CRITICAL POSITIONS IN RECENT SOUTH AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

By

KEVIN MULHEARN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2010

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the
Dissertation requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy

_____	_____
Date	Geoffrey Batchen, Chair of the Examining Committee
_____	_____
Date	Kevin Murphy, Executive Officer

Professor Anna Chave

Professor Claire Bishop

Okwui Enwezor

Supervision Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

CRITICAL POSITIONS IN RECENT SOUTH AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

By

KEVIN MULHEARN

Advisor: Professor Geoffrey Batchen

This work presents a history of South African photography through an account of critical practices undertaken by individual photographers. Rather than the history of photography in South Africa, this project offers a taxonomy of a variety of strategies and tactics pursued by practitioners of the medium before and after the fall of apartheid. Told through case studies, it probes how these photographers were influenced by their political commitments, their dreams about their country's future and their beliefs about the efficacy of art as an agent of social change. To consider both the practice of particular photographers and their personal investment in the making of images, this dissertation blends a theoretical framework with biography and social history. While bodies of theoretical inquiry, like critical white studies and creolization theory, help put South African photographs into an international dialogue with other contemporary art, biographies ground the work in the lives led by photographers who have experienced the vagaries of South African history. Drawing on interviews and on an analysis of the history of photography in South Africa, this dissertation inquires what these photographs tell South Africans about themselves and what they tell the world about South Africa.

Chapter One provides a short account of the history of photography in South Africa told through the lens of the work and careers of photographers Santu Mofokeng, Peter McKenzie and Jo Ractliffe. Chapter Two relates the work of David Goldblatt and

Hentie van der Merwe to that of scholars pursuing an avenue of inquiry called critical white studies, scholars who posit whiteness as a socially constructed form of privilege. In Chapter Three, the documentary photography of Ernest Cole and the conceptual work of Berni Searle will be situated in relation to creolization theory. Chapter Four examines how photographers Mikhael Subotzky, Zanele Muholi and Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko are articulating new concepts about what it is to be a post-apartheid South African photographer. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on my own subject position: an American, deeply concerned about race, who is looking at South Africa in an attempt to understand his own history.

Acknowledgements

So much gratitude is owed to so many in a project of this sort. I have enjoyed the support and assistance of so many throughout the process of writing this dissertation, and, to all of those thanked here by name and especially to those who I have not singled out but who have helped in this process, I owe my sincere thanks. I offer my apologies if I have inadvertently omitted anyone to whom acknowledgement is due.

Certainly, this dissertation would have been impossible were it not for the generosity shown to me by the artists I have discussed. Almost all were kind enough to take time to talk with me, and I owe a profound debt of gratitude to Jo Ractliffe, Peter McKenzie, Hentie van der Merwe, Berni Searle, Mikhael Subotzky, Zanele Muholi, Lolo Veleko, and Sue Williamson. I hope my esteem for all of these people shows through in the finished product of this dissertation. I thank each of them for their trust and openness. Arts professionals at several South African galleries and museums were also of great help to me, and I must single out Emma Bedford of Goodman Gallery Cape, John Fleetwood of the Market Photography Workshop, and independent curator Gabi Ngcobo for their assistance. Among the institutions which provided information and support are, in no particular order, the Market Photography Workshop, Michael Stevenson Gallery, Goodman Gallery, Goodman Gallery Cape, Gallery Momo, the Bensusan Museum of Photography, the South African National Gallery, the South African National Library, and the Johannesburg Art Gallery. I offer many thanks to everyone at these fine institutions.

Many at the Graduate Center have helped make this work possible. I would like to thank Geoffrey Batchen, Anna Chave and Claire Bishop for agreeing to serve as

readers of this dissertation. In my years of coursework at the Graduate Center, Professors Chave and Batchen introduced me to ideas that shaped my scholarship in ways great and small. I thank them especially for their support and their interest in my work. To call them excellent and inspiring teachers is to understate their merits. Professor Batchen served as my advisor and primary reader. His dedication to that task made this endeavor possible. I cannot begin to thank him enough for all of his help.

Before beginning work on this dissertation, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Okwui Enwezor on an exhibition of African photography at the International Center of Photography. His guidance helped germinate this project, and I am very pleased to have him serve as a reader of the finished product. His support of young scholars working in this field is well known, and I am lucky to be the recipient of his mentorship. To him, to ICP curators Vanessa Rocco and Kristen Lubben, and to my fellow researcher at the ICP, Allison Moore, I am deeply grateful. It is my especially great fortune to have Allison, who has helped and inspired me in so many ways, as a colleague and friend.

Part of this work was begun while I was a scholar at the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program. I would like to thank both ISP director Ron Clark and outside reader Eduardo Cadava for their guidance. I also delivered portions of this work on panels at several academic conferences, and I would like to thank those who organized these panels for their efforts.

I am grateful for the support of my friends. I am fortunate to have many friends, too many to name here. They are all thoughtful, loyal and generous. Each of them is remarkable in their own way. I would like to specifically thank Matt Unterman, whose

friendship has enlivened the last fifteen years of my life and who has supported everything I have done in those years.

My parents have been always unstinting in their support. They have always encouraged me to do what I though best, supporting me financially and providing me with the ability to travel and to educate myself. They value education and social justice. I hope their values are reflected in this work. In addition to my parents, I am also indebted to the many members of my extended family, especially Joanne McKee, and to Muriel and Gordon Snow for their support.

Finally, there is one person to whom this work is dedicated. Rachel Snow is an inspiration. Every day I try to match the example set by her work ethic as a scholar and her generosity as a teacher. She is the best partner I could ask for, and the joy she has brought into my life is limitless.

To all of these people, and, no doubt, to many more, I say thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Chapter Four

Introduction

This work presents a history of South African photography through a selective account of critical practices undertaken by individual photographers. Rather than *the* history of photography in South Africa, this project offers a taxonomy of a variety of strategies and tactics pursued by practitioners of the medium before and after the fall of apartheid. Told through case studies, it probes the degree to which these photographers were influenced by their political commitments, their dreams about the future of their country and their various beliefs about the efficacy of art as an agent of social change. To consider both the practice of particular photographers and their personal investment in the making of images, this dissertation blends a theoretical framework with a biographical one. Since this dissertation addresses both the specifically South African and the broadly global context for the images it considers, this combination of theory and biography is particularly important. While bodies of theoretical inquiry, like critical white studies and creolization theory, help put South African photographs into an international dialogue with other contemporary art, biographies ground the work in the lives led by photographers who have experienced the last half decade of South African history. Drawing on interviews and on an analysis of the history of the exhibition, distribution and publication of photographs in South Africa, this dissertation inquires what these photographs tell South Africans about themselves and what they tell the world about South Africa. Tackling the question of how a particular South African photographer's work functioned or functions politically also entails an investigation into the reception and distribution of this work. Therefore, this dissertation will include an analysis of the climate for the arts in South Africa and a discussion about the role of

culture in South African society. On a fundamental level, this dissertation grapples with the social and political relevance of the photographs it discusses. Whatever their maker's intentions, can the photographs discussed here subvert something like apartheid? Moving to the present, can art now help create and foster a new, multiracial democratic society?

I write this study from my own perspective as a citizen of the United States, interested in the politics of identity in my own country and curious about what the study of South African art can tell me about American art and history. This dissertation therefore seeks to excavate from the particularities of South African photography models for critically engaged cultural production in the United States and in other parts of the world. More than a decade after the overthrow of apartheid, South Africa's brand of state-sponsored racism and racial segregation, it is relevant to inquire what general lessons can now be drawn from the establishment, maintenance and eventual collapse of the white supremacist government of that nation.[1] Some of South Africa's photographers endeavored to do their part in both battling apartheid and investigating its operation. Today, some continue to confront social problems and economic inequality, political and artistic circumstances which are not unique to their country. Although South African photography has developed in its own unique light, its power and utility are not defined or restricted by locality. The photographers discussed here tackle the important political issues of the day with a profound sense of responsibility, deep commitment and uncommon persistence. Knowledge about the strategies and tactics employed by South

[1] In 1948, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party instituted apartheid, an intricate legal framework which formalized and extended an already-existing system of racial segregation in South Africa. The system officially ended in 1994, when South Africans voted in their first universal suffrage general elections, electing Nelson Mandela president. For accessible general histories of South Africa which describe the apartheid system and put it into a broader historical context, see Leonard M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, third edition (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2001); Iris Berger, *South Africa in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

African photography can aid those involved in the creation and study of visual images in general and those who seek practical social value in their own work.

A recent text places South African visual art, song, theater and political cartooning in a global context alongside other societies stained by the legacy of authoritarian rule. The editors of *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule* posit "truth-telling" as "a people's creative art," claiming that "[a]uthoritarianism inspires artful opposition." They offer their volume "as a manual of creative operations," dedicating it "to all those actively engaged in condemning" violations of human rights, and "to all of us who might wish to be."[2] Although focusing more specifically on one country and one medium, I am attempting something similar: to tell a story of South African photography that is both a history and a platform for political action.

Further, I would like this study to provide much-needed context for photography which is already appearing in the United States. Photographers from South Africa, like those from elsewhere in Africa, have become frequent exhibitors internationally, often showing their work in exhibitions focused on South Africa specifically or Africa generally. Given the global reach of the contemporary art economy, South African photography will continue to be shown in the United States. By no means is this study meant to proselytize the work of photographers under-recognized in America, to ease into the art photography canon a few more practitioners. Instead, I hope this study can offer a more compelling rationale for the display of South African photography on foreign shores than those offered by the commodity-driven global market in art.

---

[2] Ksenija Bilbija et al., eds., *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule* (Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 9.

Insofar as this dissertation endeavors to focus solely on photography, some justification of this singular focus is necessary. In part, I am interested in photography because, in hindsight, it seems so central to South African visual culture since the 1960s. As I will explain, during the apartheid era, the medium was of crucial importance to the surveillance apparatus of the apartheid state, to the efforts of those seeking to oppose the regime through visual images, and to work undertaken by journalists to report and record the story of this contentious era. The medium's importance in recent history has bequeathed to contemporary South Africa a thriving photography scene and a number of very engaged, very ambitious young practitioners. In the context of South Africa, a discussion of the history of photography entails, almost by necessity, a consideration of social issues like race or of the exertion of political power. Though this dissertation focuses primarily on art photography or on photography which has been appropriated into the art world, the special place of photography in South African history and visual culture allows my study to be wide-ranging and interdisciplinary, qualities which I hope will allow me both to capture some semblance of South Africa's richly-textured photographic history and to provide important insights into how the practitioners discussed here fit into that history.

An in-depth investigation of the works of nine photographers, this dissertation will deal with some photographers well known internationally and with some only emerging into prominence. It will provide fresh insights on photographers who are already the subject of much scholarly attention, analyzing their work through the lens of critical discourses which have not yet been brought to bear as interpretive tools. For most of the photographers under discussion, however, this dissertation will provide one of the

first analyses of its kind. This work is selective, and some very well-known and very interesting South African photographers do not feature in it.[3] The fact that certain figures are ignored in favor of other figures should merely serve to underscore the fact that I do not intend this dissertation to provide the definitive history of South African photography. To this end, the particular photographers under discussion here have been selected using two criteria. First, they must be important to the ongoing story of photography in South Africa. Second, as a group, they must be representative of the diverse range of racial identities and artistic practices prevalent in South Africa.

South Africa's complex racial mosaic is remarkably diverse, including Africans or blacks (dark-skinned people indigenous to Africa), 'coloured' people (people of mixed descent), whites (light-skinned people, mostly of European stock), and Indians (people indigenous to South Asia who originally settled in South Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).[4] The demographics of the county have evolved over time, but each of these groups is present in the country throughout the years covered by this study.[5]

---

[3] To mention one example, the work of South African photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa has featured in numerous exhibitions inside and outside of South Africa. His photographs of the interiors of black South Africans' make-shift residences have become iconic of a certain kind of aesthetic of African photography. The fact that Mthethwa is not discussed in this dissertation is not intended as a judgment on his relative merits as a photographer or his historical importance as an artist. On Mthethwa, see Zwelethu Mthethwa, with texts by Octavio Zaya, Michael Godby, and Teresa Macri, *Zwelethu Mthethwa* (Turin: Marco Noire Editore, 1999); and Bongi Dhlomo, "Zwelethu Mthethwa Talks About His Photographs," in *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, ed. Frank Herreman (New York: Museum for African Art, 1999), 66-75.

[4] Each of these terms has a complex history. For example, during apartheid, the term 'blacks' was often employed to designate all those who discriminated against by the system and not just the group sometimes known as 'African.' This dissertation will discuss some of these terms in greater depth. The central importance of these terms to the study of South African photography is underscored by the fact that a recent monograph on photographer David Goldblatt included a glossary defining each of these terms. See David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001), 444-9.

[5] In 1960, Africans were 68% of the population (accounting for nearly 11 million people), whites 19% (more than 3 million), 'coloured' people 9% (1.5 million), and Indians 3% (a half million). In 1996, Africans were 77% of the population (more than 31 million people), whites 10.9% (4.4 million), 'coloured' people 9% (3.6 million), and Indians 0.3% (one million). These figures are taken from Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 297.

However important race is in South Africa, it is only one facet of identity, a facet which exists alongside many others. For example, South Africa now has eleven official languages, including English, Afrikaans, and nine African languages, which gives some sense of the country's ethno-linguistic diversity.[6] This dissertation will also consider the role of gender and sexuality in the formation of identity in the country. The photographers discussed here are a diverse group, representing different subject positions in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

The photographers addressed in this study also represent a diverse range of artistic practices. Documentary photography represents an important aspect of the photographic output of South African artists, and, during apartheid, was the kind of imagery which garnered the lion's share of attention. More conceptual, non-documentary-based practices, which have become more prominent since the end of apartheid but which have been present on the South African art scene for many years, are also important to the general contours of the art history of South African photography. Rather than focus on photographers pursuing one or the other kind of practice, this dissertation looks for continuity between the two groups in terms of subject matter and political commitment. The photographers under discussion here also differ in the ways that they conceive of their roles as image-makers. Some consider themselves primarily as artists, some as photographers and some as political activists. The variety of their practices and the various terms with which they describe their relationship to the art world give some sense of the range of South African art photography in the last half century.

Covering an era stretching from the late 1960s until the present, this study begins at a historical moment that is significant in terms of both the political and the artistic

[6] Ibid., 258.

history of South Africa. Though apartheid was officially instituted in 1948, the early 1960s marked a decisive shift in the struggle against segregation. The introduction of very restrictive pass laws, which severely limited the movement all non-white people by requiring them to carry internal passports, led to a campaign in 1960 initiated by the Pan Africanist Conference (PAC) and pursued by both PAC and the African National Conference (ANC), a campaign that ended with the outlawing of both organizations and the arrest of many leaders. These measures "deprived Africans of their last means of lawful opposition to the South African political system and engendered in many hearts a hatred which had not previously existed."[7] This led to a radicalization of the opposition to apartheid and the creation of underground revolutionary movements willing to use violence in the fight against apartheid. The rationale for this change from nonviolent to violent resistance was articulated by leading ANC figure Nelson Mandela in 1961: "we felt that without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of white supremacy."[8] External opposition to apartheid also intensified in the 1960s. With the beginnings of decolonization in Africa and the success of liberation struggles against European powers, and with the gradual dismantling of legalized segregation in the United States, the South African political system had become "exceptional," running "counter to the almost universal renunciation of racist principals and dismantling of racist practices."[9] From the 1960s until the end of apartheid, South Africa became a geo-political flashpoint and the country became a fixture in the global news media.

---

[7] Leonard Thompson, *Politics in the Republic of South Africa* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), 180.
[8] Quoted in Ibid., 180.
[9] Ibid., 198.

As political positions hardened, art and documentary photography came to be seen as a potential weapon in the struggle against apartheid, and photographers and other artists were compelled to situate themselves in relationship to the struggle against apartheid. The earliest work discussed in this dissertation is *House of Bondage* (1967), a path-breaking book by photographer Ernest Cole, which was designed specifically as a propagandistic anti-apartheid statement.[10] On the other hand, the next oldest work discussed here, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975) by David Goldblatt, was produced by a photographer who, despite his own personal political convictions, would not allow his work to be used in explicitly political contexts.[11] Necessarily, then, this history of art in South Africa since the 1960s is defined, in part, by ideological disputes among artists and photographers over the role of cultural production in the struggle against apartheid. South Africa's political situation also brought international attention to the country's art in this era, during which it was positioned overtly in relationship to the political circumstances. Examples include books like *Resistance Art in South Africa*, by artist Sue Williamson, which presented to audiences outside South Africa the work of dozens of artists.[12]

While this dissertation addresses photography produced at the height of the struggle against apartheid, it also considers cultural production since apartheid's end. There are compelling reasons for this choice. Most importantly, I believe there is artistic continuity across this era. David Goldblatt (b. 1930), a photographer associated with the

---

[10] Ernest Cole with Thomas Flaherty, *House of Bondage*, with an introduction by Joseph Lelyveld (New York: Random House, 1967).

[11] David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (Johannesburg: Murray Crawford, 1975). Goldblatt discusses the political context of his works in an interview conducted by Okwui Enwezor published in David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, 17-8.

[12] Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989). Among the now well-known artists included in the book are Jane Alexander, William Kentridge, and Penny Siopis. None of the artists whose work is shown in the book are photographers.

apartheid era, remains an active practitioner and is a crucial mentor for the much younger Zanele Muholi (b. 1972), who only became active after apartheid's end. If one were to compare the circumstances and contours of South African visual culture and photography in 1967 with those in 2010, it would be evident that a profound change has occurred over the last 40 years. This change has been gradual and its effects unpredictable, and, if it is too starkly described, the nuances of this process are easily missed. By choosing to consider works from before and after the profound change that occurred in 1994, this dissertation is attentive to both change and continuity in South African photography.

Designed to encompass both the eras of white supremacist government and multiracial democracy, the time frame under analysis here allows for a full investigation of photographers' thematic concerns and pictorial strategies across this period. This study explores how politically progressive photographers respond to their socio-historical situations. To borrow language from the social sciences, I think that considering two very different circumstances—those before and after apartheid—also provides a large enough sample size from which to draw some general conclusions.

South Africa's distinctive history, complex demography, and exceptional patterns of cross-cultural interaction have led South Africa's artists and intellectuals to grapple aggressively with the problem of defining the parameters of South African culture for some time. Exploration of this issue has only intensified since the dramatic and democratic transformation of South Africa's government in 1994, which seemed to render earlier analyses and deconstructions of the old order moot and charge the country's cultural workers with the task of visualizing new, more inclusive ideals. In its

own way, this dissertation also endeavors to understand South African culture by recounting the ways photographers have worked to craft that culture.

Review of Literature

This dissertation contributes to a growing body of literature addressing photography from Africa generally and photography from South Africa specifically, but it does so with an eye towards also contributing to ongoing scholarly debates about the role visual art can play in understanding and influencing ideas about race. This work will be useful to readers in the United States who wish both to learn something about the vibrant visual culture of another part of the world and to think about the intersections of race, politics and photography in their own country. On the other hand, I hope this study will also be relevant to South Africans and may help, in some small way, to repay the debt I owe the photographers who spoke with me, shared their work, and stimulated my ideas. Many of them are passionately engaged in training the next generation of South African photographers, and I would like this work to be useful to future South African photographers and art historians digesting their county's photographic history, adding to it and commenting on it, crafting it in ways that respond to contemporary needs and local concerns. Hence, this work must survey and report on a complex landscape, acknowledging scholarship spanning continents and presenting material to audiences from very different art historical contexts.

This review first surveys work by scholars outside of South Africa writing about photography as a cultural phenomenon across Africa. This body of literature—which generally addresses photography from one of two distinct perspectives, viewing

photographs as either anthropological documents or as art—has provided the primary context for the reception of African photography outside the continent. Following that, this review discusses previous attempts to write about various aspects of South African photographic history, focusing especially on attempts made by South Africans to craft their own history. Finally, it discusses various theories about the relationship between photography and the construction of race, paying particular attention to theories about the ways art might actively shape conceptions of racial identity.

Only by charting these three largely distinct bodies of knowledge, can I begin to explain my own contribution to the historiography of South African photo-history. Bringing together these disparate discourses provides an unusual opportunity to foster dialogue between voices with very different perspectives. The eclectic path that links these bodies of knowledge to one another opens up new vantage points, allowing the terrain of South African photography to be surveyed in new ways and revealing the manner in which this terrain might be both familiar and unfamiliar to audiences in the United States. Although this dissertation is not designed to provide a narrative account of the last forty years of South African photo-history, it is intended to supply an absolutely indispensable underpinning to such an endeavor. This dissertation argues that the importance of South African photography can be fully grasped most fully outside South Africa when the work is read through the lens of critical theories about race. Offering this as the key to understanding the stakes of South African photography—why it might *matter* in the broader history of photography—the dissertation therefore addresses correspondences between photography in South Africa and the United States, providing an argument as to why South African photography might matter *here*, specifically. But,

before one can examine the place of South African photography in this kind of global, inter-continental perspective, it is necessary to consider how it fits (and does not fit) into the picture of African photography that has developed in the last several decades.

Much of the initial work by scholars seeking to understand African photography sought to situate the medium within traditional African cultural formations. In other words, these scholars attempted to illustrate the ways in which African photography was *African*. This approach grounds such work firmly within a broader, global effort described by Christopher Pinney as an attempt to shift the focus of discussion about photographic practice away from "the notion that photographic history is best seen as the explosion of a Western technology whose practice has been molded by singular individuals" and to instead present "a radically different account of a globally disseminated and locally appropriated medium."[13] The most important efforts to appraise and theorize the specific manner by which photography has become 'locally appropriated,' or domesticated and integrated into African cultures, have often proceeded from the disciplinary framework of anthropology. That is, the authors of these studies have drawn conclusions from interviews conducted with local informants, specifically

[13] Christopher Pinney, "Introduction," in *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 1. Pinney, an anthropologist and specialist in visual culture, has played a central role in theorizing an alternative history of photography that eschews technological determinism, focusing instead on photography as a culture practice enmeshed in the invention and reinvention of identity. His essay on "vernacular modernism" is an impressive attempt to understand the ontology of photography outside the West. Comparing Indian and African photographic practices, Pinney sees the development of local, indigenous ('vernacular') modernisms in which the scopic regimes of power that underwrite colonialism, regimes which are in turn supported by a Western conception of photography that stresses realism and pictorial depth, are subverted by an emphasis in Africa and the Indian subcontinent on the materiality of the photo-object and on the surface of the image. According to Pinney, this emphasis is achieved through structural elements like "a shallow pictorial space, collage and montage techniques, overpainting, and complex sculptural mediations." Christopher Pinney, "Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism, and Vernacular Modernism," in *Photography's Other Histories* , edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 219. As we shall see, Pinney's transcultural analysis is frequently supported or echoed by those focusing more specifically on African photography. See also Heike Behrend and Jean-François Werner, "Photographies and Modernities in Africa," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 241.

photographers and the consumers of photographs, about the role of photography in society and about the conceptualization of photography as an element of culture.

Generally speaking, scholars like Stephen Sprague, Heike Behrend, Jean-Françoise Werner, and Liam Buckley have concluded from their anthropological inquiries that African photography has an identity that is specific to Africa. The ontology of African photography that begins to emerge when the efforts of these scholars are considered as a whole is one that encompasses regional and cultural variations, but one which nevertheless includes several broadly discernable features. On the basis of these scholars' work, preliminary though it may be, one can conclude that African photography is defined by something other than diversity, that there are things which can help define African photography as a category.

It is vital to note the efforts of these scholars at the outset of this review in order to outline the differences between scholars who have conducted anthropological investigations into African photography and those who have presented African photography as art. Scholars considering African photography through the lens of anthropology have endeavored to explain the cultural role of photography in people's everyday lives and rituals, while the other group has presented African photography as art in the museums and galleries of Europe and North America, foregrounding the role of makers of images over the role of consumers of images. There is some overlap between these two approaches, though their differences are notable. An understanding of these two approaches should provide some vital context for this study, which, though it draws on interviews with photographers and tries, as much as possible, to acknowledge how South African photography looks through South African eyes, is much closer in its aims

and methodologies to the second approach. That is to say, this dissertation grapples with South African photography as art photography.

The work of Stephen Sprague represents an inaugural moment in the long-term process of understanding through anthropology how photography fits into ever-evolving African cultures. In two linked articles, first published in 1978, Sprague both examined how portrait photography had been integrated into contemporary and traditional aspects of Yoruba culture and laid out the methodology for his investigation.[14] Though decades old, the recent republication of one of these essays in a volume edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson—a volume which, besides Sprague's piece, contains only contemporary scholarship—suggests that Sprague's work remains relevant.[15] His work is pivotal in that it both opens an avenue of research into African photography followed by subsequent anthropologically-minded scholars and provides a crucial armature for those seeking to situate African photography within the art world. Olu Oguibe, for example, highlights Sprague's work in an essay included in the catalogue of *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, a 1996 exhibition which played a central role in establishing a profile for African photography on the international art scene.[16] I

---

[14] Stephen F. Sprague, "How I See the Yoruba See Themselves," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 9-28; Stephen F. Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," *African Arts*, 12, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 52-59, 107. An article by Sprague's research partner, anthropologist Marilyn Houlberg, is an important supplement to Sprague's work: Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg, "Ibeji Images of the Yoruba," *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 20–27, 91–92. Unfortunately Stephen Sprague has died, but many of his photographs are held by the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. Though Sprague was never able to follow up his work, Marilyn Houlberg later published a comparative view of Nigerian and Haitian studio photography: Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg, "Feed Your Eyes: Nigerian and Haitian Studio Photographs," *Photographic INsight* (Winter–Spring 1988): 3–8.

[15] Stephen F. Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," in *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 240-60.

[16] Olu Oguibe, "Photography and the Substance of the Image," in *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, ed. Clare Bell (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 231-49. Illustrations from Sprague's work are reproduced on pages 244 and 245.

will continue my discussion of *In/sight* later in this review, but I must point out here the significance of the fact that Sprague's work is cited within the catalogue by Oguibe alongside art photography like the work of Rotimi Fani-Kayode in an effort to "provide … material toward the formulation of a theory of African photography."[17] In the discourse in the West on art photography, the aesthetics and history of this genre of image is typically considered without reference to any other kind of photography. By contrast, in the developing discourse on the history of art photography in Africa, art photographs have often been considered alongside photographs of the sort addressed by Sprague in order to posit the existence of a specifically African category of photographic expression and usage.

Though deployed by Oguibe in support of a broader theory about African photography, Sprague's work is actually focused quite specifically on the photographic culture of one ethno-linguistic group. Sprague argues that the photography of the Yoruba, Africa's largest ethnic group, resident in the West African countries of Nigeria and Benin, exhibits "unstated but clearly discernable conventions" which "offer a codification of a range of Yoruba cultural values."[18] Presciently recognizing the importance of portraiture, Sprague focuses almost entirely on this genre. His interviews with portrait photographers and consumers lead him to see Yoruban values in these portraits in terms of the gestures and poses employed by their sitters, the preference of photographers for depicting sitters' social roles rather than individual identity, an emphasis on crafting the photograph as a three dimensional object (which he suggests is a

[17] Ibid., 236.
[18] Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," 54.

facet of the overall primacy of sculpture in Yoruban art), and their deployment as an element of indigenous spiritual rituals.

In support of this final claim, he describes how photographic portraits are sometimes used as a substitute for the *ere ibeji* carvings, which are traditionally made if one or both of a pair of twins die in infancy or childhood. Among the Yoruba, who have a remarkably high rate of twinning, twins are believed to be spiritual beings with special powers, so *ibeji* sculptures are deployed to heal a spiritual disruption and to prevent a dead twin or pair of twins from causing such misfortunes as sickness, infertility and even death among the living. Though, as Marilyn Houlberg notes, the form *ere ibeji* have taken has varied over time, the "use of the photograph [to create] such an active link with the spirit world" is remarkable.[19] She discovers that, at the time of her study, photography represented a 'progressive' choice of form for this ritual purpose, an option most often selected by Yoruban Christians and Moslems as a means of avoiding direct conflict between psychologically important local ritual and seemingly irreconcilable systems of belief. Houlberg makes it clear that the employment of photography as a substitute for or supplement to the rituals associated with *ere ibeji* sculptures tells us a great deal about the evolution of these rituals in contemporary Yorubaland. More central to our purposes, this use of photography also tells some interesting things about how the Yoruba conceptualize photography.

Taken together, the work of Sprague and Houlberg emphasizes two key characteristics of Yoruba photography, characteristics reiterated often enough by other scholars to have become part of the working definition of African photography. First, they stress that, far from marking a radical break with traditional African art and culture,

[19] Houlberg, "Ibeji Images of the Yoruba," 27.

photography sometimes complements and extends traditions, which, in any event, were always evolving and were never as static as the term 'tradition' seems to imply.[20] Therefore, though photography can be seen as a sign of modernity, it is a sign of a local modernity which retains a connection to earlier cultural and social formations.

Second, Sprague and Houlberg discern in Yoruba photography a willingness to ignore Western photography's documentary impulse and ingrained belief in the medium's truth-telling power. As Sprague notes, in Yoruba photographic traditions, "There are fascinating exceptions to the general function of the photograph as literal record."[21] Subsequent scholars have made this point even more sharply, suggesting that the idea that the primary general function of the photograph is to serve as a literal record is part of the ideology surrounding photography in the West and not something intrinsic to the medium.[22] Though photography was exported around the world as a technology, part and parcel with the West's economic and military expansion in the nineteenth century, it is becoming increasingly clear that the West's ideology and conceptualization of photography traveled less well, or at least less fully. For this reason, many of those seeking to understand the place of photography in various African cultures have focused in particular on these cultures' conceptualizations of the medium.

The prolific Heike Behrend, for example, has examined portrait photography in Kenya and Uganda, seeing in each case an embrace of the portrait photograph as a space of wish fulfillment, an understanding of the image as something which does not directly

---

[20] Houlberg notes, "The multiple photograph has thus become a traditional form of twin and triplet representation among Muslim and Christian Yoruba in at least one area of Yorubaland." Houlberg, "Collecting the Anthropology of African Art," *African Arts* 9, no. 3 (April, 1976): 18. Sprague concurs, "The photograph is sometimes believed to possess additional power and spiritual meanings and can be used in traditional rituals." Sprague, "How I See the Yoruba See Themselves," 57.
[21] Ibid., 57.
[22] This is an aspect of Oguibe's argument in "The Substance of the Image," for example.

reflect 'reality' but which instead creates, improves and upgrades it.[23] In the Kenyan photographs she examines, this is accomplished through the use of elaborately painted backdrops, while in the Ugandan case photo-collages that knit together individual portraits and images signifying success drawn from the mass media create the same effect. Like Behrend, Liam Buckley, examining studio-based photography in The Gambia in West Africa, sees photography in this part of Africa as essentially imaginative.[24] In Buckley's account, Gambian photography is conceptualized through a range of metaphors related to personal adornment and the tailoring of clothes. Personal photography is understood through terms appropriated from fashion, yielding a version of photography in which identity is accessorized and surface is emphasized.

Through investigations of African vernacular photography, that is to say photography which is not intended as art, a general concept of photography emerges that sees the medium differently from the manner in which it is regarded in the West. Acknowledging some exceptions, this distinction manifests itself through aesthetic decisions that favor surface over depth, fragment (collage) over wholeness, the depiction of adornment over personality or psychological depth, 'illusion' over 'reality.' This divergence is often seen as a legacy of colonialism and photography's former association with colonial power.[25] However, the relationship of photography to colonial power is

---

[23] Heike Behrend, "'Feeling Global': The Likoni Ferry Photographers of Mombasa, Kenya," *African Arts* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 70-77. Republished as "Imagined Journeys: The Likoni Ferry Photographers of Mombasa, Kenya," in *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 221-39. Heike Behrend, "Fragmented Visions: Photo Collages by Two Ugandan Photographers," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 301-20. See also Heike Behrend, "Photo Magic: Photographs in Practices of Healing and Harming in East Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2003): 129-45.

[24] Liam Buckley, "Self and Accessory in Gambian Studio Photography," *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 2000–2001): 71-91.

[25] See Elizabeth Edwards et al., "Anthropology and Colonial Endeavour," *History of Photography* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1-80. Obviously one can also see the link between photography and colonial power as

nuanced, and these seemingly pan-African photographic values cannot simply be seen as the negation of a Western, colonially-inspired conception of the medium. Liam Buckley furthers this observation by noting that, "the 'a-political' air of studio photography" may give breathing space to an aspect of the imagination that is not allied to any particular side or politics.[26] Studio photography "attends to that part of a person engaged with the immediacy of expedience, often ignored by politics and always celebrated in fashion—falling in love, longing, being lonely with a heartache, feeling on top of the world, feeling left behind."[27] Perhaps one could argue that the de-politicization of photography in most of Africa marks a kind of subversive act, an overturning of colonialism's insistent and insidious politicization of every aspect of everyday life.

Perhaps this explains why South African photography remained highly political in the late 1960s to the 1990s, an era during which photography from elsewhere in Africa, especially vernacular photography, tended to de-emphasize politics. In South Africa, laws like the Immorality Act (1950) and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), which forbade interracial sexual relationships, made it manifestly clear to everyone that something like falling in love (to take one of Buckley's examples), was *not* something 'ignored by politics' or by the state. Indeed, it may be that the omnipresence of the politics of race and identity in both the public and private lives of apartheid-era South Africans accounts, at least in part, for the aesthetic divergence between photography in South Africa and photography in the rest of the continent.

---

active in South Africa, where photography was often a critical tool of surveillance for the white apartheid government.

[26] Buckley, 89.

[27] Ibid.

If the anthropological investigations of African photography undertaken by Sprague, Behrend, Buckley and others provide an indispensable backdrop for understanding African photography as a whole, it is a backdrop from which South African photography apparently stands in relief. In South Africa, for example, the portrait photograph, which is a site for creative self-fashioning elsewhere in Africa, was synonymous with the identity photograph and the dreaded passbook that all non-white South African were forced to carry during apartheid.[28] Indeed, the portrait photographs found in passbooks are so iconic of the oppression of the apartheid era that blowups of these images are an introductory display at the Apartheid Museum. In South Africa, for non-whites, portrait photography often served as an image of state power. The highly-politicized character of South African photography, therefore, seems to make the country's photographic history differ from the broader history of African photography. Though this study does not follow the anthropologically-minded methodology defined by Sprague and the others described above, one of the contributions it might make is to suggest the outlines of a more inclusive definition of African photography, one that better integrates the seeming outlier of South African photography, a definition which encompasses both creatively self-fashioned studio portraits from The Gambia and apartheid-era identity photographs from South Africa.

After all, identity photographs were produced elsewhere in Africa and played a more central role in African visual culture than is sometimes acknowledged in the scholarship on this subject. One work of anthropologically-oriented scholarship which

---

[28] In a work called *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart* (1991), South African artist Sue Williamson explores the identity portraits and the passbooks that held them. The work comprises color photographs of each page of the passbook, the first page of which features a small, passport-sized black-and-white photograph of the owner. Sue Williamson, *Sue Williamson: Selected Work* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003), 54-9.

does try to assess the relevance of these images is an essay by Jean-François Werner, which suggests that identity photographs were actually a quite important aspect of the work of West African portrait photographers, a group who have come to enjoy an outsized role in both the anthropological scholarship and in the developing canon of African art photography. [29] Taking the work of Cote d'Ivoire-based photographer Cornélius Yao Azaglo Augustt as an example, Werner argues that the ubiquity of the identity portrait means that photography's centrality in African visuality is derived from its association with modern state power. On the connections between portrait photography and state power, one might also note the fact that Malian portrait photographer Seydou Keïta (1923—2001), who, as I shall discuss, has come to be regarded as one of Africa's most historically significant photographers, spent much of his career as a photographer for the Malian government.[30] While the portrait photographs by Keïta, which seem to typify the kind of creative self-fashioning discerned by Behrend and Buckley, have become famous in art circles, gracing gallery walls and filling catalogues, his official photographs have remained invisible.[31]

---

[29] The importance of identity photographs in an African context other than that of South Africa is discussed in Jean-François Werner, "Photography and Individualization in Contemporary Africa: An Ivoirian Case-Study," *Visual Anthropology* 14 (2001): 251-68.

[30] In an interview with Michelle Lamunière, Keïta discusses his experience working in this official capacity: "During decolonization, the Europeans … took everything back. The state security bureau didn't have any way of creating documents for military personnel, the police, the national guard, etc. It turns out that since I'm related to the president, Modibo Keïta, someone suggested that he ask me to do the job. I never really thought they would want me to work for them. … They presented it as a sort of duty, an obligation. So I agreed, but I told them that the only way I'd consent to work for them was if I could maintain my civilian status." Seydou Keïta, interview with Michelle Lamunière, in *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé*, ed. Michelle Lamunière (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 48.

[31] For a discussion of how Malian photographer Seydou Keïta became a central character in the story of African modern art and photography and how images from Keïta's larger body of work became canonical, see Elizabeth Bigham, "Issues of Authorship in the Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta," *African Arts* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 56-67.

Keïta's case is not unique. After decolonization, in the years immediately following national independence in the 1950s and 1960s, African political programs were promoted photographically by official press agencies like Syli-Photo in Guinea, Congopresse in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and ANIM (the National Malian Information Agency) in Mali.[32] Each of these organizations employed photographers to craft the public personae of the charismatic leaders of the independence era. Christraud Geary, in her book *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915,* pushes the history of politically-aware photographic representation back even further, arguing that photography was employed for political purposes by King Njoya of Bamun, Cameroon, at the beginning of the twentieth century.[33] She attributes to Njoya an aesthetic and political agenda that he wished to express through photographic portraiture. The photographs produced by Njoya and by the official photography agencies of newly-independent African states were created to contest the images produced by Europeans during the colonial era. Circulated in Europe as postcards or through illustrated periodicals like *L'Illustration Congolaise* (1924-40), colonial photographs were visual propaganda for these regimes' efforts to 'civilize and morally develop the natives.'[34] The explicitly ideological context in which government-sponsored images by various African regimes were created is similar to

[32] Pascal Martin Saint Léon and Jean Loup Piven, "The Official Agencies," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, eds. N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 196-201, 208-19; Guy Hersant, "In the Time of Sékou Touré," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, eds. N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 202-5.
[33] Christraud Geary, *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988).
[34] Christraud Geary recounts the long history of colonial image production in the Belgian-dominated Congo in Christraud Geary, *In and out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960* (New York: Phillip Wilson Publishers, 2002).

circumstances in South Africa, where, during apartheid, photography was mobilized both in support and in opposition to the regime.

In this sense, the differences between the contexts in which a photographer like Keïta and the one in which the South African photographers under consideration worked are not as different as they might initially appear. In the case of South African photography, as I shall discuss, the political struggle against apartheid was and to some extent is the dominant lens through which the history of photography in that country has been viewed. As the foregoing examples demonstrate, scholars have noted some of the ways that photography has intersected with political representation in other parts of Africa, though this kind of discussion has not held a dominant place in the discourse on African photography generally that it has in relationship to South African photography.

As is evident from the foregoing discussion, many of the most thoughtful anthropological considerations of African photography address vernacular photography. Interestingly, as African photography has begun to grow in prominence in the international art world, many of the photographers who have appeared most frequently in galleries and museums and in the pages of catalogues and journals, have been likewise photographers who were originally working in vernacular modes, particularly those making commercial portrait photography or visual journalism. Since this dissertation deals primarily with photographers working within the institutional parameters of the art world, it is obviously imperative to understand how the category of African art photography has been constituted.[35] One of the preconditions for writing a dissertation

[35] Most of the photographers I address are art photographers. The key exceptions are Ernest Cole, Peter McKenzie, and Zanele Muholi. Cole was a documentarian and visual journalist who never intended his work to be exhibited as art, though some of his images are now held and exhibited by the South African

such as this one is a discussion of how non-art images have been incorporated into the art world, a movement not peculiar to African photography but certainly a prominent aspect of recent discursive events that have made figures like Seydou Keïta and David Goldblatt (the subject of one this dissertation's chapters) stars of the international art scene.

The case of Seydou Keïta likely provides the most instructive and informative example of how the art world has appropriated African photography. The story of his works' migration from the homes and albums of Bamako, Mali to the walls of some of the world's most prestigious museums is told with admirable thoroughness by Elizabeth Bigham.[36] Keïta, like many African photographers whose work has *become* art, was a commercial portrait photographer, producing work for a paying clientele and not for the art gallery. His photographs, which have come to be considered as manifestations of African art photography, were taken by a photographer who had no such ambitions for his work, which more properly can be considered vernacular rather than art photography.

Keïta's arrival in the art world, and, by extension, African photography's arrival, is typically credited to the exhibition of several of his photographs in "Africa Explores," an exhibition organized by Susan Vogel and shown first at the Center for African Art in New York in 1991.[37] This eclectic exhibition tried to move the perception of African culture beyond the so-called traditional, introducing pieces of urban or 'popular' visual culture into the discourse and incorporating work by academically-trained artists. Though Keïta's photographs were exhibited anonymously, they elicited enough attention

---

National Gallery. Neither Mckenzie nor Muholi consider themselves artists, preferring to think of themselves as cultural workers or activists. Both display their work in art galleries and museums, however.

[36] Bigham, "Issues of Authorship in the Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta."

[37] Susan Vogel, ed., *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (New York: Center for African Art, 1991).

to spur scholar André Magnin's interest in Keïta.[38] Magnin organized exhibitions of the now-retired photographer's work and eventually acquired a large cache of the photographer's negatives, an acquisition whose legality is now being challenged in court.[39] By the end of the 1990s, Keïta's work would enter the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, he would be the subject of the first one-person exhibition of an African artist at San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, and new, large-format prints of his work were being sold through the blue-chip Gagosian Gallery.[40]

As Bigham suggests, the arrival of Keïta onto the international art scene was an epochal event in the history of African photography. Indeed, if one is to consider the amount of attention African photography has received from critics, curators and collectors in the years since this event, it could be argued that Keïta's arrival *began* the 'history of African photography' as an institutional discourse in the West, creating the field as an object of study. As Bigham writes, Keïta has become "a generative point for the reception of other African photographers," his work paving the way for the arrival of other African photographers onto the Western art scene.[41]

While few African photographers have matched the speed and trajectory of Keïta's rise to prominence, in the wake of his 'discovery,' several other African portrait photographers would receive international attention. Like Keïta, many of these

---

[38] Bigham, 62.
[39] Michael Rips, "Who Owns Seydou Keïta?" *New York Times*, 22 January 2006, 32.
[40] Bigham, 63.
[41] Ibid., 65. She adds that the tendency to overestimate the importance of his work has led sometimes to overestimation of his influence on other photographers. I found this with reference to one of the South African photographers, who I will discuss in the final chapter of this study, a photographer who was unfamiliar with Keïta's work even though her work was constantly compared to his in reviews.

photographers were older, many worked in outmoded styles, and some were retired.[42] The work of these photographers was taken from the cultural, social and historical milieu in which it was created and revived in wholly new circumstances, a process with profound implications for the reception of and developing discourse on African photography.

Interested in the process of canon formation in African photography and intrigued by the way Keïta's work has become synonymous with the very category of African photography, Bigham notes that the 'relocation' of his portraits from their original geographic and temporal context has led to a "conspicuous authorial transformation."[43] Bigham argues that the portraits now ascribed solely to Keïta were produced originally in the context of collaboration between the photographer and his subjects/clients. Seen now as an artist in the traditional Western sense of that term, Keïta's work can be compared by Robert Storr to that of Delacroix, Ingres and Matisse, a comparison which privileges formal similarities and ignores the chasm that exists between the circumstances surrounding the making of these very different visual objects.[44]

Bigham argues that a full contextualization of African photography is a necessary precondition for dealing with African photography in the discourse of art history and in the institutional space of the museum or the university. She also insists that scholars of African photography must try to understand the intentions of its makers, the desires of its audiences, and the cultural context of its creation. The study of African photography, she

---

[42] Gerald Matt and Thomas Miessgang's exhibition "Flash Afrique! Photography from West Africa" (2001) features two other portrait photographers alongside Keïta and several documentary photographers: Philip Kwame Apagya (b. 1958) of Ghana and Malick Sidibé (b. 1936) of Mali. See Gerald Matt and Thomas Miessgang, *Flash Afrique! Photography from West Africa* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2001). The exhibition of these other two photographers' work in the West is a result of interest Keïta's work.

[43] Bigham, 65.

[44] Robert Storr, "Bamako: Full Dress Parade," *Parkett*, no. 49 (1997): 24-34.

suggests, requires a full and thorough history. As she notes at the close of her account of Keïta's appropriation by the Western art market, "lacking such a history, it is all too easy for the specificities of this work and its authorship to be glossed over, taken at face value, or to circulate simply as simulacrum."[45] In so far as this is possible, this dissertation seeks to avoid this problem and to meet Bigham's necessary precondition.

The issues revealed by Bigham with respect to the absorption of figures like Keïta into the art world are different from those faced by this dissertation, which deals more often than not with photography meant for the art world at its inception. The concerns most proximate to the work undertaken here, then, are those surrounding how African art photography moves from an African art world to a Western one. Or, more specifically, how and why has art photography moved from a South African context to a North American one? How has South African photography entered into an increasingly globalized, internationalized art market? How has a context for South African art photography developed over the last several decades?

To address the process by which this context was created, we should turn to the work of the two preeminent scholars of African photography, Okwui Enwezor and Simon Njami, both of whom primarily work outside the African continent. The various histories of African photography and modern and contemporary African art produced or overseen by Enwezor and Njami are among the most widely circulated and have, in some sense, established the field. An account of their work frames in this review a summary of the work of other scholars in Europe and North America, many of whom have pursued themes and proposed arguments similar to those offered by Enwezor and Njami. Therefore, important works by those other than Enwezor and Njami are discussed in

[45] Bigham, 67.

relationship to these two scholar's work, stressing the common ground shared by all of those writing the history of African photography outside Africa.

Three expansive exhibitions produced by Enwezor with the assistance of various collaborators and their accompanying catalogues helped introduce African photography to English-speaking audiences outside the continent: "In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present" (1996), "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994" (2001), and "Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography" (2006).[46] The first exhibition and the third deal specifically with photography from Africa, while the second surveys the overall terrain of African art since 1945. In addition to these exhibitions, one must also note an indispensable anthology of essays on contemporary African visual culture assembled by Enwezor with Olu Oguibe, *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*.[47]

The first of Enwezor's exhibitions on African photography, "In/sight," was produced at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.[48] Path breaking, the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue were the first to try to discern an overall, continent-wide historical trajectory in recent African photography, bringing together a wide array of material. Among the work included was portrait photography by practitioners like Seydou Keïta and fellow Malian Malick Sidibé (b. 1936); documentary-oriented

---

[46] Each of these exhibitions was accompanied by a lavish exhibition catalogue: Clare Bell, ed., *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996); Okwui Enwezor, ed., *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994* (Munich: Prestel, 2001); Okwui Enwezor, ed., *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2006).

[47] Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe, eds., *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

[48] The exhibition was curated by Okwui Enwezor, Danielle Tilkin and Octavio Zaya. For a representative review of the exhibition, see John Peffer-Engels, "Review: In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present," *African Arts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 73-75.

photography from a variety of contexts (commercial, journalistic, artistic), including work by photographers from South Africa's *Drum* magazine and by Mozambique's Ricardo Rangel (1924—2009); and explicitly fine-art photography of various kinds produced by artists, including several born in Africa, trained in the West, and now part of diasporic communities, like Nigeria-born artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode (1955—1989).[49]

"In/sight" marks the beginning of canon formation in the field of African art photography. In support of this assertion, one might simply note how frequently photographers represented in this exhibition appear and reappear in subsequent exhibitions of African photography and contemporary art.[50] The canon of African art photography that is developed through this show and others is remarkably diverse in terms of geography and genre of image. Though "In/sight" marks one of the first surveys of African photography, continent-spanning exhibitions of other kinds of African art have a long history.[51] Resting on the debatable premise that the term 'Africa' describes a

---

[49] "In/sight" included 30 photographers from more than a dozen countries. Photographers from South Africa include Gordon Bleach, Cloete Breytenbach, Mathew Faji, Christian Gbagbo, David Goldblatt, Bob Gosani, Ranjit Kally, Peter Magubane, Santu Mofokeng, G.R. Naidoo, Gopal Naransamy and Lionel Oostendorp.

[50] The work of Malick Sidibé, for example, was exhibited for the third time outside Mali in "In/sight," and the exhibition was the first exposure of the artist's work in a large-scale museum setting. The exhibition was central in establishing the artist's reputation internationally. Subsequently, his work appeared in numerous exhibitions, including several that helped further establish a canon of African photography, such as Tobias Wendl and Heike Behrend's "Snap Me One!: Studiofotografen in Afrika" (1998), Okwui Enwezor's "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994" (2001), and Gerald Matt and Thomas Miessgang's "Flash Afrique! Photography from West Africa" (2001). In 2007, Sidibé was awarded the Venice Biennale's Golden Lion award for lifetime achievement. Since the publication of the catalogue for "In/sight," Sidibé's work has been published widely in a number of accessible publications: André Magnin and Malick Sidibé, *Malick Sidibé* (Zurich: Scalo, 1998); Malick Sidibé et al., *Malick Sidibé: Photographs* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2004).

[51] Interestingly, one of the latest continent-wide blockbusters was on view at the Guggenheim at the same time as "In/sight." "Africa: The Art of a Continent," an exhibition of so-called 'traditional' African art was organized by the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in association with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. See Tom Phillips, ed., *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (Munich: Prestel, 1996). A seemingly unlikely pair, "In/sight" dealt with the visual manifestations of Africa's modernity and post-modernity while "Art of a Continent" delved deeply into the past and included no works which alluded to Africa's contemporary condition. Still, both exhibitions did bring into the high-art space of the museum objects and images not meant by their makers to be anything like art in the Western sense, for example the commercial

geographical locale with defined features, a space which is characterized by something other than its diversity, these exhibitions posit the possibility of a continent-wide African visual culture.[52] Exhibitions like "In/sight" bring together artists from all over the African continent, from places as culturally diverse as Egypt, Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa. Further, these exhibitions are diverse in terms of the kind of photographs they present, including both formalist and conceptually-oriented art photographs and appropriating into the art discourse various kinds of vernacular images.

What distinguishes "In/sight" as an exhibition is its self-reflexive focus on theorizing the nature and character of the category of African photography. There is an attempt to justify the diversity of the material presented and to theorize whether there might be something particular about African photography distinguishing it from other manifestations of the medium. The exhibition's paramount influence on the formation of a canon of African photography is therefore felt through the critical apparatus which it

---

identity portraits Cornélius Yao Azaglo Augustt and a Senufo ceremonial headdress, both from Senegal. For a useful critical assessment of "Africa: The Art of a Continent," see Christopher B. Steiner, "Discovering African Art … Again?," *African Arts* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1996): 1-8, 93.

[52] Suzanne Preston Blier notes in her introduction to a widely used introductory textbook on African art, "At the risk of promoting an inaccurate sense of Africa as a place of unified or monolithic artistic practice, the question of what, if anything, is distinctively 'African' about African art is an intriguing and interesting one to address as a preface to what follows." She immediately adds, however, "The answers to this question are subtly different with regard to specific areas of the continent and periods of its history." Suzanne Preston Blier, "Africa, Art, and History: An Introduction," in *A History of Art in Africa*, ed. Monica Blackmun Visonà and others (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 15. Despite the fact that Blier goes on to point out some elements typical to 'African Art' in the broadest sense, if one follows the logic of her initial statements, then the notion that there is something definitely African about African art becomes problematic. For example, if those elements that define the 'African-ness' of a given art object differ regionally, then it would be impossible to affirm the existence of a geographically-grounded category of African art. It might be argued that the greater inter-regional connectedness wrought by globalization is making a common African visual culture more perceptible in the twenty-first century. However, it seems just as reasonable to claim that globalization is making connections *across* continents in the developing world, connections which mean that Johannesburg has more common ground with Rio de Janeiro (over the linked social ills of income inequality and crime) and Cairo with Mumbai (both are regional cultural capitals and home to indigenous film and recording industries) than the two African cities with one another. A recent collection of essays edited Sarah Nuttall represents an important attempt to theorize the possibility of a contemporary African visual culture and a distinctively African aesthetic: Sarah Nuttall, *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

deploys to support its curatorial vision. This is a vision which brought together, in the space of the art museum, what, on the surface, might seem to be very diverse material in terms of geography, era and photographic genre.

This critical apparatus is best understood through the selection of photographs and through the essays collected in the catalogue, which illuminate how the organizers, led by Enwezor, understand the place of photography in African culture and its identity as an art form. First of all, 'African photography' is construed by the exhibition as *photography by Africans*, photography by photographers who understand their identity to be somehow African. The development of African-identified photographers is therefore seen to be coterminous with the development of modern African identity, beginning in the 1930s and 1940s and culminating in the anti-colonial struggles and independence movements of the post-war years.[53] As is made clear by Enwezor and Octavio Zaya in their catalogue essay "Colonial Imaginary, Tropes of Disruption: History, Culture, and Representation in the works of African Photographers," photographers like Senegal's Salla Casset (1910—1974) and Mali's Keïta have a complex and central relation to the ideological conflicts of

[53] For a useful general history of this period, see Ali A. Mazrui, ed., *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, unabridged ed., *General History of Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 1999). Mazrui notes four overlapping (but distinct) phases in the political struggles of this period: "There was first the phase of pre-Second World War elite agitation for greater autonomy. There was then the phase of popular involvement in the struggle against Nazism and fascism. There was, thirdly, non-violent popular struggle for full-independence after the Second World War. Finally, there was armed engagement for the political kingdom—the guerilla wars against white minority governments especially from the 1960s onwards." Ali A. Mazrui, "Seek Ye First the Political Kingdom," in Ali A. Mazrui, ed., *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, unabridged ed., *General History of Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 1999), 106. Key primary texts on the constitution of African identity in the years before and after the Second World War include, Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *The Foundations of "Africanité" or "Négritude" and "Arabité"* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1971); and Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path* (New York: International Publishers, 1973). Useful anthologies of contemporary texts include that in Enwezor, ed., *The Short Century*, 365-460; and Eli Kedourie, ed., *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1971). More recent ruminations on this era of political formation and on the idea of African identity include Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

that era and to the process of identity formation: "They methodically documented an important milieu in that negotiated space bridging the gap between colonial and post-colonial identity, between the self and the other, between modernity and tradition."[54] More than simply documenting this milieu, the article continues, photographers helped shape it and propel its development. In this sense, "In/sight" positions African photography at the center of African cultural development in the modern era.

This notion is furthered by Enwezor's *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945—1994*, shown at four venues in Europe and the United States from 2001 to 2002. The exhibition examines the period between the beginning of the end of colonialism in 1945 to the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994. This half century marks a pivotal period in African history and in the development of African art. "Short Century" was remarkably interdisciplinary in approach, combining works of art with historical documents, including colonial and anti-colonial propaganda. Among the many kinds of image-making and design practice incorporated in the exhibition were architecture, film, poster art, print media of various kinds, textile art, and photography. The exhibition understands African modernism as arising from this very complex cultural field, both effect and cause of the political, social and economic changes of this era. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are works of cultural history in the grandest sense. Though photography is only one kind of image-making among many included in the exhibition it does play a prominent role, and the exhibition catalogue features an important essay by curator and critic Lauri Firstenberg on African photography, "Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic

[54] Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya, "Colonial Imaginary, Tropes of Disruption: History, Culture, and Representation in the works of African Photographers," in *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, ed. Clare Bell (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 28.

Portraiture."[55] The essay is important in that it considers several different kinds of photographic practice, including studio portraiture, photojournalism and art photography, in an attempt to discern general characteristics of African photography, positioning the medium's development in relation to modernity and colonialism. In its consideration of photography and its similar treatment of the history of other media in Africa, "Short Century" does for modern African cultural production generally what "In/sight" endeavored to do for African photography specifically: uncover the historical circumstances of contemporary cultural forms. Both of these exhibitions and the catalogue essays published in conjunction with them, including essays by Enwezor and Zaya and by Oguibe in the "In/sight" catalogue and by Firstenberg's in the "Short Century" catalogue, are distinguished by their efforts to sketch the historical development of African photography since the middle of the twentieth century.

Enwezor's most recent undertaking, "Snap Judgments," an exhibition for which I served as a research assistant, is different in that it offers no attempt to historicize the production of African photography. In "Snap Judgments," only contemporary photography was featured, and, though some other kinds of photography appeared (including visual journalism and fashion photography), the selection skewed heavily toward art photography. The exhibition sought to demonstrate how artists can use photography as a tool to explore the social realities of contemporary Africa. Through the diverse work of nearly 40 artists, the exhibition grappled with complex issues related to contemporary African visuality, including issues related to local responses to the international media and the touristic gaze, the depiction of the African body, and history,

[55] Lauri Firstenberg, "Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 175-9.

memory and postcolonial identity; and urbanization. In a sense, this exhibition marked the maturation of 'African photography' as a category of artistic production. By dispensing with the longer historical trajectory that guided the selection of work for "In/sight" and "Short Century," "Snap Judgments" shifts its focus away from the previous exhibitions' concerns with the development of African photography. Instead, "Snap Judgments" addresses the question of how artists work with the medium of photography to examine and depict the social realities of contemporary Africa.

In a sense, "Snap Judgments" marks the maturation of the category of African art photography. In this exhibition the category's existence is taken as a given, its history need not be elucidated, and its current practitioners can take center stage. Further, these practitioners appear in the exhibition on the basis of the value of their individual artistic visions and not because they help define the contours of a continent-wide African photographic practice. This focus on the visions and merits of individual artists is carried through by another recent project in which Enwezor participated, an overview of recent contemporary African art written with Chika Okeke-Agulu: *Contemporary African Art since 1980*.[56] The book surveys the work of more than 100 artists, organizing their work by decade in a chronological framework that completely eschews place-of-origin. It is somewhat surprising to find a book of this sort ignoring country-of-origin as means of organizing the artists it presents in favor of a strictly chronological approach. And yet, it may be that surprise is generated only because the artists involved are African. After all, it would not be strange, I think, to see a book dealing with European art of the last twenty

[56] Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Contemporary African Art since 1980* (Bologna: Damiani, 2009). The books features several South African artists, including some who are discussed in this dissertation like David Goldblatt, Zanele Muholi, Jo Ractliffe, Berni Searle, Mikhael Subotzky, Hentie van der Merwe and Nontsikelelo Veleko, suggesting that many of the figures addressed here, even those who have emerged only recently, are on their way to becoming canonical figures.

years organize works of art by date rather than by country or region. Exhibitions like "Snap Judgments" and books like *Contemporary African Art since 1980* represent the culmination of Enwezor's efforts to, first, define African photography, and, now, to see it exhibited and discussed in a manner similar to the way art from Europe or North America might be treated.

Simon Njami's curation and scholarship of African photography are of a magnitude and importance comparable to Enwezor's, and the trajectory of his approach to this material is similar. Njami served as chief curator of the exhibition "Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent," an expansive exhibition shown between 2004 and 2006 at several venues in Europe, in Tokyo, and, notably, in Africa at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Accompanied by a large-scale catalogue, "Africa Remix" was a remarkably ambitious survey of contemporary African artistic production, and included many South African artists and photographers.[57] Njami also curated, with Fernando Alvim, the first African pavilion at the "52nd Venice Biennale" in 2007. In the specific field of African photography, Njami is notable for his work as the long-time director of the "Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie," a biennial festival and exhibition of African photography held in Bamako, Mali, which Njami directed from 2001 to 2008 and which has been held since 1994. In the time Njami oversaw the festival, it grew into an indispensable manifestation of African photographic culture, an important meeting place for practitioners, curators, critics and collectors from both within the continent and outside. Important multi-lingual catalogues have been produced for several editions of this

[57] Simon Njami, ed., *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005). Among the South African artists and photographers featured in this exhibition were Jane Alexander, Willie Bester, Marlene Dumas, David Goldblatt, Moshekwa Langa, Santu Mofokeng, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Tracey Rose, and Guy Tillim. Alexander, Goldblatt, Mofokeng, Mthethwa, Rose and Tillim all make photographs.

biennial, surveying and disseminating a broad range of contemporary photographic practice and preserving aspects of the history of African photography.[58] For example, the sixth edition in 2005 featured both Mikhael Subotzky (b. 1981), who is discussed in this dissertation and is representative of the young, emerging generation of South African photographers, and Ranjith Kally (b. 1925), a photographer for *Drum* magazine who was already making photographs in the 1940s and began working professionally in 1956. This interest in the broad sweep of African photographic history, in embracing both the past and present, can also been seen in a national exhibition of Sudanese photography within the biennial which covered the years from 1935 to 2002.[59] Though not as tightly focused or as carefully prepared as the catalogues for "In/sight" or "Snap Judgments," these volumes overseen by Njami are indispensable to the scholar of African photography. Besides his work as a curator, Njami's contributions to the study of African art include co-founding and serving as editor-in-chief of the cultural magazine *Revue Noire,* a journal published between 1991 and 2001 which brought many African photographers to the attention of a much wider international audience.

Taken together, the work of Njami and Enwezor offers a sense of how the study of African art and photography has grown and evolved over the last twenty years. Though the contributions of these two scholars are crucial and the critical study of African photography remains a remarkably recent phenomenon, there are many other scholars who have made important contributions to the field.

---

[58] Simon Njami, ed., *Mémoires Intimes d'un Nouveau Millénaire: IVes Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2001* (Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2001); Simon Njami, ed., *Rites Sacrés / Rites Profanes: Ves Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2003* (Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2003); Simon Njami, ed., *Un Autre Monde: VIes Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2005* (Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2005).

[59] Claude Iverné, "Soudan/Sudan: Documents Spontanés, 1935-2002/Spontaneous Documents, 1935-2002," in *Un Autre Monde: VIes Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2005*, Simon Njami, ed. (Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2005), 140-55.

An important precursor to more recent developments in the field is Nicolas Monti's *Africa Then: Photographs 1840-1918,* a serviceable and occasionally provocative attempt to construct a history of photography in the colonial period, published in 1987.[60] His approach is to present European-produced colonial images of the continent side by side with African-produced work. Certainly this approach helps reveal the difficulty in discerning the differences between colonial photography and the first stirrings of indigenous photography, though in practice, in the context of his book, the European images somewhat overwhelm the African examples. Still, Monti undeniably presents a viable model for the construction of a history of the use of photography in Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and his book is typical of several other more tightly-focused attempts to consider this period.[61]

As has already been mentioned, an important landmark for the migration of African photography into the art museum is the already-discussed 1991 exhibition

---

[60] Nicolas Monti, ed. *Africa Then: Photographs, 1840–1918* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

[61] One of the most powerful attempts to theorize the ideological content of colonial photography was undertaken by Malek Alloula, though his book only addresses Orientalist images from North Africa: Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). For a selection of photographs by some of the most important European photographers working in the Orientalist mode, see Rudolf Lehnert and Ernst Landrock, *L'Orient d'un Photographe* (Lausanne: Favre, 1987). Other important contemporary scholarship addressing colonial photography in Africa include two already cited books by Christraud Geary, *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915* and *In and out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960,* and an article written by Geary with Paul Jenkins: Paul Jenkins and Christraud Geary, "Photographs from Africa in the Basel Mission Archive," *African Arts* 18, no. 4 (August 1985): 56-63, 100. Another useful work is an article by postcard scholar David Prochaska: David Prochaska, "Fantasia of the Photothèque: French Postcard Views of Senegal," *African Arts* 24, no. 4 (October 1991): 40-47, 98. There are several books which publish large selections of colonial postcards: Jean-Louis Hébrard and Marie-Claude Hébrard, *L'Algérie Autrefois* (Le Coteau: Horvath, 1990); Abdelkrim Gabous, *La Tunisie des Photographes: 1875-1910* (Tunis: Editions CERES, 1994); Jean-Claude Karmazyn, *Le Maroc en Cartes Postales: 1900-1920* (Cahors: Publi-fusion, 1994); André Laronde, *La Libye à Travers les Cartes Postales: 1900-1940* (Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 1997). On the employment of photography by colonial regimes and the importance of photography in colonial archives, see M.W. Daly and L.E. Forbes, *The Sudan: Photographs from the Sudan Archive, Durham University Library* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994); and Françoise Durand-Evrard and Lucienne Martini, *Archives d'Algérie: 1830-1960* (Paris: Hazan, 2003).

"Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art."[62] The exhibition situates photography in relation to forms of urban and popular art forms, like sign painting. Another work which puts photography in an expansive context as a facet of recent African cultural expression is Sidney Littlefield Kasfir's *Contemporary African Art*, a book published as part of the "World of Art" series published by Thames & Hudson.[63] This publication, from a popular, inexpensive and widely-circulated series, has done much to highlight the broad range of African art and visual culture in the second half of the twentieth century. The efforts of Vogel and Littlefield Kasfir are important in that they try to understand photography as a cultural phenomenon in relationship to traditional and popular art, and in relationship to the work of academically trained contemporary artists. However, though both of their efforts are important to African photography's arrival as an area of academic study, neither focus on the medium with much specificity.

The first encyclopedic survey of African photography is the *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, a sprawling, unruly work edited by N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, which grew out of the efforts of the journal *Revue Noire* to publish African photography and exhibitions mounted by the magazine in 1992 and 1998.[64] Unlike the catalogue for "In/sight," which provides a comprehensive look at the work of a small number of photographers, the *Anthology* offers a glance at the work of more than a hundred photographers working in a wide variety of styles and modes. These photographs are contextualized by numerous essays, which range in tone from the academic to the poetic. Some essays are histories of particular kinds of African

---

[62] Vogel, *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*.
[63] Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).
[64] N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds., *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999). The French-language edition of this work appeared in 1998.

photography, others appreciations, and still others personal reminiscences. The diversity of writing style and non-linear organization of the book suggest the vastness of the topic to which it is devoted and hint at the still fragmentary nature of our knowledge about certain aspects of this topic. Though more tightly-focused works of scholarship that have appeared in the wake of the *Anthology* have superseded certain aspects of the book, which was published, after all, at an early point in the study of African photography, it is likely to be a long time before another work is able to capture as fully the remarkable scope of the medium's history in Africa. The *Anthology* remains an indispensable reference for those working in this field.

This review of literature would be incomplete if it did not also cite some of the numerous exhibitions of African art and photography undertaken in recent years by curators other than Enwezor and Njami. Some of these exhibitions have been of the same type as "Africa Remix," endeavoring to present a broad-sweep of contemporary cultural production. Most, however, have been more tightly focused on individual media, particular moments in history or specific regions in Africa. The essays in the catalogues accompanying these exhibitions are a crucial resource for those interested in contemporary African culture. One of the most notable collections of essays can be found in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, a book and related exhibition which endeavored to tell, through essays by curators and artists, stories about the development of modernism in seven African countries: Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda.[65] Two important works which deal with a widespread phenomenon of contemporary art made by Africans living outside Africa are *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* and *A Fiction of Authenticity:*

[65] Clémentine Deliss, et al., eds., *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

Contemporary Africa Abroad, both from 2003.[66] Another important catalogue and exhibition from this same year is *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, which traces the fraught cultural landscape of contemporary African cultural production through the work of artists from Africa and the African diaspora and essays by cultural critics including Stuart Hall, Achille Mbembe, Okwui Enwezor and Simon Njami.[67] The most important works of scholarship on African photography have already been mentioned in the course of this review. However, one work of tangential importance bears note: *Nazar: Photographs from the Arab World*, an exhibition catalogue, surveys photography from the Middle East and is a useful and incisive reference on photography from North Africa.[68] Several of the photographers included in *Nazar* have also appeared in exhibitions of African photography, offering a way to think about the porous geographical boundaries and regional connections that animate the category of African photography. Though the foregoing list represents only a selection of the available works, it is a selection made with an eye towards choosing works most specifically pertinent to this study. Those interested in learning more should consult the bibliographies of the works cited here, especially the extensive bibliography on African photography found in *Snap Judgments*, which I prepared with Allison Moore.[69] Finally, before ending my review of the literature on contemporary African art and photography generally (as opposed to South African art and photography specifically), I must note the emergence of several journals devoted to African cultural production and

---

[66] Laurie Ann Farrell, ed., *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2003); Shannon Fitzgerald and Tumelo Mosaka, eds., *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad* (St. Louis: Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2003).
[67] Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell, eds., *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes* (London: Institute of International Visual art in collaboration with the Forum for African Arts and Prince Claus Fund, 2003).
[68] Wim Melis, *Nazar: Photographs from the Arab World* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2004).
[69] Enwezor, ed., *Snap Judgments*, 379-83.

the rise of a new generation of scholars interested in this field. Among the journals publishing extensively on this field, one might note, *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art, Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture,* and *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*. Many of those publishing in these journals are younger scholars drawn to this field in the wake of pioneering work undertaken in the last several decades. In the process of revising this manuscript, I participated in several panels and symposia on African contemporary art at which most of the speakers were young scholars. Indeed, this manuscript owes a great deal to discussions and collaborations with Allison Moore, another doctoral student at the Graduate Center of the City of New York writing about African photography. It is likely that these young scholars will advance the field a great deal in the coming years.

While this review of the literature on African art and photography is by no means exhaustive, it does provide a useful survey of some of the most important work in this developing field, allowing me to now turn my attention to the subset of this literature that specifically addresses South African photography, art and culture. Given the topic of this study, I will begin this part of my review by addressing the literature on photography in South Africa. I will then broaden my focus to consider the literature that addresses contemporary art and culture generally.

There are only a few works which can claim to be general histories of photography in South Africa. The oldest of these books is *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa*, written by Dr. A.D. Bensusan in 1966.[70] Bensusan, a medical practitioner, scientist, minister, and mayor of the city of Johannesburg, was an amateur

[70] A.D. Bensusan, *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa* (Cape Town: Howard Timmims, 1966). The book tries to address the entirety of photography's history in Africa, though it is written largely from a South African perspective.

photographer of some note and the first president of the Photographic Society of South Africa. Bensusan was also a collector of photography, and his collection forms the core of the Bensusan Museum of Photography, which now forms part of Museum Africa in Johannesburg and includes rare and valuable photographic equipment, including an early daguerreotype camera owned by William Henry Fox Talbot. Bensusan's history of photography in Africa is a treasure-trove of fascinating material on the early history of photography in South Africa, though, of course, it covers an era prior to the one addressed in this study. Bensusan's book is therefore a general history of nineteenth and early twentieth century photography. Another work of interest on the history of photography in South Africa in that era is *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from Its Beginnings to the End of 1870* by Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield, though the book is dated in tone and sometimes racist in passages.[71] *Surviving the Lens: Photographic Studies of South and East African People, 1870–1920,* a more recent book addressing nineteenth century photography, provides useful analysis of colonial photography in the region.[72]

After Bensusan's history, the next attempt at a general history of photography in South Africa is *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*.[73] Based on an exhibition to which a number of a number of curators contributed their expertise, *Lines of Sight* represented an attempt at creating a more democratic history of photography in South Africa, a history suited to the post-apartheid era. Embracing topics

---

[71] Marjorie Bull and Joseph Denfield. *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from Its Beginnings to the End of 1870* (Cape Town, T. McNally, 1970).
[72] Michael Graham-Stewart and Michael Stevenson, *Surviving the Lens: Photographic Studies of South and East African People, 1870–1920* (Simon's Town: Fernwood Press, 2001).
[73] Kathy Grundlingh, ed., *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001).

as diverse as family photographs, visual journalism, pictorialist art photography, and the contributions of women to the history of photography, the catalogue is appealingly diverse. It is, however, fragmentary and non-linear, akin to the *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* in its structure. *Lines of Sight* offers a series of snapshots of various moments and styles, rather than providing a narrative history of the topic. A narrative history of this sort is offered by Kathleen Grundlingh in a short essay in the *Anthology*, "The Development of Photography in South Africa."[74] John Peffer, in his recent book *Art and the End of Apartheid*, also tells the history of South African photography, though, again, only in the form of a brief essay that provides a staging ground for Peffer's analysis of two contemporary photographers, Santu Mofokeng and Zwelethu Mthethwa.[75]

Publications of or about photography in South Africa during the apartheid era typically focus on politically-engaged documentary photography. The demands of this era's political struggles forced documentary practice into the central position it holds in the discourse on South African art photography, a position occupied elsewhere in Africa, as I have discussed, by portrait photography. During apartheid, several interesting collections of documentary photographs were published outside South Africa, collections which often emphasized the production of photographers associated with the Afrapix collective, a group of photographers committed to the fighting against and documenting the apartheid regime. The two most notable are *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* from

[74] Kathleen Grundlingh, "The Development of Photography in South Africa," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 243-50.
[75] John Peffer, "Shadows: A Short History of Photography in South Africa," in *Art and End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 241-80.

1986 and *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* from 1989.[76] These books did much to popularize South African photography outside the country and to establish a certain kind of documentary practice as iconic of the country's photographic culture. Within South Africa, censorship sometimes made the publication of certain images difficult, but the cultural magazine *Staffrider* provided one notable outlet for documentary images, including in a special issue published in 1983.[77] During apartheid, the ethics of documentary photography were debated by practitioners of the medium. In addition to the essays attached to the aforementioned texts, one must cite Paul Weinberg's essay "Apartheid—A Vigilant Witness: A Reflection on Photography," which sheds valuable light on attitudes during this era.[78] Since the end of apartheid, several attempts have been made to historicize this era and photographic practice. Michael Godby, for example, discusses the importance of documentary photography in South Africa's photographic history, noting that, while the end of apartheid led to important changes in documentary practice, it remains relevant.[79] Photography associated with the struggle against apartheid is also addressed by Pierre-Laurent Sanner in his essay "Comrades and Cameras."[80] The fullest treatment of this topic is offered by Darren Newbury in *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*, a book-length study which addresses both social documentary photography and visual

---

[76] Omar Badsha, ed., *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Omar Badsha, Gideon Mendel, and Paul Weinberg, eds., *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Aperture Foundation in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, 1989). Badsha, Mendel and Weinberg were all members of the Afrapix collective.
[77] The special edition of *Staffrider* was titled "Social Documentary Photography: South Africa through the Lens" (*Staffrider*, 1983). See also Andries Walter Oliphant, ed., *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine, 1978-1988* (Johanneburg: Ravan Press, 1988).
[78] Paul Weinberg, "Apartheid—A Vigilant Witness: A Reflection on Photography," in *Culture in Another South Africa*, Willem Campschreur and Jost Divendal, ed. (London: Olive Branch Press, 1989), 60-70.
[79] Michael Godby, "After Apartheid: 10 South African Documentary Photographers," *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 36-41, 94.
[80] Pierre-Laurent Sanner, "Comrades and Cameras," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 253-63.

journalism.[81] There have also been interesting analyses of specific aspects of the history of visual journalism in South Africa, most notably of *Drum* magazine.[82]

In the last fifteen years, a number of art exhibitions have revealed the parameters of art photography in South Africa, often connecting more explicitly art-oriented photography with documentary photographs. Typically, these exhibitions focus on a few representative practitioners. A few of these exhibitions have appeared in South Africa, including the exhibition "Photosynthesis: Contemporary South African Photography" (1997), which included thirty-five photographers.[83] More have appeared outside South Africa in Europe and North America. Among the most ambitious in scope have been "Demokratins Bilder: Fotografi och Bildkonst efter Apartheid/Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art after Apartheid" (1998), "Black, Brown, White: Fotografie aus Südafrika/Photography from South Africa" (2006), and "Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa since 1950" (2009).[84] Each of these exhibitions includes at least one of the artists under discussion in this study. Each has a slightly different focus, but, taken together, they provide crucial insights into art photography in South Africa. Other useful guides to recent photography in South Africa are the catalogues produced in conjunction with the Cape Town Month of Photography, a biennial festival of

---

[81] Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2009).
[82] Okwui Enwezor, "A Critical Presence: *Drum* Magazine in Context," in *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, Clare Bell, ed. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim, 1996), 179-228.
[83] Kathleen Grundlingh, ed., *Photosynthesis: Contemporary South African Photography* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1997).
[84] Jan-Erik Lundström and Katarina Pierre, *Demokratins Bilder: Fotografi och Bildkonst efter Apartheid/Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art after Apartheid* (Umeå: BildMuseet, 1998); Gerald Matt and Thomas Miessgang, *Black, Brown, White: Fotografie aus Südafrika/Photography from South Africa* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst; Wien: Kunsthalle Wien, 2006); Tosha Grantham, ed., *Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa, 1950 to the Present* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

photography organized by Geoffrey Grundlingh.[85] Necessarily diverse, these catalogues do provide an invaluable window onto the range of photographic practice in the country.

The broader, non-medium-specific production of contemporary art in South Africa is best surveyed in three books produced by South African artist Sue Williamson, either alone or in collaboration. The first of these, *Resistance Art in South Africa* from 1989, was explicitly intended to showcase a multiracial roster of artists working in a wide range of styles, a roster unified only in their opposition to the apartheid regime and their desire to articulate that opposition through visual art.[86] The two later volumes address artistic production in the post-apartheid cultural context.[87] These books are all similar in format. Brief introductory essays are followed by short, heavily illustrated essays on individual artists. The importance and acceptance over time of photography as a medium can be charted through these volumes: the first has no photography whatsoever while the latter two incorporate many photographers. A similar work surveying a large number of artists is *10 Years, 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa*, edited by Sophie Perryer. Fifteen artists, critics and curators selected the artists in the book in the context of a dialogue on the state of the arts in South Africa, who are then discussed in short essays.[88] The magazine *Art South Africa*, also published by Bell Roberts, is a useful place to chart ongoing developments in the South African art world.

---

[85] Geoffrey Grundlingh, ed. *100XC, Photography in South Africa: The Cape Town Month of Photography* (Cape Town: South African Centre for Photography/University of Cape Town, 1999); Geoffrey Grundlingh, *The Cape Town Month of Photography, 2002* (Cape Town: South African Centre for Photography/University of Cape Town, 2002); Geoffrey Grundlingh, *The Cape Town Month of Photography, 2005* (Cape Town: South African Centre for Photography, 2005).
[86] Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).
[87] Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1996); Sue Williamson, *South African Art Now* (New York: Collins Design, 2009).
[88] Sophie Perryer, ed., *10 Years, 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishers in association with Struik Publishers, 2004).

To understand the terrain of contemporary art in South Africa, one must also consult several exhibition catalogues, many of which accompanied exhibitions mounted by either Emma Bedford or Laurie Ann Farrell. Bedford was formerly a curator at the South African National Gallery and Farrell at the Center for African Art in New York. Bedford's most notable exhibition was "A Decade of Democracy: South African Art, 1994-2004," which was the occasion for the publication of two catalogues.[89] In the same year, Farrell produced "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art," a multi-site exhibition mounted in New York, which also saw the publication of two catalogues.[90]

South African art's movement into the global mainstream is best charted in the expansive volumes produced for the first (and only) two Johannesburg Biennales in 1995 and 1997. Both include important theoretical essays and survey the output of some of the most important South African contemporary artists. The first, more modest and locally-oriented, biennale was held in 1995.[91] The second, organized by Okwui Enwezor, was very ambitious in scope and showcased cutting-edge international artists alongside their South African counterparts.[92] A truly globalized affair, the second biennale marked South African art's arrival on the international scene and international art's arrival in South Africa. Though these exhibitions have not been repeated, Johannesburg now hosts

---

[89] Emma Bedford, ed., *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art, 1994-2004* (Cape Town: Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 2004); Gary Van Wyk and Sophia Ainslee, eds., *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa* (Boston: South Africa Development Fund, 2004).
[90] David Brodie, Churchill Madikida, and Laurie Ann Farrell, *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art* (New York: Museum for African Art, 2004); Sophie Perryer, ed., *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art*. New York: Museum for African Art, 2004.
[91] Christopher Till,. *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, 28 February—30 April 1995* (Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, 1995).
[92] Okwui Enwezor and Colin Richards, eds., *Trade routes: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale* (Johannesburg: Thorold's Africana Books, 1997).

a biannual African Art Fairs, an international art fair directed by Simon Njami and held, so far, in 2008 and 2010.

South Africa's evolving historical circumstances have led to a great deal of debate over the nature of South African culture, especially in recent years. Recently published cultural studies readers include two by Sarah Nuttall with various collaborators: *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* and *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*.[93] For a useful monographic study on South African culture, see Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, a book rife with incisive analysis.[94] The best available reader dealing specifically with the application of critical theory to the visual arts is a volume edited by Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*.[95] Finally, I would be remiss in not mentioning a study by Annie E. Coombes of contemporary South African visual culture, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*.[96]

Finally, to conclude this review, I must also note scholars of American visual culture, especially those focusing on the interrelationship of race and photography, who are of great relevance to this dissertation. Indeed, one of the most useful models for the work undertaken here is the catalogue for the exhibition "Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self" (2003), which, through a series of interlinked essays,

---

[93] Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds., *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, eds., *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[94] Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005).
[95] Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, eds., *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press, 1999).
[96] Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

offers a kaleidoscopic view of the ways photography has shaped ideas about race and nation in the United States.[97] Edited by Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, the volume addresses a number of issues also considered in this dissertation.

From the foregoing review, it should become clear that the most vital work addressing the specific focus of this study, recent and contemporary art photography in South Africa, has been undertaken in conjunction with art exhibitions mounted either in the country or abroad. The short essays scattered across the catalogues of exhibitions like "Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa since 1950" have added much to our understanding of the subject, offering useful background and incisive analysis of select artists.[98] However, despite such recent scholarship, some of it appearing since I began this project, I feel there remains a useful role for this study. Brevity is the main shortcoming of essays in museum catalogues and of the short critical appreciations published in art magazines. Only a few of the photographers discussed here have been the subject of long-form critical appraisals of the kind this dissertation endeavors to provide. With the exception of the work of David Goldblatt, to mention the most obvious example, in the main, the work of South African photographers has become much more recognized while remaining still under analyzed. The length of this study allows for in-depth analysis of these photographers' work and for an even fuller presentation of the socio-historical context in which this work was undertaken. Though this dissertation by no means minimizes the importance of the already existing literature on South African art photography, it provides, I think, an absolutely essential supplement to it. Taken together, the literature discussed in this review represents a very complex field from

---

[97] Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, eds., *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003).
[98] Grantham, *Darkroom*.

which my own work emerges. Anthropology, art history, cultural studies and critical theory are all tools that have been applied to the study of African photography. My study acknowledges these precedents, but primarily employs critical theory and biography to focus on the production of South African art photography.

Methodology

This dissertation proceeds from the assumption that colonialism, and those visual documents which both reflect and constitute it, must be critiqued by art history and its allied academic enterprises. The issue then resolves to this: what is/are the most appropriate methodological ground(s) from which to launch such a critique? By asking a question of this nature, this work demands usefulness from art history, demands that it do something with consequences in the real world, something like subverting or, at least, revealing the structures by which colonial power once articulated (and perhaps continues to articulate) its dominance.

'Theory,' a heterogeneous and variably constituted body of writing produced in a variety of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and political contexts (including, but not limited to, philosophy, literary studies, art history, feminism, and postcolonialism), is being applied in the United States with ever increasing frequency to the study of cultural production. Parallel to the use of theory by critics and academics as a tool for understanding art from all eras has been the employment of theory by contemporary artists as a framework for the creation of art. This dissertation frequently deals with contemporary art, and, rather than offering a narrative account of South African photographic history, it addresses the nexus of culture, the politics of identity and the

medium of photography. Therefore, it makes sense to employ theories about culture, identity and photography as a means of structuring this study. However, since the term theory encompasses a broad range of meanings even among US-based academics, and since the application of theory to art practice has a distinct history in South Africa, a degree of further clarification is necessary.

In this study, a variety of critical theory will be employed to account for the diversity of subject positions articulated by the artists under consideration, a diversity which stems from both the complexity of South Africa and from the more than 40 years addressed. In particular—and necessarily, due to the central role of race in South African history—critical theories of race will be of the greatest importance. In employing critical race theory as a unifying element for my study, I am following the example of several path-breaking works examining the role of race in the visual arts of the United States, especially the Fusco and Wallis edited volume *Only Skin Deep*.[99] Looking at photography through the lens of such theory therefore creates a point of convergence between the photographic histories of the United States and South Africa.

Having noted works from United States that set a precedent for this study, it is vital to note that the history of critical theory's application to art history in South Africa is different from and shorter than that of the United States. Though South African monographs and readers on critical theory are now emerging after the end of apartheid, during the 1970s and 1980s, when critical theory was becoming entrenched in European and American cultural studies, theory was much less commonly employed in the discourse on visual art in South Africa and was especially rare in the discourse on photography. As Jo Ractliffe notes, in the 70s and 80s, "most of the nation's leading

[99] Fusco and Wallis, *Only Skin Deep*.

photographers were self-taught, [while] artists came from art school."[100] In her experience, this legacy lingers and has made South African photography, relative to contemporary photography in Europe or North America, anti-theory. As is shown by Ractliffe's own work, and by the work of photographers like Berni Searle and Hentie van der Merwe (who will also be addressed in my study), this anti-theoretical bias is diminishing, affected by changes wrought by the end of apartheid.

In South Africa, the end of apartheid has influenced the strategies pursued by photographers and altered the terms through which photography is understood. The distinctions between (documentary) photography and art (conceptually- or formally-based photography) is diminishing as both camps have tried to examine and reexamine the role their work plays in society, the place their work stakes out in culture. Critical theory has become ever more important for photographers who are attempting to understand, situate and justify their cultural production. Simultaneously, political changes have made the theorization of South African culture as a whole—the theorization of a single South African culture embracing all citizens—an equally pressing concern. Critical theory is therefore becoming an ever more indispensable tool for examining the photography which is the subject of this study.

Critical theory also provides a way of discerning continuity and common ground between both South African photography from before and after apartheid and photography from South Africa and the United States. Critical theory provides a way of apprehending how both documentary-based and conceptually-based photography in South Africa share the same goal and are two valid means of revealing, fostering or resisting—through photography—the mechanisms of identity formation and the

[100] Jo Ractliffe, interview by author, 24 June 2007.

operations of systematic racism. Though the appropriateness or effectiveness of different artistic strategies will be considered, this dissertation focuses primarily on the overall effectiveness of interventions by art in the social construction of identity. For this reason, the dissertation is not divided into chapters on the basis of particular artistic strategies, but rather on the basis of various models and modes of identity formation.

This dissertation also employs biography and social history as tools for analysis. In many cases the life stories of the photographers and their subject positions provide crucially important context for the photography they produce. It is for this reason that this study takes the unusual step of blending critical theory with biography. My concern with the social history of the art presented here is an effort to ensure that the images discussed are grounded specifically in the socio-historical circumstances of South Africa. If theory is used in this dissertation to provide a broader context for the images discussed, biography and social history are deployed to supply a context that is specifically and distinctively South African.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: *Brief Histories of South African Photography*

This chapter will provide a short account of the history of photography in South Africa, offering a critical context for the remainder of the material presented in this study. The work of photographers Santu Mofokeng, Peter McKenzie and Jo Ractliffe will provide a focus and anchor for my account of the country's experience of the medium and its role in the art world.

Chapter Two: *Critical White Photography*

In Chapter Two, the work of David Goldblatt and Hentie van der Merwe will be related to that of scholars pursuing an avenue of inquiry often called 'critical white studies,' scholars who posit whiteness as a socially constructed form of privilege. One of the ways in which 'critical white studies' desires to undermine the ideological bases of white supremacy is by revealing the mechanisms by which it is maintained. Similarly, both Goldblatt and van der Merwe create photography which denies that race is a natural order and instead offers a description of it as a relation of power. Goldblatt, arguably South Africa's most internationally-renowned photographer, tries to understand South Africa's whites and their place within and culpability for the racial hierarchies of apartheid. Likewise, Hentie van der Merwe grapples with the place of militarism in the construction of white masculine identity. By photographing colonial-era military uniforms in the contemporary, post-apartheid cultural moment, he twists their meaning, historicizing (and concomitantly de-naturalizing) the ideological tethering of masculine identity to the commission of violent acts.

Chapter Three: *'Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation': Coloured and Creole Subject Positions in South African Photography*

In Chapter Three, the photography of Ernest Cole and Berni Searle will be situated in relation to creolization theory. In recent years, *créolite* and creolization have been the subject of much scholarly scrutiny as a means of theorizing hopeful political possibilities within the processes of cultural mixing and the reconfigured economic relations that define globalization. It makes sense to knit South Africa into the broader fabric of creolization: historically, South Africa and the Caribbean were shaped by the same exchange of slaves and commodities that spurred the worldwide expansion of European power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In terms of Cole, this dissertation draws parallels between his documentary photography and Glissant's notion of camouflage—a strategy of resistance forwarded in Glissant's theoretical writings. A deferral of meaning through detour, digression, tricks, and disguise, camouflage is an integral part of Creole languages, and an outgrowth of their origins in slavery. Cole's project was similarly clandestine. In his book-length photo-essay *House of Bondage*, his pictures are suffused with anger, but the narratives and captions which accompany them make clear how much of this anger had to be hidden by Cole or disguised by his subjects. On the other hand, Berni Searle often uses her own body in her conceptually-based photographic work. However, she partially obscures her own skin with spices, complicating any recognition of the biological basis for her own racial status as a "coloured" (or mixed race) person. Searle puts her body on display, but uses the spice to insist this display is all surface, is without transparency. For Edouard Glissant, opacity combats transparency, and is characteristic of creolization.

Chapter Four: *Photography after Apartheid? Mikhael Subotzky, Zanele Muholi and 'Lolo' Veleko*

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, photographers Mikhael Subotzky, Zanele Muholi and Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko are articulating and reflecting new concepts about what it is to be South African. In her photography, Lolo Veleko endeavors to recognize and question the construction of identity in a radically-altered society. Her recent work has employed the format of fashion photography to capture the vibrant street culture of young people in Johannesburg, whose stylish and sophisticated clothing confronts stereotypes about how the young, black and urban ought to look. Zanele Muholi is an activist documenting the lives and struggles of her community, South Africa's lesbians, gay men and transgendered people. Mikhael Subotzky's first major

series, “Die Vier Hoeke” [The Four Corners] (2005), is the product of his extended analysis of conditions in South Africa’s prisons. His photographs offer both specific commentary on South Africa and a contribution to a global debate on the place of prisons in any democratic, multi-racial society. These photographers consider subjects entwined with the legacy of apartheid. Each of the photographers discussed in this chapter confronts the gap between expectation and reality in post-apartheid South Africa. However, in contrast to photographers discussed earlier, they also aggressively address themselves to international audiences and participate in global, rather than local, debates.

Conclusion

While the focus of this dissertation is on South Africa, for me, as a citizen of the United States, the underlying issues are also parochial. I undertake this work rooted in my own country, only forty years removed from legally enforced racial segregation and still struggling to realize its own ideals. This conclusion will reflect on my own subject position: an American, deeply concerned about race, who is looking at South Africa in an attempt to understand his own responsibilities and culpabilities. It will consider what it means for someone like me to be engaged in telling the history of photography in South Africa.

Chapter One: Brief Histories of South African Photography

Part One: Photography in Everyday Life

South African playwright, novelist, actor and director Athol Fugard once claimed, "The notion that there could be such a thing as an apolitical South African story is a contradiction in terms."[101] As the cliché goes, every picture tells a story, and this dissertation suggests that it is similarly impossible for the stories told by South African photographs to be apolitical. From the most rarefied fine-art photographs to the most humble family snapshot, every South African photograph has some political resonance. No doubt this is true everywhere, and perhaps South Africa only differs from other places in the degree to which its stories and photographs are political. This brief chapter endeavors to provide some useful context for the remainder of this dissertation in order to understand why this is the case and to offer a slightly broader window onto the history of photography in South Africa than is possible in the other chapters. It recounts a few key moments in this history, noting the medium's arrival in the region, the ideological valences photography has taken as a result of the country's distinctive social and political history, the relationship between art and vernacular photography, and the differences between kinds of art photography practices. As a whole, this dissertation considers art photography rather than other genres of the medium. This chapter, for example, is focused on a consideration of the work of three art photographers, Santu Mofokeng (b. 1956), Peter McKenzie (b. 1955) and Jo Ractliffe (b. 1961). However it also addresses family photography and other kinds of non-artistic image-making in order to provide a backdrop for my overall discussion of art photography and to show how art

[101] Quoted in Albert Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa to the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 187.

photographers have sometimes drawn on other kinds of photography as inspiration. For example, the importance of vernacular photography in the work of Santu Mofokeng reflects his interest in investigating the politics of representation in South Africa.

Secondarily, this chapter addresses why there are not clear divisions between those pursuing documentary photography as a type of art photography and those pursuing other types of more conceptually-driven art photography. I argue that these divisions are largely irrelevant, effaced by professional and personal connections between photographers that transcend aesthetic and ideological differences. Finally, this chapter assesses some of the reasons photography is and has been so central to South African visual and political culture.

Photography's history in South Africa is richly textured and long; long enough, indeed, to extend back to before the medium was even invented. As South African photohistorian, photographer and collector Arthur David Bensusan notes in his pioneering text *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa*, John Herschel, who helped perfect the medium and who was the first to use the terms 'photography,' 'positive' and 'negative,' spent the years 1834 to 1838 on the Cape of Good Hope, performing astronomical studies and employing both the *camera obscura* and *camera lucida* to make sketches.[102] This pre-history of photography in South Africa is closely followed by the arrival of the medium on the southern tip of Africa. According to Bensusan, French daguerreotypist and traveler M. J. Léger stopped in Port Elizabeth in

[102] A. D. Bensusan, *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa* (Cape Town: Howard Timmims, 1966), 1-4. Bensusan also reproduces two sketches of South Africa by Herschel between pages 16 and 17. Larry Schaaf's *Out of the Shadows: Herschel, Talbot, and the Invention of Photography* discusses a letter Herschel sent to a friend in South Africa in which he incorporates a photogenic drawing of a plant into the letter itself, along with a description of Talbot's process. With that description in hand, a girl made some photogenic drawings of her own, probably the first in Africa. See Larry Schaaf *Out of the Shadows: Herschel, Talbot, and the Invention of Photography* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 1992).

1846 on the return leg of a journey to India. Partnering with local entrepreneur William Ring, Léger produced commercial portraits in Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, also staging a photographic exhibition in the latter city.[103] By the 1850s and 1860s, photographic studios had proliferated across the region, offering likenesses to a growing population and 'exotic' images to the world market.[104] Photography grew in popularity among amateurs, and 1890 saw the formation of the first of many photography clubs organized in South Africa to band together these practitioners and foster the development of the medium. As is made clear by Bensusan's book and the exhibition catalogue *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*, which provides a history of South African photography through a series of interlinked essays, the medium has been put to many of the same purposes in South Africa as it has elsewhere in the world.[105] Taken in the service of social science, journalism, and commerce, made by professionals and amateurs, employed to make postage stamps and currency, photography has become, since its introduction, central to South African visual culture and an important means of articulating identity, whether collective or personal, public or private.[106]

Fugard, who frequently employed photography as a motif in his work, points towards several reasons why photography looms so large in South African culture. He features photography in his plays in ways that show the medium as something able to both open spaces of profound creativity and function as an implement of repression. Photography appears most prominently in two of Fugard's plays, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*

---

[103] Bensusan, 9-12.
[104] Bensusan, 13-23, 38-48. Bensusan notes that photography was spurred by events such as the 1860 visit to Cape Town of Queen Victoria's second son, Prince Alfred, the discovery of diamond deposits in 1867, and the South African (or Anglo-Boer) War of 1899-1902.
[105] The medium's various uses are hinted at by both Bensusan's work and by Kathy Grundlingh, ed., *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001).
[106] Bensusan, 49-52.

(1972), created in collaboration with actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1974).[107] As Albert Wertheim notes, these are both plays "dealing with a recurrent concern in Fugard's work: the meaning and power of photography."[108] And, as the plays make clear, Fugard and his collaborators viewed photography during apartheid as something whose meaning and power are highly ambivalent.

In *Sizwe Bansi*, one of the main characters, Styles, is a photographer, and the play hinges on the tension between the possibilities that photography offers to those in the country's oppressed majority seeking self-reinvention and the limits of those possibilities, limits imposed by institutionalized racism. Early in the play, in the midst of a long monologue, Styles gestures to the sign of his shop, which reads,

> Styles Photographic Studio. Reference Books; Passports; Weddings; Engagements; Birthday Parties and Parties. Proprietor: Styles.[109]

He then asks his listeners rhetorically: "When you look at this, what do you see?" Looking around the studio, he answers his own question in a manner that defines his ambitions:

> This is a room of dreams. The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never get statues erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds. People who would be forgotten, and their dreams with them, if it wasn't for Styles. That's what I do, friends. Put down, in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children's children will remember a man … 'This was our Grandfather' … and say his name. Walk into the houses of New Brighton and on the walls you'll find hanging the story of the people the writers of the big books forget about.[110]

---

[107] These plays are collected with *The Island* in Athol Fugard with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, *Statements* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986).
[108] Wertheim, 81.
[109] Fugard, 12.
[110] Ibid., 12-3.

For Styles, photographs can provide a true record of poor South African blacks, many of whom were illiterate and lived lives marked by transience. It is an avenue for telling histories from below, from the perspective of the downtrodden. Given the frequency of migratory labor for blacks and non-whites' tenuous claims to land during apartheid, photographs might be a person's only cherished possessions, a connection to people and places from which he or she was driven by the system. As Styles makes clear, however, these memories are carefully crafted, as much a representation of the subject's dreams as of reality.

The medium's ability to serve as a tool of invention, its ability to transcend mere reality, is emphasized by another of the play's vignettes. Another character, Sizwe Bansi, has had his work permit revoked and is struggling with the consequences of this catastrophe when his friend Buntu, urinating in an alleyway, finds a corpse. The dead man's clothing contains his valid passbook with identification number and work permit, the internal passport which restricts the movements of non-whites. His friend Buntu suggests that Bansi assume the dead man's identity, Robert Zwelinzima, by substituting his photograph for the one in the passbook, originally taken by Styles in an earlier scene. This ruse will work, at least temporarily, because the passbook photograph, the representation of history and dreams produced by Styles, can be removed and substituted. As Wertheim comments, the reason this can be done "is that for the white man, not only do all blacks look alike, they are faceless commodities, not individuals."[111] All this is only a stopgap measure because the fingerprints of Bansi/Zwelinzima will be checked if he gets into trouble, and trouble is inevitable for a black man in apartheid South Africa.

[111] Wertheim, 84.

As Bansi notes, "Our skin is trouble."[112] His face, his photograph, is interchangeable, because his skin is 'trouble.'

As Bansi's story shows, the magic of the photograph, the dream so carefully crafted by Styles, is easily pieced by the state's coercive power, a notion underscored by *Statements*, the story of an ill-fated (and illegal) romance between a black man and a white woman at a time when apartheid law forbid interracial relationships. She is a librarian and he a school principal. The play's third character is a policeman whose arrest of these lovers punctuates the play's midpoint. The arrest is dramatized by the metaphor of photography, and the medium is a kind of fourth character in the drama, exposing the lovers to the harsh light of police surveillance.

The first part of the play is performed by nude actors in dim light, suggesting the secret space the two lovers require for their union, while the second part is defined by the destruction of that space in the glare of flashlights and in the bursting light of a camera flash that takes six photographs of the still-nude couple. Fugard's stage directions read:

> A sequence of camera flashes in the darkness exposes the man and the woman tearing apart from their embrace; the man then scrambling for his trousers, finding them, and trying to put them on; the woman, naked, crawling around on the floor, looking for the man. As she finds him, and tries to hide behind his back, the flashes stop and torches are shone on them. The woman scrambles away, finds the blanket, and covers herself. The torches are relentless, but we never see anything of the men behind them.[113]

Photography is an instrumental aspect of the state's dissection and destruction of these two lovers' real, human relationship. The photographic evidence of their 'immorality' is nothing like the imagery created by Styles. While the photographs in *Sizwe Bansi* have the potential to be creative and the people who employ them have the possibility to be

[112] Fugard, 43.
[113] Ibid., 96.

subjects, the photographs at the heart of *Statements* are wholly destructive, and those pictured are objects for discipline and study. The various experiences the black characters in these plays have with photography suggest that the medium is a highly contested and ambivalent thing, both a tool of the system and something capable of precarious resistance, depending on the situation.

In South Africa, photography has several histories, depending on historical circumstance and on the subject position(s) of those employing and interacting with it. The history of photography in South Africa is atomized, cut through by differences related to race, class, gender, political ideology and numerous other markers of identity. Since there is no collective experience of photography in South Africa—even within communities there is diversity of experience—one is hard-pressed to argue for a collective history of photography in the country. Photography comes to South Africa because of colonization, because there are Europeans and people with European ancestry in the region in the nineteenth century with close connections to developments in Europe. In ways great and small, the medium would serve the social, economic and political needs of this group, a minority group which dominated the region despite their numbers. On the other hand, the medium would also serve as an important tool of resistance against minority rule. As the photographers discussed in this dissertation suggest, it could be of great use to those fighting for majority rule and trying to envision a new South Africa. Given this, I would argue that these various histories photography in South Africa are unified only through the fact that South Africa's social and political history profoundly affects all of these histories.

As I have noted, every kind of photography in South Africa from art photography to family snapshots is politicized. In part, this dissertation presents a sustained discussion of how art photographers have tried to self-consciously politicize their work, to make it respond to historical circumstances. Among other things, this chapter looks at how simple family photographs also embody South Africa's defining political struggles. Though an analysis of public, published or exhibited, photography forms the core of this study, it is always important to acknowledge the ways private people used photography to tell their own stories or record family histories. If the country has many histories of photography, family photography of non-whites represents one story often forgotten, though recent efforts have been made to recover it.

Emile Maurice's fascinating essay "Lives of Colour: Images from Cape Photo-Albums," for example, reveals a piece of the rich photographic history of Cape Town's so-called 'coloured' community by delving into the "intimate archive" of the photo-album.[114] The texture of everyday life within this mixed-race population is brought to life in images of a young child with a department store Father Christmas, a bride on her wedding day, or a soldier posted in Egypt during the Second World War, seen in vignette in the upper left-hand corner of a postcard, which has his wife and children in the upper right and is dominated by a typical view of the pyramids. Many of the images reproduced by Maurice are similarly banal. None are explicitly political. Yet the narration that accompanies each one shows the inescapable impact of 'politics,' of racism and apartheid.

---

[114] Emile Maurice, "Lives of Colour: Images from Cape Photo-Albums," in *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*, ed. Kathy Grundlingh (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001), 67. The history of the 'coloured' community will be addressed fully in a subsequent chapter of this dissertation.

Six women kick their legs out and smile for the camera in a photograph taken at a 1971 theme party—a 'Hot Pants Party.' Maurice's caption, standing in for the kind of oral narration that typically accompanies the viewing of a snapshot album, notes the unlikely pall of tragedy attached to this cheerful image. These women were a group of friends, all married women, who regularly "lived it up" at one or the other of the women's homes. Three of the six women applied for racial re-classification, going from 'coloured' to white, because whiteness "seemed to be a way of moving up in the world." For a while, the parties continued, but the impact of this change took a toll. Eventually, the group's ring leader could stand it no more. She left South Africa for Australia: "And that was the end of their theme parties—and their close friendships."[115] Many of South Africa's 'coloured' community found their situation under apartheid untenable, and emigration and loss are themes common to several of the photographs reproduced by Maurice.

Perhaps all snapshot albums are ultimately about loss, about shoring up memory and preserving community or family in the face of time and distance. But apartheid's assault on community, its attack on and denial of the multicultural reality of South Africa, makes the story these pictures tell something out of the ordinary. One picture in particular delineates the chasm of loss these everyday photographs attempt to bridge. This tightly-cropped image of a smiling man and woman is labeled "Reunion, Cape Town" and dated 1991. In the photograph, the woman has placed her hand over the man's left forearm, and the man, clearly moved, has placed his right hand over hers. The caption explains that the man, Ashley Forbes, joined the armed resistance to apartheid in 1986. He was soon on the run from the security police, who knew his name but not his

[115] Ibid., 71.

appearance. The police repeatedly raided his mother's home in attempts to effectuate his capture. His mother, the woman in the picture, was forced to destroy every photograph of her son, who was eventually jailed on the notorious Robben Island. His release and their reunion are depicted in the photograph, one image that must stand for all those lost as a direct result of the struggle against apartheid.

A more sustained effort to recover and highlight the lost history of family photography has been undertaken by writer and photographer Santu Mofokeng. His interest in family photographs reflect not only his own interest in connecting to the history they represent, but also reveal the remarkable trajectory of his own career as a photographer. For Mofokeng, archiving and displaying family photographs is a facet of his efforts to understand the politics of representation in South Africa and his own place within this discourse, a question he also pursues in a series of autobiographical essays.

"Trajectory of a Street Photographer," one of these essays by Mofokeng that functions simultaneously as autobiography, artist's statement, and socio-historical investigation into black South Africans' experience of photography, begins with a story:

> As far as I can recall there are no photographs of me as a baby. My first encounter with the camera was in the early 1960s when I was seven or eight years old. The person behind the camera was an itinerant journeyman photographer … He came to our house at the behest of my mother, to photograph me and my younger brother one cold morning. She wanted to memorialize the jackets she had sewn for us with bits of leftover material from the garment factory where she worked. She was proud of her handiwork. We were happy for the warmth we got from these coats of many colors, although we regretted that that our jackets did not carry any store labels.[116]

Aside from offering a description that beautifully conjures for readers the talismanic quality this unpublished photograph has for Mofokeng, this story also captures the tenor

[116] Santu Mofokeng, "Trajectory of a Street Photographer," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, Pascal Martin Saint Léon and N'Goné Fall, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 265.

and feel of Mofokeng's mature artistic practice, which is resolutely and indistinguishably personal and political. His story expresses the deeply emotional reasons people have for making photographs, reasons like maternal love and family memory, reasons indistinct from the realm of the overtly political in South Africa during apartheid. At the same time, it articulates the systematic socio-economic inequalities that gave the medium of photography such a powerful ideological charge in that country. This photograph, if we could see it today, would no doubt betray evidence of both personal and familial pride and of systemic, race-based poverty and inequality. The contours of Mofokeng's personal vision are such that this photograph *of* him betrays remarkable connections with photographs *by* him.

It is apt to begin a consideration of the work of Santu Mofokeng with this story in the sense that it discusses a so-called vernacular photograph, as Mofokeng has throughout his career blurred the somewhat artificial boundaries that distinguish this kind of image from others. In the history of photography, the term 'vernacular' is used to denote photographs traditionally considered outside of the category of art: portrait, journalistic, commercial images and their like are often grouped together under this rubric. Part of the significance of Mofokeng's work to the configuration of South African art photography is the way in which his practice entwines 'art' and 'vernacular' photographs as part of a coherent project. It makes sense that someone with a career in photography as varied as Mofokeng's would embrace an expansive range of photography and incorporate various types of images into his practice.[117] Indeed, his career is a veritable tour through the

[117] In addition to "Trajectory," Mofokeng recounts his biography in an essay called "Lampposts" included in a monograph on his work: Santu Mofokeng, *Santu Mofokeng TAXI-004* (Johanneburg: David Krut Publishing, 2001). The English-language version of "Lamposts" is found on pages 25-40.

recent history of the photography in South Africa and provides useful insights into the experiences of non-whites with the medium.

An amateur photographer from the age of 17, Mofokeng began making pictures professionally as a street photographer, taking portraits and commemorating weddings and other special occasions with images now locked away anonymously in family albums. Non-white South Africans access to photography during apartheid was restricted by economic circumstance rather than law. As Mofokeng recalls, "Cameras in whatever condition were difficult to come by because they were said to be too expensive."[118] Poverty meant that few owned cameras and those wishing to have photographs made often had to rely on professional portraitists like Styles or itinerant photographers like Mofokeng at the beginning of his career. In effect, in the townships, owning a camera was enough to make one at least a semi-professional photographer. Mofokeng began this way, starting his career as one of many roving portrait photographers plying their trade in the streets. Even today, with cameras much more common, street photographers remain active in central Johannesburg's Joubert Part, adjacent to the Johannesburg Art Gallery.[119] While not especially lucrative, when Mofokeng began, the job held social status. For Mofokeng, this was a large part of the appeal of owning a camera:

> Let me confess that envy is one of the motivations that steered me into the photography business. A few friends and peers at primary school had cameras. I noticed that they were very popular and had no problems approaching girls and chatting them up. They always had loose change in their pockets.[120]

---

[118] Mofokeng, "Trajectory," 266.
[119] These photographers were the subject of a fascinating series of portraits by art photographer Terry Kurgan in 2001. See Ruth Rosengarten, "Material Ghosts: Terry Kurgan's Park Pictures," in *Johanneburg circa Now*, ed. Terry Kurgan and Jo Ractliffe (published by the authors), 30-43. The essay discusses the photographers' work and aesthetics, and their relationship to the city.
[120] Mofokeng, "Trajectory," 265.

Owning a camera may have made a person popular, but it turns out to have been difficult for even the most enterprising to make more than 'loose change.' Street portraiture was a low-margin business, and, according to Mofokeng, owning a camera meant constant invitations to celebrations and parties, invitations that stressed that he come with his camera as his companion. The subtext of these was always the same:

> The real meaning of the invitation was that I was not going to be paid. Pressing the shutter was not considered work![121]

Indeed, the difficulty of making money from his work caused him to resist considering photography as a career, and it was only boredom with his job at in a pharmacy laboratory that led him to explore press photography more seriously, learning what he could as a poorly paid darkroom assistant.

Until very recently, photographic training was most available to South African photographers of all races through an apprenticeship or mentorship. Outside these channels, photography was often a self-taught skill.[122] Today, photographic education is more widely available, both at elite art schools like the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town or through more innovative programs serving traditionally under-privileged populations like the Market Photography Workshop.[123] When Mofokeng started, however, the path was much more difficult for those who were not white, and he could only serve as darkroom assistant at a newspaper and not as a formal apprentice. As he recalls,

---

[121] Ibid. 266.

[122] David Goldblatt, for example, was largely self-taught, though he also served a desultory apprenticeship to a wedding photographer. See Michael Godby, "David Goldblatt: The Personal and the Political," in *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, David Goldblatt (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001), 407-8.

[123] On the history of the Market Photography Workshop, see Brenton Maart and T.J. Lemon, eds., *Sharp: The Market Photography Workshop* (Johannesburg: Market Photography Workshop, 2002). Of the young photographers who are the subject of Chapter Four of this dissertation, one attended Michaelis (Mikhael Subotzky) and the other two the Market Photography Workshop (Zanele Muholi and Lolo Veleko).

> Only white people could be apprenticed as photographers. I would be asked to show the new white employees their way around the darkroom and the next thing I knew, I was taking orders from them![124]

In fact, Mofokeng credits a more informal mentorship from David Goldblatt with nurturing him as a freelance photographer.

In these early years, Mofokeng toiled unceremoniously as a darkroom assistant at several newspapers, including both *Die Beeld*, a right-wing Afrikaans-language newspaper, and *New Nation*, a left-alternative, anti-apartheid paper. Finally becoming a photojournalist himself for a brief period, he joined the anti-apartheid Afrapix photography collective and gradually shifted his focus from journalistic to documentary photography, eventually making images under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Social Research at the University of the Witwatersrand and then as a freelance photographer and researcher. Most recently, while continuing to make and exhibit his own documentary photographs, now often showing these in the context of art museums and galleries, Mofokeng has undertaken archival research into the history of photography in South Africa, gathering, investigating and exhibiting portraits commissioned by urban black working- and middle-class patrons around the turn of the twentieth century. Acknowledging the variety of activities in the foregoing list and adding to it Mofokeng's work as an essayist, it is clear that Mofokeng's photographic and artistic practice is multifaceted, moving back and forth across the threshold that divides 'art photography' from other kinds of photographic images. Part of the work of understanding this seemingly unwieldy CV as a coherent life therefore involves ignoring distinctions between categories of photography. Simply, the distinction between art and vernacular

[124] Mofokeng, "Trajectory," 268.

photography is not a meaningful one in the context of Mofokeng's career in photography, a career which is not really unusual among South African photographers.

In its organization, this dissertation acknowledges the way in which distinctions between the documentary and conceptual modes in art photography are largely effaced in the history of South African art photography, enabling an assessment of this history that is driven more by the particular social concerns of photographers than by their stylistic interests. This peculiarity of South African art photography is a result of the primacy of political commitments among the concerns of the photographers addressed here. Mofokeng's work extends this theme even further, embracing both documentary and conceptually-driven projects within the realm of art *and* various kinds of non-artistic production. Mofokeng is consistent, not to a particular kind of image or specific avenues of distribution, but rather to a sustained interest in the politics of representation in South Africa in all of its various guises. If photographic representation is seen as a site of political contestation, Mofokeng has participated in this struggle both by creating, analyzing and archiving images and by self-reflexively examining his own motives for doing so in his essays. It is for this reason that his biography is so central to an understanding of his photography. In the telling of his story, each stage marks a step in his education as an ethical actor in the arena of photographic representation. He tells and retells his life story, it seems to me, in order to eliminate the possibility that viewers might regard his work as that of a neutral, objective observer and instead to foreground the subject position from which he articulates statements as a photographer, to foreground his subjectivity as a presenter of images.

One of way to demonstrate how Mofokeng's life story informs his photographic projects is to discuss how the photograph he describes in his essay is reflected and reinterpreted again and again in the photographs made or collected by Mofokeng. In a sense, then, Mofokeng has rediscovered and recreated this primal image of his own childhood, returning it to the world at the heart of his project. He integrates the telling of his own story into the work of telling the stories of others. In another of his written essays, "The Black Photo Album," in which he discusses the conception and realization of this 1997 project for which Mofokeng researched, re-photographed and exhibited photographs harvested from the old family albums of residents of the townships of Johannesburg, Mofokeng explains that this project "was initially conceived as a metaphorical biography."[125] Though Mofokeng distances the final result—the collection of portrait photographs mostly from the turn of the twentieth century that comprise his 'album'—from its origins as a kind of biography, it is nevertheless true that he articulates his own story in relation to his country's and vice versa. The artifacts of visual culture that Mofokeng creates and collects contribute to a history that is both personal and collective, autobiography and biography. This commingling of the individual and the collective can be seen visually in those works of Mofokeng's which reflect the photographers' first experience of the medium.

Sometimes these reflections can be discerned in photographs Mofokeng has made in a documentary style throughout his career. Frequently taking children or the relationship between parents and children as his subject matter, Mofokeng has made this

---

[125] Santu Mofokeng, "The Black Photo Album," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, Pascal Martin Saint Léon and N'Goné Fall, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 72. The title of the entire project is *The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me: 1890-1950s* (1991-2000). The work was exhibited in the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale "The Short Century" and also published in *Granta* 92 (Winter 2005) alongside the text from "Trajectory of a Street Photographer:" 215-32.

an important theme in his documentary work, one well represented in his career-spanning monograph. The black-and-white photograph *Kressie Thiko, Vaalrand* (n.d.) is representative of these images **[FIG. 1]**. Through what appears to be a window opening into a rough-hewn wall through which the photographer looks at an angle, the viewer sees two children, judging from the clothing almost certainly girls. They are framed by the sill, by part of an unfinished window frame, and by a large piece of thin wood that rests at a 90 degree angle to the frame. Probably hinged into the wall to allow the portal to be opened and closed, this object is seen obliquely and is difficult to identify in the photograph. It provides an odd, unsettling formal element across the top of the photograph. In the background, on the left-hand side of the photograph, bright light streams through a door, revealing another room with a couple of mismatched chairs. The two children dominate the center of the image. The older of the two stares at the camera with a self-possession that makes her seem old beyond her years. Her neck is crooked toward the younger child, who she cradles protectively and holds aloft for the camera, and her shoulders incline in the opposite direction, balancing the weight of the younger child. If one were able to see her entire body, she would likely resemble a beautiful gothic Madonna, standing in a graceful swaying s-curve. The younger girl looks away from the photographer, mouth open and brows furloughed in thought. Like almost all of Mofokeng's documentary photographs, *Kressie Thiko, Vaalrand* is a black-and-white image with a rich range of contrast and a slight graininess, resulting from the photographer pushing his equipment to its limits in less-than-ideal lighting conditions. Most remarkable of this photograph's formal elements is the way light from an unseen

source falls across the face of the older girl, who stands out in bright relief against the inky blackness of the wall behind.

Though its technical skill and formal rigor marks this photograph as the work of a serious practitioner, an artist, its subject connects it to those photographs destined to reside in family albums, inartistic but emotionally resonant photographs like the one of Mofokeng and his brother he discusses in his essay. A photograph like *Kressie Thiko, Vaalrand* is indicative of Mofokeng's investment in creating images of South Africa that eschewed the mayhem of the struggle and depicted instead the daily lives of black South Africa. In the absence of conflict, Mofokeng focused on the humanity of his subjects and on the quotidian facts of their lives, trying to attach to his formal and artistic images some of the emotional power and social usefulness of family photographs.

This connection is made even more manifest in another aspect of Mofokeng's photographic projects, *The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me: 1890-1950s* (1991-2000), where, again, certain photographs echo Mofokeng's childhood introduction to the medium. *Ouma Maria Letsipa and her Daughter, Minkie Letsipa* (original photograph c. 1900) **[FIG. 2]** is an excellent example of this sort of photograph. As in all of the images from this project, Mofokeng has copied an older photograph, preserving the backing that reveals the original image as a carte-de-visité or a cabinet card. In this case, the backing advertises the original object's maker and place of origin: "Scholtz Studio / Lindley, O.R.C." [Orange River Colony]. Though retaining the backings that give his source material its distinctiveness and sense of objecthood, in other ways he has divorced his found photographs from their origins. By not collecting these artifacts as photo-objects, by re-photographing them and distributing them through reproduction in publications and

exhibiting them in the form of a slide show, he has made them virtual. Also, he has re-photographed these images in black-and-white, eliminating the color of the original objects, which, while not 'in color,' often would have had the sepia tones common in albumen prints and the beige-, grey- or blue-colored cardboard that often backed photographs in this period. In the case of *Ouma Maria*, this decision has made the resulting image harsher, with a higher degree of contrast than it would have had originally. Abrasions and marks of wear on the cardboard backing become stark; the cloth which Maria and Minkie pose in front of becomes blotchy and abstract. Once Mofokeng is through with them, these old images are seen as if in a dream or through the haze of memory.

In this photograph, mother and daughter sit stiffly, with a formality typical of portraits from this era. Neither smile. They stare at the camera intensely. Maria, the mother, wears a long, dark skirt, a high-necked white blouse, and a dark scarf, which is wrapped around the top of her head. Standing out against her dark skirt is some foliage, which she holds lightly in her hands. Its forms are echoed in the long, floral-print dress worn by her daughter, who reaches out with her left hand and grasps her mother's wrist in a sign of affection. Taken as a whole, the portrait is typical of its era: without a great deal of technical flash the photographer has captured the likenesses of sitters who present themselves to the camera with gravity and self-respect. The striking dignity of these portraits, of course, is what made them important to Mofokeng, what made them seem like revelations to him. In some sense, therefore, the portrait is both typical and unusual in the context of South Africa: though eyes conditioned by apartheid's visual culture might find it strange, it would not have been so for its original audience. In another way,

though, the picture is like all family portraits: it manifests and memorializes bonds of affection and links between generations. The occasion for Mofokeng's first portrait was his mother's desire to commemorate her loving gift to her children of coats made from scraps of scavenged material. Perhaps the charming frock worn by Minkie was the thing that merited her being pictured with her mother.

As I describe Santu Mofokeng's contributions to South Africa's visual culture, my account may sometimes seem abstract, perhaps academic in tone, but it is vital to not lose sight of the quality which makes his work remarkable: his attention to those things which make the photographic experience *special*. He tries to harness to his photographic projects and essays, which operate in the realm of art, the value invested in pictures made and saved within families. Such images are fragments of memory and expressions of love, mnemonic devices that assist in the narration of individual and family history. They are enmeshed in human relationships in a way that art photographs are only rarely. Not only an expression of community as finished artifacts, family photographs are also made in an atmosphere of communion and collaboration. These are not always the cultural values or emotional valences found in documentary photographs of the sort made by Mofokeng or in conceptual projects like *The Black Photo Album*. Mofokeng does achieve these effects in his work, it seems to me, through the careful balancing and layering of many different kinds of expression: no aspect of his work stands alone and each facet adds meaning to the others.

Mofokeng's method relies then on a careful entwining of voices and images, consisting of several inseparable threads: (1) documentary photographs made by Mofokeng, usually in a fairly traditional black-and-white format; (2) ideas and narratives

produced in collaboration with the photographer by the subjects of those images; (3) found photographs dating from the turn of the twentieth century unearthed and displayed by Mofokeng; (4) stories attached to these images that are supplied in many cases by the descendents of those pictured; and (5) narratives written by Mofokeng which offer autobiography and situate his practice discursively. In his essays and photographic projects, therefore, Mofokeng is simultaneously engaged in several linked endeavors. First, he is trying to force recognition of photographic representation as something which is not natural but rather cultural, and he is therefore providing a narrative for an acculturation to photography in his own life and in his country's recent history. Second, he is trying to understand the role of photography in establishing identity, investigating this process like an archeologist by excavating the history of urban black self-representation. Third, he has created or collected against an absent, invisible other: mass-cultural, often stereotyped images of township life and the black experience. The images he contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the politics of representation in South Africa are meant as a counter or corrective to other kinds of images.

The photographic experiences dramatized by Fugard and described by Emile Maurice and the lost photographic histories uncovered and archived by Mofokeng in the *The Black Photo Album* reveal both the multifaceted roles photography plays and has played in the everyday lives of South Africans and the way in which the politics of representation—the social and historical circumstances that surround the creation and consumption of photographic images—have shaped profoundly photography's use in the country. The history in South Africa of photography in everyday life, of vernacular photographic expression, is politicized. It is for this reason that art photographers

interested in the politics of representation, like Mofokeng, have engaged with vernacular traditions. Though this dissertation is very much an analysis of art photography, the fact that vernacular photography provides an explicit backdrop to work by Mofokeng and a more implicit backdrop to the work of many other art photographers makes this history of relevance to the remainder of my work. While my account here has been necessarily very selective, I have tried to provide enough of an overview of this material to contextualize the remainder of my study.

Part Two: The Art History of Art Photography

If the history of photographic experience in South Africa provides one important backdrop for this study, the history of art photography provides another. Since this dissertation is organized as a series of case studies, each of which describes an incident or aspect of this history, it will be useful to the reader to have an overall narrative of this history and a sense of how actors within it relate to one another. Even readers familiar with the general history of art photography may find certain aspects of South Africa's history unexpected. Though there are ways in which the history of art photography in South Africa mirrors the global history of this phenomenon, there are important differences.

As elsewhere, very early twentieth century fine art photography in South Africa was in the pictorialist style, which is characterized by carefully composed and impeccably printed images, often with soft-focus.[126] In South Africa, this style remained important even into the 1950s, flourishing in photographic clubs and societies which

[126] Kathy Grundlingh, "Pictorialism and the Salon in South Africa, 1906-1960," in *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*, ed. Kathy Grundlingh (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001), 34-49.

arranged salon-style exhibitions. Though pictorial photographers might have aspired to art for art's sake, the style's historical development was nevertheless colored by the country's political situation in that South Africa's pictorialist organizations and exhibitions were segmented racially. White photographers like Will Till could exhibit in the salons of the Photographic Society of South Africa, Asian photographers like Jack Ho with the Chinese Camera Club, and black photographers like Peter Magubane with the Progressive Photographic Society, whose exhibitions were open to all races.[127] Founded by Magubane in 1957, this group "marked a turning point for South African photography," a result of both its commitment to racial equality and the fact that many members adopted a documentary approach influenced by the globally significant "Family of Man" exhibition, which was first exhibited in New York in 1955 and visited South Africa as part of a 37 country, 69 venue world tour.[128]

Another idiosyncrasy of South African art photography is the fact that, before the 1980s, art galleries and museums rarely showed art photography in South Africa, even progressive and politically-conscious institutions like the Goodman Gallery, a contemporary art gallery which opened in 1966. Today, the country's important contemporary art galleries, including the Goodman and the Michael Stevenson Gallery, represent many of the county's best-known art photographers, including most of those addressed in this dissertation. Concomitantly, a critical apparatus for art photography has also grown, one largely built by artists and galleries. Most notably, one could cite the glossy *Art South Africa*, published by Bell-Roberts Publishing, which also has an associated gallery, and the online art magazine *ArtThrob*. *ArtThrob*, begun as a one

[127] Ibid., 35.
[128] Ibid.

person site by artist, critic and curator Sue Williamson, is a sprawling innovative online visual arts publication reporting on the local art scene and the involvement of South African artists in the international art world. With financial support from the more commercially successful South African artists and the unpaid labor of young artists and critics, *ArtThrob* demonstrates the cooperation and resourcefulness employed by South African artists to build community at home and bridges to an international audience. In the last two decades, as these publications have developed, galleries and museums like the South African National Gallery and the Johannesburg Art Gallery have become receptive to many kinds of art photography, including both documentary and more conceptually-driven work.

Conceptual strategies and the influence of post-modernist theories came more slowly to photography in South Africa than they did in other places.[129] As Jo Ractliffe notes, in the 1980s, as conceptual strategies began to take hold, a "split between artists and photographers" developed.[130] Those more mediated images not in the documentary tradition were deemed to be by 'artists' rather than 'photographers.' In Ractliffe's telling, photographers saw themselves not as artists, as interpreters, but rather as witnesses. If an image was not in the documentary mode, it was not a photograph. While several of South Africa's prominent apartheid-era artists, including Ractliffe, Sue Williamson, Gavin Jantjes and Penny Siopis, were beginning to employ photography as an element in their work, they, like many of their artistically-minded colleagues, would not necessarily consider themselves photographers. However, as South Africa's cultural isolation began to diminish after the end of apartheid, conceptual techniques and post-

[129] Jo Ractliffe, interview by author, 24 June 2007.
[130] Ibid.

modernist theories became ever more available as choices for younger photographers, and Ractliffe, a photographer as influenced by John Baldessari as by David Goldblatt, has become a touchstone and provided a precedent for recent developments.

It is difficult to generalize about Ractliffe's varied output, but a remarkable early project called *Nadir* (1988), produced as part of her Master's degree at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town, demonstrates the distance between her practice and the South African documentary tradition **[FIG. 3]**.[131] Though the subtitle of the thesis that generated the project, *A Graphic Interpretation of Dispossession and Aspects of Conflict*, implies an art work which is overtly political, *Nadir* is in fact allusive and poetic. Each of the images from the project shows one or several large dogs running or leaping, teeth bared in excitement, across stark landscapes that seem industrial and barren, almost post-apocalyptic. The grainy photographs are primarily black and white, with touches of beige. Though there are no visible 'seams' in the photographs, something seems off about the relationship between elements within the images, and careful inspection reveals them to be photomontages.

To make *Nadir*, Ractliffe employed a "laborious production process," which involves source photographs taken at dog training classes and at interesting sites like beaches and scrap yards.[132] Having secured this source material, Ractliffe developed her compositions with sketches and photocopied photographs. The production of the final images was also complex:

> the original negatives were enlarged onto high-contrast line film, using a sheet of sandblasted glass as a screen to create halftone positive transparencies. Fine and random-grained, the glass simulates

[131] *Nadir* is described by Brenda Atkinson in her essay for a monograph on Ractliffe's work: Jo Ractliffe with Brenda Atkinson, *Jo Ractliffe: TAXI-001* (Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2000), 15-23.
[132] Ibid., 16.

> photographic grain more closely even than mezzotint. Ractliffe then collaged the line-film components into images which she exposed onto a photographic litho plate and printed as black and white lithographs. These were screenprinted to add colour, density, depth and luminosity—in other words, to restore to the images a photographic quality. Finally she screen-printed a varnish over each print, thereby strategically mimicking a photographic surface.[133]

This strikingly complex method allowed Ractliffe to create 'photographs' that are not really photographs, fictitious landscapes that express dislocation both through subject matter and method. The images from *Nadir* are photographs about dislocation, dislocated from photography.

Like much of Ractliffe's work, *Nadir* addresses the relationship between photography and truth, situating, as she puts it, photography as "a medium of non-disclosure" in which we nevertheless "retain a certain belief in the truth of appearances."[134] As Ractliffe notes, "I'm interested particularly in that space of slippage between photography and the real."[135] While her work is 'straight,' that is, un-manipulated by digital means, she mediates her images in various ways: for example, through collage or the use of eccentric/idiosyncratic cameras. Taken as a whole, then, Ractliffe's work does not fit within the documentary mode traditionally dominant in South Africa and usually recognized outside the country as representative of the country's art photography. Instead her work is indicative of a now burgeoning direction in South African art photography, one that distances itself from the documentary style and one in which photography is employed tactically by artists who work across several media.

---

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

If, in South Africa, pictorialist photography remained viable longer and conceptually-grounded photography came to prominence later than in other places, then, in between, art photography in the country was dominated by work done in the documentary mode. Because of apartheid, documentary photography assumed an importance in the country's photographic tradition which it has yet to relinquish, despite changing social and political circumstances.[136] Indeed, to return again to Santu Mofokeng, I would note that one of the most interesting aspects of his many-layered art practice is his continuing commitment to documentary photography. Rather than abandoning this aspect of his work to concentrate fully on the more conceptually-oriented archival investigations typified by *The Black Photo Album*, Mofokeng has retained an investment in the traditional documentary mode. This is interesting in light of the criticism—both external and self-reflexive—that made Mofokeng question his role as a photographer and expand his practice beyond the journalistic and documentary modes. As he tells it, his first exhibition of his documentary photographs in an art gallery became an occasion for some soul searching. This self-reflection resulted from a statement he found in the exhibition's comment book: someone who signed his name as 'Vusi' and gave his age as 19 responded to Mofokeng's work with this stinging rebuke: "Making money from blacks."[137] Mofokeng's reaction to the incident is profound:

> I am disillusioned by my work as a journalist and documentary photographer. Having put up a show at the gallery, seeing how my work gets absorbed, interpreted and assimilated into the mainstream, I have questions on the efficacy of photography making interventions, and mobilising people around issues. I am not making photographs.[138]

---

[136] See Michael Godby, "After Apartheid: 10 South African Documentary Photographers," *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 36-41, 94.
[137] Mofokeng, "Trajectory of a Street Photographer," 269.
[138] Mofokeng, "Lampposts," 36.

In his telling of his own story, this incident is the latest in a string of events that served to disillusion Mofokeng with a certain kind of photography. Remarkably, however, this disillusionment does not dissuade him from making documentary photographs. It forces him to change the way he makes them, forcing him to grope towards an ethic of collaboration in the making of his images, and helps open him to new kinds of non-documentary endeavors like *The Black Photo Album*.

In the canon of South African art photography, Mofokeng's ongoing commitment to documentary photography is not unusual. For much of the twentieth century, art photographers in the country have often situated their practice as a useful and ethical response to South African political circumstances, especially systematic racial inequality. Documentary photography emerged as a critical tool in the fight against apartheid and secured a position which it maintains to the present day. Photographers from Ernest Cole to David Goldblatt to Santu Mofokeng to Zanele Muholi have pursued various kinds of documentary practices in their quest to respond to South African politics and culture. While David Goldblatt, one of the main subjects of the second chapter of this dissertation, is representative of this latter group, who used photography to subtly undermine apartheid's racial logic, Peter McKenzie is a good example of the former group.

The charismatic McKenzie—in my opinion much less well known outside of South Africa than he ought to be—was a founder of the Afrapix collective, a group of photographers brought together in 1981 by their shared commitment to politically-engaged documentary photography.[139] Born in Durban to 'coloured' parents,

[139] On Afrapix, see Pierre-Laurent Sanner, "Comrades and Cameras," in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 253-63.

McKenzie's career is in many ways typical of the members of this group. According to him, he picked up photography, "because I wanted to say something about what was happening in my country."[140] His political maturation unfolded gradually: he lived his early life in one of the last multiracial communities in the country, but the continuing process of segregation ripped him from this multicultural milieu into and inserted him into the tightly-packed, heavily polluted 'coloured' township of Wentworth. For Mckenzie's family and for many others in this community, their past included experiences of multiracial life in places like Durban's city center and Cape Town's District Six. Apartheid irrevocably cleaved this past from the present and future, dividing history and creating a new form of racial identification. "Nobody told us we were coloured before," he explains.[141] The pain and trauma of being forced to understand oneself through what others believed you to be divorced people from their past. In places like Wentworth, 'coloured' culture was constructed from scratch, because the past was "too painful" to talk about, even for McKenzie's own father. As McKenzie puts it, "history started in Wentworth."[142]

By the time he took up photography, he was already an activist working against apartheid. At the time, he seriously considered leaving the country to join the exiled armed resistance wing of the African National Congress (ANC), *Umkhonto we Sizwe* [Spear of the Nation], but elected not to as he had a child to support. Instead, he settled on photography as his way to participate in the struggle. He began producing

---

For a theoretical text explaining the motives another founder of the group, see Paul Weinberg, "Apartheid—A Vigilant Witness: A Reflection on Photography," in *Culture in Another South Africa*, Willem Campschreur and Jost Divendal, ed. (London: Olive Branch Press, 1989), 60-70.

[140] Peter McKenzie, interview by author, 12 July 2007.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

documentary photographs, which were generally black and white and which focused on the social circumstances of apartheid South Africa. Typical of his early images is a photograph like *Central Johannesburg*, which presents a slice of apartheid-era street life in the city **[FIG. 4]**.

Like many photographers of his generation, few influences from outside South Africa motivated his work. In conversation with me, he noted only the work of Lewis Hine and the photographers of America's Depression-era Farm Security Administration, describing this work as "easy to understand" for South Africans in the 1970s.[143] The only photograph to truly galvanize him was press photographer Sam Nzima's iconic photograph of Hector Pieterson, a twelve year old student protestor killed by police at the start of the 1976 Soweto uprising. This photograph, showing the dying Pieterson carried by 18 year old student Mbuyisa Makhubo as Pieterson's sister, Antoinette, runs alongside, arms raised in grief, was searing for many South Africans, and is now the *raison d'etre* for Soweto's popular Hector Pieterson Museum. The photographer, Sam Nzima, was the subject of a campaign of intimidation and harassment and was hounded out of photography by the police.[144] There was nothing unusual in such tactics: in 1989 a member of McKenzie's household was killed during a burglary of his home and studio. McKenzie's negatives were the only thing taken, leaving him in no doubt about the political motives behind this act. If McKenzie saw his work in explicitly political terms, so too apparently did the apartheid government, which singled him and other photographers out for repression.

---

[143] Ibid.
[144] Jerome Cartillier, "How One Photograph Changed the World," *Mail & Guardian*, 15 June 2006.

McKenzie saw his work as unrelated to 'art,' to anything like an autonomous realm removed from day-to-day political concerns. Indeed, in a context like this, it is not hard to understand how difficult it might be for someone like McKenzie to focus on the questions of importance to art photographers: formal concerns, conceptual categories, and the like. Therefore, like many of his colleagues, McKenzie considered (and to some extent still considers) himself a photographer or a cultural worker, and not an artist. Many documentary photographers working during apartheid shared his terminological preferences. The close tie between politics and photography from the 1960s to the 1990s and attitudes towards photography prevalent among South Africa's artists meant that the link between art photography and documentary photography was almost non-existent in that era.

The intensity of the struggle against apartheid and South Africa's turbulent history were the key factors behind the particular importance that photojournalism and documentary photography had for practitioners like McKenzie. News images emerging from South Africa provided a visual context for a struggle which featured prominently in the world media.[145] Despite censorship inside South Africa, such photographs were even more important within the country.[146] As documentarian and Afrapix member Cedric Nunn notes:

---

[145] On black journalists reporting in South Africa during apartheid, see William Finnegan, *Dateline Soweto: Travels with Black South African Reporters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

[146] The South African government enacted photography regulations as part of a State of Emergency declared in 1986: "4.(1) No person shall without the prior consent of the Commissioner or of a member of a security force serving as a commissioned officer in that force take any photograph or make or produce any television recording, film recording, drawing or other depiction—(a) of any unrest or security action or of any incident occurring in the course thereof, including the damaging or destruction of property or injuring or killing of persons, or (b) of any damaged or destroyed property or injured or dead persons or other visible signs of violence at the scene where unrest or security action is taking place or has taken place or of any injuries sustained by any person in or during unrest or security action." These regulations are taken from the *Government Gazette of the Republic of South Africa*, vol. 276, no. 11342 and quoted in a

> In a society which was as regulated as our own, images played a major role in the manner in which it was reflected and policed. … In a real sense meaning was contested primarily through the use of photographic images.[147]

Among the socially-engaged, debates about photography revolved around subject matter and distribution, not aesthetics, and the truth-telling capabilities of the medium were deployed rather than deconstructed. In the "anti-apartheid mind, the mind of critical resistance," explains Emile Maurice, "what was understood as the 'authentic' South African photograph, the genuine article, was that which represented and championed that struggle."[148]

The members of Afrapix were brought together not only by their commitment to making 'struggle photography,' but also by their commitment to teaching photography to others. Committing to an ideology of 'each one teach one,' the members sought to disseminate knowledge of photographic techniques to oppressed communities. Black visual education was often left to initiatives outside the formal, official state structures, which sought to limit the skills of non-white South Africans.[149] The members of Afrapix therefore worked both to create images and to spread otherwise unavailable knowledge.

"Preface" credited to 'The Photographers' in *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa*, Iris Tilman Hill and Alex Harris, eds. (New York: Aperture Foundation in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University with the cooperation of Afrapix and the Centre for Documentary Photography, Cape Town, 1989), 7. Noting these restrictions, the photographers whose work is published in *Beyond the Barricades*, photographers mostly associated with Afrapix, note of the "many of the photographs included in this book could not be taken today." Ibid., 7.

[147] Cedric Nunn, "Photographers Denied," in *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*, ed. Kathy Grundlingh (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001), 83.

[148] Maurice, 67.

[149] For information on another art education program, one oriented around print-making rather than photography, see Elza Miles, *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre* (New York, Ampersand Foundation, 2004). On apartheid education, see UNESCO, *Apartheid: Its Effects on Education, Science, Culture and Information* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1967); and UNESCO, *Apartheid: Its Effects on Education, Information and Culture* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1975).

If photography was a tool in the struggle against apartheid, it was one the members of Afrapix had no wish to monopolize.

The end of apartheid marked the political liberation of the country, leading to both new possibilities for photographers and an increased prominence for South African visual culture elsewhere in the world. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa's photographers and the international art world have discovered one another. Meanwhile, South African photographers have become much more receptive to 'art' as a concept and to the photograph as an art object. In contrast to the apartheid era, when the possibilities for art photography were circumscribed, the post-apartheid era has seen a veritable explosion of art photography, propelled by practitioners who have garnered a great deal of international recognition. As McKenzie notes, for photographers like him, the end of apartheid opened new formal possibilities, different subject matter and conceptual possibilities, allowing photographers the ability to "look at the world through more than one lens."[150] But, if photographers largely appreciated these new possibilities, the medium's more complex (and distanced) relationship to politics and increased acceptance in South Africa's galleries and museums has been regarded by many with some ambivalence, and the presence of photography in art galleries has not led to a withdrawal from social commitment. Although the tactics and strategies pursued by those associated with recent developments in art photography in South Africa may be more varied, the photographers making art photography in the country often continue to see themselves as socially engaged. As McKenzie explains, for South Africans, "keeping touch with the social needs of this country is not difficult."[151] This is as true for photographers who

[150] Peter McKenzie, interview by author, 12 July 2007.
[151] Ibid.

began working during apartheid as it is for those whose careers have only just started. Similarly, both documentary and non-documentary photographers remain concerned with broader social issues.

The fact that art photography typically was and is produced by photographers in South Africa as a response to political circumstances, suggests that there ought to have been changes in photographic practice that went in tandem with political changes like the end of apartheid. Also, it suggests that there ought to be profound differences between those pursuing different practices. If artistic practice is tied to the character of the photographer's ideological opposition to apartheid, for example, then it would seem that different artistic practices ought to imply different ideological positions. However, it turns out that neither of these suppositions is entirely true. While there have been changes in the overall character of South African art photography since the end of apartheid, continuities between the present and past are also evident. Likewise, aesthetic and philosophical differences are effaced by professional and personal connections between photographers. Though during apartheid, ideological disputes between photographers could be heated, in recent years the intensity of such debates has lessened. On the face of it, McKenzie and Ractliffe might seem to be in different camps, divided historically by their allegiance to documentary photography and art photography, respectively. However, they are friends, incredibly respectful of one another's work, involved together in the management of the Market Photography Workshop, an organization founded by David Goldblatt and committed to disseminating photographic literacy to underprivileged communities. They see themselves as engaged in a common

cultural endeavor, and, together, are working to help train and mentor the next generation of South African photographers.

Clearly, if one were to compare ‘snapshots’ of the relationship between art and photography in South African visual culture in the 1960s and 2000s, it would be evident that a profound change has occurred over the last fifty years. This change has been gradual and its effects unpredictable, and, if it is too starkly described, the nuances of this process are easily missed. As South African art photography has become more prominent, photographers have avoided categorization of their production, sometimes by working in both documentary and conceptual styles, always by seeing themselves as part of a larger South African photographic community whose members are linked by the common social commitments they hold and not distinguished by the kinds of photographs they make. Delving more deeply into the last fifty years of South African art photography reveals both change and continuity among the country’s photographers. This dissertation, which does not confine itself to the era before or the era after the end of apartheid, tries to take the long view on this history and paint on as broad a canvas as possible.

Chapter Two: Critical White Photography

The body of theory usually called 'critical white studies' provides an intriguing means of understanding certain contemporary South African art, especially art attempting to grapple with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Scholars pursuing this avenue of inquiry use the term whiteness to describe a socially constructed form of privilege and not the physiology of a biologically distinct group.[152] Therefore, in critical white studies, as defined by the editors of one of the most useful volumes on the subject, "the social reality of white skin privilege is now an underlying research assumption, a point of departure for investigations into how it was established and how it is maintained."[153] One of the ways in which critical white studies desires to usefully undermine the ideological bases of white supremacy and privilege is by revealing the mechanisms by which it is maintained. As cultural critic and scholar of whiteness Maurice Berger points out in the catalogue prepared for his exhibition *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art*, "visual arts serve as an important catalyst for the discussion of race

---

[152] In their introduction to *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, the editors note, "We use the term 'critical whiteness studies,' rather than the term 'whiteness studies,' to mark the explicitly analytical nature of this inquiry." Birgit Brander, et al., eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 17 n1.

[153] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Introduction," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Delgado and Stefancic, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 3. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to fully articulate the contours of critical white studies, to introduce the field a selective bibliography is in order at this point. Foundation texts include, Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," (1993) in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, et al. (New York: The New Press, 1995), 276-91; Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One; Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York and London: Verso, 1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Maurice Berger, *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999). Among edited volumes of essays, the following complement the one compiled by Delgado and Stefanic: Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, eds., *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); and "The White Issue" of the journal *Transition* 73 (1998). On the place of whiteness in visual culture, more will be said later, but it is important to mention at the outset the most important text: Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

… because much of what defines race in culture is innately visual."[154] As the exhibition Berger organized endeavors to show, this is particularly true of whiteness, where visual art "can help us understand something that has ironically remained invisible: whiteness."[155] Looking at art through the lens of critical white studies might allow us to understand how anti-racist art can speak to white audiences about their own whiteness.

This chapter considers the ways David Goldblatt (b. 1930) and Hentie van der Merwe (b. 1972) have made South African whiteness visible through photography. Probably one of South Africa's best-known photographers, Goldblatt began making photographs during apartheid, and he remains active. He has maintained a career-long commitment to documentary photography. The younger artist is less-known outside South Africa, has only worked as an artist since the end of apartheid, and makes art in a variety of media. Despite their differences, both men are linked by their investment in whiteness as a theme in their work. During the apartheid era in South Africa, white privilege was preserved through the visual production of racial difference, a process of distinction which is made visible and manifest in the photographs of these artists so as to be examined, deconstructed and defused.

Part One: Hentie van der Merwe's "Trappings": The Buttons

In "Bring the Statues Back," a stinging poem first published in 2006, South African poet Ingrid de Kok demands remembrance. She reflects on the heady days following apartheid's collapse, as place names changed and statues glorifying the great men of the old regime toppled. She recalls "the sheer delight" as statues of men like

[154] Maurice Berger, "White: A Catalogue of Works," in *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art* (Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture (UMBC), 2004), 45.
[155] Ibid.

Hendrik Verwoerd fell: "apartheid's architect a dangling man / at the end of a winch on a crane."[156] She marvels at the speed of this erasure:

> How easy, after all
> to remove a world
> to erase a crooked line
> and start again.[157]

She marvels, but she also fears. She seems to ask, if all is forgotten, every connection to the duplicity, brutality and injustice that came before lost, what will become of South Africa's new ideals, its hopeful commitment to transparency, peace and social justice? Answering, she posits, "If we auction off the statue's buttons / we might forget the monumental overcoat."[158] Ingrid de Kok's metaphor of the 'overcoat' and the 'buttons,' the fact of white rule (the 'overcoat') described by its plumage (the 'buttons'), is also employed by artist Hentie van der Merwe.

A conceptually rigorous artist, who frequently places photography at the center of his artistic practice, van der Merwe consistently engages with issues of identity and gender construction. Born in Windhoek, Namibia, he has lived and worked in both Johannesburg and Antwerp, Belgium. He attended the University of the Witwatersrand, receiving a BA in 1994 and an MA in 2000. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions at galleries in South Africa, Belgium and Germany. Of these, the most pertinent to this essay is *Trappings*, shown at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, in 2000. Since 1995, his work has appeared in group exhibitions around the world, including *Lines of Sight, Contemporary South African Photography* at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town (1999); *Emotions and Relations* (curated by the artist) at

---

[156] Ingrid de Kok, "Bring the Statues Back," *Seasonal Fires: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), 142.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 143.

the Sandton Civic Gallery, Johannesburg and the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, Oudtshoorn (2000); *Translation/Seduction/Displacement* at White Box Gallery, New York (2000); *Sexuality and Death: Aids in Contemporary African Art* at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne (2003); and *10 years 100 artists* at Bell-Roberts Gallery, Cape Town (2005). His inclusion in *10 years 100 artists*, designed to highlight the best in South African art ten years after the end of apartheid, and his receipt of the 2008 Sasol Wax Award, a prestigious art award given to mid-career artists with a substantial exhibition profile, demonstrate his importance on the South African art scene.

The critical reception of van der Merwe's work has typically highlighted his exploration of masculinity in his work. For example, Yvette Gresle discusses his work alongside that of several other South African artists in an article entitled "Performances of Masculinity."[159] She notes the artist's "interest … in the construction of masculinity in terms of the dominant socio-historical and cultural narratives of war and violence."[160] This interest, she argues, "resonates with [his] personal experience of being male, South African and gay."[161] Gresle captures several important facets of van der Merwe's subject position and helps us understand the ways in which that subject position might color the work he produces. However, I would argue that his work also specifically addresses the construction of *white* masculinity. Influenced by his identity as an Afrikaner, van der Merwe's work articulates how whiteness is a global phenomenon and how South African whiteness is a very specific historical construction.

In terms of his investigation of whiteness as a visual phenomenon, van der Merwe's most notable work is the series "Trappings" (2000-3) **[FIG. 1]**, which

[159] Yvette Gresle, "Performances of Masculinity," *Art South Africa* 3, no. 2 (summer 2004): 42-7.
[160] Ibid., 45, 47.
[161] Ibid., 45.

endeavors to reveal the monumental character of whiteness through the microcosm of costume. In the photographs that comprise this series, which are of variable dimension but which were exhibited in New York City as part of the exhibition "Snap Judgments" as larger-than-life, billboard-sized prints, van der Merwe depicts historical military uniforms from South Africa's Museum of Military History (SANMMH) in Johannesburg.[162] This museum is the only one of its kind in South Africa, and it surveys what, after the end of apartheid, has to be one of the most contested and controversial aspects of South African history.

Because the military history of South Africa is so often the history of inter-communal conflict, different segments of South Africa's population have very different relationships to specific events. The conflicts and violence associated with the imposition of and resistance to apartheid represent only the most recent chapters of this story: the Khoikhoi—Dutch Wars pitted newly arrived Dutch colonists (the ancestors of the Afrikaners) against indigenous peoples in several small-scale conflicts between 1659 and 1677; the Mfecane, which means something like 'the crushing' or 'scattering' in Zulu, describes a period of widespread warfare among indigenous tribes in southern Africa between 1815 and about 1840; the Anglo—Zulu War was fought in 1879 between British colonial soldiers and the Zulus; the Second Boer War, fought between 1899 and 1902, pitted the British Empire against two independent Afrikaner republics in what is today South Africa.[163] These wars represent conflict *between* white and non-white

[162] In addition to uniforms, the museum's collection includes the official war art, photographs aircraft, armored fighting vehicles, small arms, edged weapons, medals, flags, etc. See *South African National Museum of Military History*, revised (Johannesburg: South African National Museum of Military History, 1983).

[163] A comprehensive military history of South Africa is available in Timothy J. Stapleton, *Military History of South Africa* (Santa Monica: Praeger, 2010).

groups and also conflict *among* various groups of whites or blacks. Within today's South Africa, the descendents of both the winners and the losers of each of these conflicts are present as important parts of the national fabric. Is it any wonder that the telling of this history, the commemoration of it through monuments and museums, is a challenging task in contemporary South Africa?[164]

For "Trappings," ven der Merwe focuses solely on one richly symbolic and visually striking facet of this military history: uniforms. White rule in South Africa, as elsewhere, was underwritten by military power, by both modern technologies for killing and modern methods of organizing killers. Military uniforms are part and parcel of these innovations, a symptom of the massive economic, political and social changes which propelled the West to global power in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century.[165] This historical context is clearly crucial to the meanings conveyed by van der Merwe's photographs from this series.[166] Each color photograph from the series shows one isolated article of military clothing, usually a jacket, from the late nineteenth or the twentieth century. Often parade uniforms, the kind of colorful ceremonial costume

---

[164] Contemporary debates over how to narrate, commemorate and archive history in post-apartheid South Africa are discussed in Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[165] On the history of military uniforms, see I.T. Schick, ed., *Battledress: The Uniforms of the World's Great Armies, 1700 to the Present* (London: Peerage Books, 1983).

[166] The ensuing discussion is adapted in part from material prepared by me for the catalogue of the exhibition *Snap Judgments* (see Enwezor, *Snap Judgments*, 166-73, 372), which was based on email communications with the artist. In conjunction with the exhibition, I also moderated an artist panel in which the artist participated. Useful accounts of van der Merwe's artistic practice include: Rory Bester, "Raiding the Archive," *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 6-7 (summer-fall 1997): 64; Hentie van der Merwe, with an essay by Rory Bester, *Trappings* (Johannesburg: Goodman Gallery, 2000); Uta M. Reindl, "One to Seven: Galerie Gabriele Rivet, Köln," *Kunstforum International* 157 (November-December 2001): 342-343; Tracey Murinik, "Hentie van der Merwe," in *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa*, ed. Sophie Perryer (Cape Town: Bell-Roberts, 2004), 386-389. A selected bibliography on the artist should also include an essay prepared by him in response to criticism from artist and critic Kendall Geers: Hentie van der Merwe, "The Difference between Colonisation and Desire," in *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*, eds. Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz (Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill, 1999), 283-6.

designed solely for military pageantry, these red and purple and blue garments recall an earlier era of military costume, before the First World War, when industrialized mass-killing finally bled all the vestigial color from the once-bright costumes of war. Rather than focusing generally on uniforms for fighting, with some exceptions van der Merwe photographs uniforms associated with military spectacle, with the symbolic aspect of military power. In this sense, his photographs from this series might be contrasted with a documentary photograph by Gideon Mendel showing crisply uniformed white policemen attacking young protesters demanding the release of political prisoners in 1985.[167] Caught twisting and turning in their efforts to beat protestors with short leather whips called *sjamboks*, the policemen's uniforms flutter and wrinkle, animated by the exercise of direct, physical power. While the documentary photograph emphasizes the actual exertion of military power, by contrast van der Merwe's still, silent photographs suggest such power's symbolic dimensions, suggest that, even in the absence of action, uniforms operate within a regime of power and race.

In his photographs of these archived artifacts of military ritual—the buttons on the overcoat of white rule—van der Merwe revivifies these uniforms and reinserts them into the contemporary historical moment, transfiguring the museum's dry, academic displays into floating, blurred, slightly out-of-focus apparitions, made ghostly by the photographer's use of natural light, slow exposure times and a hand-held camera. In the museum, these pieces of clothing are displayed on dress forms, so, in the photographs, they appear disembodied, without heads, hands or legs, an effect which accentuates the uncanny, dreamlike quality of van der Merwe's photographs.

---

[167] Iris Tillman Hill and Alex Harris, *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1989), 31. Mendel's photograph is accompanied by a long caption but no title.

In the photograph *Transvaal Horse Artillery (Colonial), Officer (1903-13)* (2002-3) **[FIG. 2]**, van der Merwe photographs a jacket, brocaded and seemingly light-blue or light-green, hung in the military museum, apparently on some sort of unseen armature. Nothing is seen that would suggest to the otherwise uninformed viewer the original location of the jacket's display. Though clearly designed to encase the human body, the jacket is strangely disembodied, a shell. Above the jacket's high collar and below its flared tail, the jacket is headless and legless. Its arms hang limply at its sides. The dim light and the out-of-focus blur of the photograph make the jacket seem to emerge, hovering, into materiality, animated by something subtler and stranger than the flesh and blood of a human soldier. Now a nightmare image, the jacket seems to take on a kind of possessed quality. The once festive braiding that extends in horizontal rows across its surface begin to look skeletal or perhaps exoskeletal, giving the jacket a form that evokes death or that calls to mind something insect-like and inhuman.

In this photograph, van der Merwe cuts away any context—his scholarly, historically-minded title, taken from the museum's taxonomic organization, only serves to reinforce the gulf that separates his poetic images from the museum's model of presentation. Far from being a 'museum piece,' an object of passing historical interest whose meaning is derived from the institutional discourse of its display, in van der Merwe's image this trapping of white rule becomes talismanic, magical. The uniform's shell-like jacket effaces the humanity and individuality of the wearer. Dead as an individual, the wearer has become the bringer of death, a symbol of the violence that stakes out claims of colonial and racial dominance. However, military uniforms do not

simply signify military power or even colonial dominance. They are also a crucial location in which whiteness can be displayed.

The photographer's interest in military uniforms is not unique among contemporary artists.[168] "Trappings" would have fit comfortably into the exhibition *Uniform: Order and Disorder* (2001), for example.[169] Shown in Florence and New York, the exhibition examined how military costume appears in popular culture, influences contemporary fashion and is deployed critically in art. Besides clothing designers like Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein, the show included artists like Matthew Barney, Vanessa Beecroft, Catherine Opie, and Jeff Wall. Hentie van der Merwe's work also bears some comparison with the late 1970s and early 1980s output of painter Leon Golub. For the series "Mercenaries," "Interrogations," or "White Squad," for example, Golub made large-scale paintings depicting incidents of violence, terrorism and torture, often at the hands of uniformed mercenaries.[170] Like van der Merwe's photographs, these paintings recall earlier forms of 'heroic' military spectacle, in this case history painting, but subvert it. In Golub's paintings, as in van der Merwe's photographs, uniforms signal at and form a kind of inextricable component of the violation of human dignity and the abuse of power, but, whereas Golub shows viewers the actual violence which the uniforms connote, van der Merwe relies on uniforms alone to tell the story.

---

[168] The topic of war in recent art is considered by David McCarthy, who considers the work of Yoram Wolberger, Leon Golub and H. C.Westermann., among others. See David McCarthy, "Fantasy and Force: A Brief Consideration of Artists and War in the American Century," *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 93-100. Art that specifically considers the theme of military uniforms can be seen as a subset of this larger theme.

[169] Francesco Bonami, Maria Luisa Frisa, Stefano Tonchi, eds., *Uniform: Order and Disorder* (Milan: Charta, 2000).

[170] Jon Bird, "'Infvitabile Fatum:' Leon Golub's History Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 1 (1997): 81-94.

Though this broader artistic context for "Trappings" is important, van der Merwe's interest in the spectacular display of militarism is especially and specifically resonant in the context of South African history. In the 1970s, Albie Sachs noted the apartheid-era South African Defence Force (SADF) among the 'instruments of domination' employed by the white regime but also notes that, "despite centuries of armed conflict, South Africa is not a highly militarized country."[171] By the standards of other industrialized states (and certainly by the standards of other oppressive regimes), South Africa's white minority regime had a surprising small army and relied for its survival on the 'show' of military force. Under colonial regimes, as in South Africa, small groups of well-organized, well-equipped, well-armed men (essentially a modern military) were employed to dominate larger groups of less-organized and poorly organized men. Uniforms are a crucial component of the innovations that allowed the industrialized militaries of the West to leverage specific social, technical and economic configurations into global dominance, a circumstance which persisted in South Africa under the guise of apartheid. Uniforms of all sorts provide a way to easily identify members of a group or a subculture, both to one another and to outsiders. In South Africa during apartheid, military uniforms provided a ready means of signaling white dominance, of making whiteness visible and manifesting its presence in visual culture.

Richard Dyer, one of the most perceptive analysts of whiteness and its representation argues that whiteness is a paradox in terms of visual culture. Indeed, he posits that whiteness is founded on a series of paradoxes, allowing it to be simultaneously:

---

[171] Albie Sachs, "The Instruments of Domination in South Africa," in *Change in Contemporary South Africa*, eds. Leonard Thompson and Jeffrey Butler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 229.

> a vividly corporeal cosmology that most values transcendence of the body; a notion of being at once a sort of race and human race, an individual and a universal subject; a commitment to heterosexuality that, for whiteness to be affirmed, entails men fighting against sexual desires and women having none; a stress on the display of spirit while maintaining a position of invisibility; in short a need to be everything and nothing, literally overwhelmingly present and yet apparently absent, both alive and dead.[172]

To judge from this, whiteness is a strange kind of thing, at once embodied and disembodied, specific and general, and, in terms of visual culture, visible and invisible. So, on the one hand, one of the most oft-forwarded claims of 'critical whiteness studies' is that whiteness derives strength from its invisibility to its bearers. To quote Martha Mahoney,

> Privileged identity requires reinforcement and maintenance, but protection against seeing the mechanisms that socially reproduce and maintain privilege is an important component of privilege itself … White privilege therefore includes the ability to not-see whiteness and its privileges.[173]

On the other hand, whiteness must be simultaneously always visible to non-whites for it to function. Indeed, as Richard Dyer notes, "visual culture demands that whites can be seen to be whites."[174] This paradoxical entwining of visibility and invisibility is key to understanding how art can function critically within the social structure of whiteness, especially for white viewers, who are still, both in South Africa and in the United States, the main consumers of art.

Such an attack on whiteness may seem so subtle as to be almost negligible. But one must not underestimate the tenaciousness with which this structure effaces itself. Martha Mahoney adds to the proposition presented above the following intriguing idea:

---

[172] Dyer, 39.
[173] Mahoney, "The Social Construction of Whiteness," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Delgado and Stefancic, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 331.
[174] Dyer, 44.

> Whiteness is visible to whites, however, when it appears to be the basis on which well-being is threatened. Whites perceive racism against themselves when, through interventions in the norm of transparency, whites are forced to experience the consciousness of whiteness. In the logic of white privilege, making whites feel white equals racism.[175]

The usefulness of considering the pervasive representations of whiteness in visual media from the standpoint of critical white studies is that, once whiteness is revealed to be as raced as any other subject position, it might cease to function as hegemonic. The recognition and identification of visual strategies that accomplish this task of 'racing' whiteness is evidently an important task. The employment of such a strategy might allow one to strip away some of the aura of invulnerability that is bestowed by the mantle of normalcy, to undercut the universalizing authority of a humanism that is, in fact, specifically raced, gendered and classed. Art's ability to muddy whiteness' transparency can allow whites to see whiteness for what it is. Art has the power to allow whites to experience the power of whiteness by seeing it from the outside.

If, as I suggest, art can have an important role to play within the political project that is at the heart of critical white studies, before considering this theoretical framework further it is critical to provide some art historical context for the work of artists examining whiteness. There is a budding canon of work that might be called 'critical white art,' a canon into which van der Merwe seems to fit very well while Goldblatt seems somewhat out of place. As I will argue, Goldblatt's interest in traditional forms of documentary photography makes his work unlike most of the other art made about whiteness. The canon of critical white art embraces mostly the work of artists who employ various kinds of postmodern tactics and strategies like appropriation in the creation of their work. Goldblatt really ought to be considered among those artists who

[175] Mahoney, 331.

have critiqued whiteness, and his anomalous position within the current canon might reveal other artists who might be missing from this canon, including Tina Barney and Nicholas Nixon. To understand how Goldblatt and van der Merwe fit and do not fit within this recently emerged canon, it is necessary to sketch its evolution.

The depiction and critique by artists of the visual properties of whiteness is a facet of a range of other artistic production in South Africa and elsewhere which foregrounds the visual articulation of racial identity and the construction of racial categories. There is a venerable tradition of art work reflecting attitudes about race prevalent in the societies of its makers.[176] The history of art which self-consciously critiques racial ideologies is briefer but far more pertinent to the work under discussion here. Largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century, the work of artists from around the world who deal critically with the complexities of race is linked to and partly arises from the diverse political and social attitudes associated with global movements for decolonization and civil rights.[177] As particular ideological formations around race have come and gone and, independently, as the institutional frameworks in which art is created and consumed have also changed, so too have the attitudes of artists addressing race as a thematic. Though the intricacies of these shifts are beyond the scope of this study, a useful distinction is suggested by Elvan Zabunyan between artists who received their artistic training before the 1960s and

---

[176] Certainly the most informative introduction to the question of race and art can be found in the essays collected by Kymberly N. Pinder in her edited volume *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002). The essays, though focusing mostly on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, also address representations of race in ancient Roman art and medieval European art.

[177] In the United States, Elvan Zabunyan argues, the history of art dealing critically with race begins in the 1920s in and around the Harlem Renaissance, which was characterized by African American artists "questioning the codes and influence of Western art on the artistic development of African American artists." Elvan Zabunyan, *Black Is A Color: A History of African American Art* (Paris: Dis Voir, 2005), 19. The African political context for the emergence of race as an artistic concern is described by Okwui Enwezor in his essay "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994," in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 10-18.

those who did so after. Zabunyan suggests that the latter group "situate themselves with regard to cultural theories unknown before the aesthetic transformations of the 1970s."[178] The dates of this shift are different in the context of South African art, where isolation from mainstream art currents, a different institutional framework, and the stress on opposing apartheid through art delayed the full impact of postmodernist theories on visual art until the 1980s and 1990s.[179] Still, this distinction is a useful one, and it allows us to apprehend some of the differences between the ways that Goldblatt and the much younger van der Merwe address themselves to race generally and whiteness specifically as a thematic.

Art addressing the question of whiteness can be seen as a subset of the broader category of art addressing the question of race. This is the tack taken toward this kind of work in the first influential essay to address this issue, Thelma Goldnen's "What's White …?", written for the catalogue of the 1993 Biennial Exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art.[180] She is explicit in linking artists' investigation of whiteness to the investigation of other kinds of racial identity, and suggests that deconstructing whiteness through art can be part of the political project of eroding the normativity of whiteness in culture and casting whiteness as simply one more identity among all others. In this sense, the "state of whiteness" is taken by the artists she identifies as "a definitive category as different (or as specific) as those we label 'other.'"[181] Golden notes several artists in the exhibition who "work consciously to deconstruct and de-center the politically constructed

[178] Zabunyan, 16.
[179] Jo Ractliffe, interview by author, 24 June 2007.
[180] Thelma Golden, "What's White …?", in *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman, et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 26-35.
[181] Ibid., 35.

site of whiteness and its relation to the ever-changing definition of Americanness."[182] Among those singled out in her essay are Byron Kim, Fred Wilson, Robert Gober, and Daniel J. Martinez.[183]

A somewhat broader treatment and more contemporary attempt to understand how artists might examine the theme of whiteness is found in the already mentioned 2003 exhibition *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art*, organized by Maurice Berger and shown at the Center for Art and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and at the International Center of Photography in New York.[184] The first exhibition and catalogue devoted solely to this topic, it includes twelve artists: Max Becher and Andrea Robbin, Nayland Blake, Nancy Burson, Wendy Ewald, Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley, William Kentridge, Barbara Kruger, Nikki S. Lee, Cindy Sherman, and Gary Simmons. Photography is central to the practice of several of these artists (including Burson, Kruger, Lee and Sherman), and the roster is international (including German artists Becher and Robbin and South African artist William Kentridge), reflecting an attempt to understand whiteness as a global phenomenon.[185] For these reasons, there seems no reason to suppose that Goldblatt and ven der Merwe would not fit comfortably into this group, becoming part of the mainstream of 'critical white art.' The composition of the group of artists assembled by Berger, which includes photographers and a South African, suggests that the medium of photography and the

---

[182] Ibid., 27.
[183] Typical of the works discussed by Golden is Martinez's *Museum Tags* (1993), in which the artist re-imagined the Whitney Museum's admission buttons. Normally metal tabs emblazoned with 'WMAA,' Martinez created analogues with fragments of text, which, when combined, read "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white." Ibid., 34-5, 194-5. This message, as Golden notes, forces visitors to acknowledge both their own racial identity and the privileged cultural space of the museum.
[184] Maurice Berger, *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art*.
[185] Kentridge is represented by four of his apartheid-era animated films: *Drawings for Projection Series: Johannesburg – 2nd Greatest City after Paris; Monument; Mine;* and *Sobriety, Obesity and Growing Old* (1981/91).

particular socio-historical circumstances of South Africa might be especially useful arenas from which to assess the visual culture of whiteness—a proposition to be tested in this chapter.

The artists mentioned in both Golden's essay (and the artists found in the 1993 Biennial as a whole) and several of those included in Berger's exhibition are similar in that many employ artistic strategies associated with postmodernism, including appropriation and institutional critique.[186] When artists reconfigure already-existing visual images (as in appropriation) or intervention in the operations of art institutions (as in institutional critique), they can critique constructions of race in visual culture or cultural institutions. Indeed, these strategies can be seen as two of the most fruitful means for grappling with whiteness through art, and it should come as no surprise, therefore, that these strategies are employed by the South African artist van der Merwe. Perhaps the most iconic work of this type is Fred Wilson's 1992 installation *Mining the Museum*.[187] Though not specifically mentioned in Golden's essay, this work is central to the art historical juncture she describes. For *Mining the Museum*, Wilson combed through the archives and storage rooms of the Maryland Historical Society's collection to find objects that highlighted the histories and cultural contributions of blacks and Native Americans, which could then be integrated into the museum's Euro-centric, white-oriented historical displays. Finding slave shackles, he placed these among colonial silver, opening a window onto the sources of the wealth encapsulated by these luxury

[186] Several of the artists in *White* were also a part of the 1993 Biennial, including Kelley, Sherman and Simmons, suggesting some common ground between the vein in the Biennial discerned by Golden and the exhibition organized by Berger.
[187] See Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: An Installation* (New York: New Press, 1994); and Maurice Berger, ed., *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979-2000* (Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture [UMBC], 2002).

goods. Inserting these objects into the space of the historical museum reveals not only the usual absence of people of color from the space of the museum but also, conversely, the cultural whiteness that normally pervades the space. Like Wilson, in "Trappings" van der Merwe is working with cultural artifacts from a historical museum. Though the South African's work is not designed as a specific intervention into the space of the museum, it does draw on the cultural narrative of the museum as raw material for artistic statement and social critique. Both artists address specific historical legacies and work to highlight the relevance of these legacies to the present moment. The similarities that van der Merwe's work shares with Wilson's place it in the mainstream of the contemporary critical project of revealing whiteness through art.[188] However, his work is distinct due both to the specificities of whiteness in South African visual culture and history and to his own particular subject position.

On the surface, whiteness in South Africa seems to be a construction marked by internal distinction, seemingly atomized into numerous competitive groups. The primary divide among whites is linguistic, between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans, though religious differences are also important.[189] Afrikaners (Afrikaans-speakers) tend to belong to the Dutch Reformed Church, while English-speakers are more diverse religiously and encompass most of South Africa's Jewish population. Afrikaners typically represented a somewhat larger percentage of the white population and dominated the apartheid-era government, though English-speakers

---

[188] One could also note interesting resonances with the work of Ernesto Pujol, who, in a photographic series entitled "Whiteness" (1999), combined Nazi porcelain dishes collected in Europe with bronzed, enameled, baby boots from the United States. See Ernesto Pujol, "Notes on Obsessive Whiteness," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 98-100. Like Wilson and van der Merwe, Pujol employs historical objects to address contemporary whiteness.

[189] Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa* (New York: Random House, 1985), xiv-xv.

dominated the economic sector. As Vincent Crapanzano noted in 1985, "There is considerable hostility between the two groups."[190] Though the nature of this antagonism has changed in recent years as political and economic power have begun to shift away from South Africa's white minority, the depth of its historical roots cannot be overstated. The Second Boer War (1899 and 1902), fought between the British and two independent Afrikaner republics, was one of the most destructive wars fought on South African soil and was, in many ways, the crucible in which the militant nationalism that characterized apartheid-era Afrikaner identity was formed.[191] As Crapanzano notes, these two segments of the white community in South Africa have defined themselves historically in opposition to one another.[192]

As a whole, I argue, the historical military uniforms photographed by van der Merwe for "Trappings" represent whiteness, but, to different parts of the white community, the uniforms would also reference conflict between English-speakers and Afrikaners. The photograph *Cape Mounted Rifles (Dukes), Bandsman (1913-1926)* shows a blazing red jacket decorated with gold trim, an article of clothing associated with this British colonial paramilitary unit employed against the Afrikaners during the Second Boer War.[193] To Afrikaner viewers, this uniform would recall this history and symbolize the red coat of British imperialism. On the other hand, another photograph shows the uniform of a unit closely associated with Afrikaner political power: *State President's Guard (Formed 1967—Deactivated 1990), Riflemen* **[FIG. 3]**. This unit served as the

---

[190] Ibid., xv.
[191] W.A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom* (New York: Penguin, 1975), 90-1.
[192] Crapanzano, 37.
[193] Hereward Senior, *Constabulary: The Rise of Police Institutions in Britain, the Commonwealth, and the United States* (Toronto, Dundburn Press, 1997), 127-38. This unit included both 'native' and European troops in a ratio of roughly 2:1. For much of its history, European troopers were recruited directly from Britain.

ceremonial guard for the State President, South Africa's head of state once the country became a republic and the British monarch no longer served in that capacity. [194] In this sense the office was symbolic of Afrikaner repudiation of its connections to Britain. Every officeholder until the post was abolished as part of the democratic reforms of the 1990s was a high-ranking member of the National Party and was therefore white, male and Afrikaner. The uniform associated with this unit would therefore symbolize for English-speaking South Africans the dominant role of Afrikaners in apartheid regime. The uniform might recall days when the military was much more popular among Afrikaners than among English-speakers.[195] Within van der Merwe's series, because of the histories of the uniforms depicted, particular photographs would potentially speak differently to different parts of the white audience.

However, I believe the delineation of difference among whites is only tangential to the overall theme of van der Merwe's works from "Trappings." It is significant that he includes uniforms associated with both English and Afrikaner military power, suggesting that military power in South Africa has been a totality, associated historically not with different ethno-linguistic groups within the white community but with whiteness itself. Vincent Crapanzano claims that during apartheid white groups defined themselves in relation to one another while non-whites were largely insignificant to this process, invisible in many ways to the white minority.[196] In a now-democratic South Africa, where all groups are now 'visible' parts of the political process, every segment of society

[194] H. R. Hahlo and I. A. Maisels, "The Rule of Law in South Africa," *Virginia Law Review* 52, no. 1 (January, 1966): 8.
[195] Crapanzano, 110-11.
[196] Ibid., 38-9.

is faced with redefining itself.[197] Under these circumstances, the similarities among whites are much more evident than their differences, and the uniforms depicted by van der Merwe are therefore more likely to articulate a shared history of political power and social privilege, a history whose end must be in the process of being written if the democratic experiment is going to succeed.

Further, one must consider the resonances of these uniforms to viewers who are not white, for whom the distinctions between different kinds of whites might be relevant but do not override the general status enjoyed by all whites during apartheid, the universal privilege derived from skin color. For viewers who are not white the uniforms are like apartheid itself: the difference between a uniform which is Afrikaner or English in its historical associations is the difference between a sign that reads 'Slegs Blankes' and 'Whites Only.' The distinction does nothing to alter the overall effect. Though van der Merwe's series endeavors to deconstruct whiteness—and must therefore be attentive to historical particularities like the differences between different language groups—it nevertheless depicts whiteness as a coherent phenomenon defined by privilege.

Hentie van der Merwe's identity as a young, white man of Afrikaner heritage makes him especially attuned to the internal complexities of whiteness in his country, and his identity as a gay man makes him aware of how factors other than language, including sexuality, complicate South African whiteness. In this regard, he articulates in his work the relationship in South Africa between whiteness, militarism, heterosexism and masculinity. Though more clearly and explicitly a system of institutionalized white supremacy, apartheid was also concerned with enforcing traditional forms of sexual

[197] The problem of defining South African identity in light of the country's history is considered in Ivor Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist?: Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'The People'* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2007).

identity and gender roles. In this vein, apartheid's ideologues construed their brief to maintain the purity of the white race (and especially the Afrikaner race) in ways that were as heterosexist as they were racist. As Glen Retief notes, "Racist legislation and iron-fisted rule have, since the earliest days of Nationalist government, gone hand in hand with an obsessive interest in sexual policing."[198] The desire to keep the white nation racially pure was coupled with a conservative, Calvinist impulse towards sexual and moral purity. Homosexuals therefore faced profound discrimination under apartheid-era laws.[199] Retief explains the situation clearly,

> In South Africa, government homophobia has historically been expressed in the context of an apartheid belief-system which holds that South Africa is a country under siege and can only survive if it maintains its sexual purity and moral solidarity. Homosexuality is perceived, within this framework, as a threat to the nation, deserving of eradication and attack.[200]

Indeed, recognition of the apartheid regime's linkage of racism and homophobia led to remarkably progressive attitudes towards homosexuality in the official policy of the ANC-led post-liberation government. Albie Sachs, then noted ANC activist and soon-to-be a justice on the Constitutional Court of South Africa, asserted in 1990,

> What has happened to lesbian and gay people is the essence of apartheid—it tried to tell people who they were, how they should behave, what their rights were. The essence of democracy is that people should be free to be what they are. We want people to be and feel free.[201]

---

[198] Glen Retief, "Keeping Sodom out of the Laager: State Repression of Homosexuality in Apartheid South Africa," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 99-114

[199] Useful overviews of the gay and lesbian experience in South Africa during and immediately after apartheid and an examination of the politics of gay South African identity can be found in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, "Defiant Desire" in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3-13 and in Mark Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to the 1990s," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14-86.

[200] Retief, 109.

[201] Sachs quoted in Gevisser, 82-3.

Sachs would follow up on these words and author the Constitutional Court's holding in the case which overthrew South Africa's statute defining marriage to be between a man and a woman and mandated for equal protection for all and against marital discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. (South African government policy on homosexuality and the distinction between progressive policy and conservative popular opinion will be explored in Chapter Four of this dissertation.)

For gay white men during apartheid, the full brunt of the regime's homophobia was often felt most profoundly during military service, making van der Merwe's interest in military artifacts all the more specific to his unique subject-position. During much of the apartheid era, white men faced compulsory military service. While some who wished to evade enforced complicity in the violent imposition of white rule might flee abroad, this option was not open to most, leading to the creation of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) in 1983, a group that played an important role in mobilizing mainstream white opinion against apartheid in the late 1980s.[202] Unable to escape conscription or daunted by the cost and near-impossibility of conscientious objection, most young men found themselves, willing or unwillingly, becoming a cog in the regime's military machine, the South African Defence Force (SADF). Unusually, even gay men were not excluded from service, even though homosexuality was a chargeable offence and discrimination was encouraged within the SADF. Matthew Krouse aptly

[202] For an interesting account of ECC see: Ivan Toms, "Ivan Toms Is a Fairy?: The South African Defence Force, the End Conscription Campaign, and Me," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 258-63. Conscientious objector Toms, the first white jailed for refusing to perform military service, discusses both the homophobic smear campaign conducted against him in the 1980s by the SADF and the ambivalence within the anti-apartheid ECC over his sexuality.

sums up contemporary attitudes towards homosexuals in the military: "We will be included – and then censured. We may fight but we may not fuck."[203]

Beyond its practical impact enforcing dominance in the township and projecting might beyond the borders, the South African military also worked to enforce dominance on the ideological level, constructing a pathologized, militarized version of masculinity. Graduating from white government schools that taught 'survival skills' like target shooting, young men entered the military, where "soldiers were told that they were fighting the war to protect their wives and children."[204] Meanwhile, in army-supplied booklets like *While He Is Away*, wives were told to be submissive and faithful.[205] With speech and written language, heterosexuality is normalized and armed violence is justified as necessary to the protection of 'vulnerable' white women. According to Krouse, gays in the SADF served the function of reinforcing these stereotypes about sexuality and gender. Gay men's "supposed 'womanliness'" served to "reinforce what it [meant] to be a real man."[206] Additionally, under the circumstances, one might add that this quality also served to reinforce what it meant to *white* man, since normative whiteness and masculinity were conflated in culture.

Krouse bases this conclusion on his own service in the SADG as a soldier, a gay man, and, improbably enough, a drag performer. In South Africa, according to Krouse, "female impersonation has been one of the basic forms of entertainment in barracks, prisons and sometimes even schools."[207] In 1984, Krouse performed in a group called

---

[203] Matthew Krouse, "The Arista Sisters, September 1984: A Personal Account of Army Drag," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 209.
[204] Ibid., 210.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., 209.
[207] Ibid., 213.

the Arista Sisters, which began by entertaining troops in his barracks and went on to tour military facilities around the country, even performing in a televised variety show attended by the then-President's wife.[208] In the context of conservative, apartheid-era South Africa, the satirical program described by Krouse and, indeed, the very idea of male soldiers appearing in corsets, stockings and high heels seems peculiar. And yet, as he points out, the military allowed this brief moment of transgression not to subvert norms but to reinforce them. These drag concerts "reaffirmed the state's control over all … types," even homosexuals, by coopting "the most powerful of homosexualised icons—drag."[209]

Felix Guattari discerns potential political power in drag. For him, drag 'troubles' spectators to the point where, "The question is no longer whether one will play feminine against masculine or the reverse, but to make bodies, all bodies, break away from the representations and restraints on the 'social body.'"[210] In the situation described by Krouse, all of the potential power noted by Guattari is drained away and the drag costume becomes another kind of military costume, designed, like the uniforms pictured by van der Merwe, to both enforce and display conformity. In hindsight, Krouse sees that his drag performance enacted homosexuality's incorporation into and subjugation by the dominant culture. His experience highlighted the difficulty of grounding a white gay identity outside the masculinist, racist hegemony of apartheid. In the events described by Krouse, "The [drag performance] provided admonishment of the power of the state."[211]

---

[208] Ibid., 215-7.
[209] Ibid., 218.
[210] Felix Guattari, *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1996), 37.
[211] Krouse, 218.

Controlling the right to all forms of identity, the state allows a version of homosexual identity that is, ultimately, a charade:

> It has to resemble that which dominates it, heterosexuality. The gays must conform to being a little weaker. They too, in their love of men, must affirm that man is the supreme conqueror.[212]

If, as Krouse points out, men masquerading as women during apartheid could serve to reaffirm white masculine power, clearly one could argue also that men masquerading as men, that is wearing a military uniform, an icon and talisman of masculinity, also express apartheid's values. Hentie van der Merwe's identity as a gay man, something central to his identity as an artist,[213] and his understanding of his position as a white man of Afrikaner heritage in contemporary South Africa has helped him understand this aspect of how military uniforms signify. Indeed, one of the ways that his photographs of military uniforms articulate the connection between masculinity and whiteness is by showing how these characteristics might be performative rather than intrinsic, the result of masquerade.[214] In the same way that female drag offers a representation of femininity, military uniforms provide a means for performing masculinity. Ultimately, the photographs try to demonstrate how uniforms can work to create the effects of masculinity and whiteness, to suggest that clothes do make the (white) man.

---

[212] Ibid., 214

[213] The artist has given several talks on the topic of his own subject position and how his understanding of that subject position relates to other artists'. In 1996, he gave a talk called "New Strategies: The Re-presentation of Gay Identity and AIDS in the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres," at the Second Annual South African Qualitative Conference, and in 1997, he gave a paper entitled "The Representation of AIDS and Gay Identity in the Work of Robert Gober and My Own," at the Annual South African Art Historians Conference.

[214] The representation of masculinity as masquerade is explored in a catalogue edited by Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner, *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

Hentie van der Merwe's photographs from "Trappings" crystallize this conception of the military uniform as the articulation of a certain kind of white masculinity, one which is extrinsic rather than intrinsic, and one which is defined (and limited) by its accessories rather than by the intrinsic characteristics or character of the white subject. This quality can be seen in a photograph like *TA Member of 32 Battalion Reconnaissance Wing* (2002-3) **[FIG. 4]**, which shows the field dress worn by a member of one of the SADF's most decorated units of the 1970s and 1980s. Ironically, despite this photograph's importance in a body of images that dissects whiteness, the 32 Battalion was actually composed of Angolan soldiers and non-commissioned officers, and the unit was mostly deployed beyond South Africa's borders in occupied Namibia and in Angola as part of the apartheid regime's effort to destabilize its neighbors.[215] Unusually for "Trappings," which mostly focuses on jackets resting on headless mannequins, *Member of 32 Battalion* depicts a camouflaged bush or boonie hat over a camouflaged mask which completely conceals the face. Below, dark, indistinct forms suggest a field jacket. This photograph is central to the overall power of the series in the way that it emphasizes the anonymity and lack of autonomous identity created by the military uniform. If race, the differentiation of non-white from white, is read on the surface of the skin, then this uniform effaces that marker. By hiding that key marker of racial identity, the uniform depicted by van der Merwe reveals a circumstance where the uniform itself becomes the only possible signifier of race. The skin color of the wearer loses relevance. Whether

[215] For an 'insider account,' see Piet Nortje, *32 Battalion* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004).

worn by a black-skinned or white-skinned person, this uniform conveys the ability to oppress militarily, an ability that is at the heart of colonial whiteness.[216]

Hentie van der Merwe captures the way in which racial identity can be created through costume—a variation on the cliché 'the clothes make the man,' wherein the clothes make the race. But a photograph like *Member of 32 Battalion* also articulates the cost to the humanity of the wearer of the military uniform. Obviously the ensemble of hat and mask depicted in the photograph is designed to conceal the presence or protect the anonymity of the wearer on dangerous or surreptitious commando missions. Though it differs in form, in function the mask in the photograph recalls the balaclavas often worn by soldiers conducting brutal raids into the townships to terrorize residents.[217] The mask in van der Merwe's photograph is the mask of the torturer or the executioner, but, like the executioner's mask, it is a mark of weakness, intended to protect the wearer from the taint of a taboo act. The hooding in the photograph also calls to mind wet bag torture, the infamous interrogation technique demonstrated by police Captain Jeffrey Benzien to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).[218] As these associations build, the mask of whiteness depicted by van der Merwe can be seen to encompass both

---

[216] The post-apartheid experience of the former members of 32 Battalion suggests that the link between this largely-Angolan unit and South African white power was evident to the ANC, which insisted that the unit be disbanded as part of the negotiations that led to the end of apartheid. Unable to return to Angola, soldiers were given South African citizenship and resettled in a squalid, dilapidated town on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. Feeling abandoned, many of the soldiers eventually found employment as mercenaries, working as members of the notorious Executive Outcomes. Several were jailed for alleged participation in a failed coup directed at oil-rich Equatorial Guinea. Craig Timberg, "African Coup Plot Leaves Kin Bereft: 65 Jailed for Role Were Poor Ex-Soldiers," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2004, A13.

[217] See, for example, the sequence of photographs taken by Themba Nkosi in 1985 of balaclava clad security personnel killing a young activist during a raid: Themba Nkosi, *The Time of the Comrades* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987), 4-5.

[218] Antjie Krog, "The Wet Bag and Other Phantoms" in *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 89-99. Waterboarding, a variation on this kind of torture, was later employed by American interrogators working for the CIA. See James Risen, David Johnston and Neil A. Lewis, "Harsh C.I.A. Methods Cited in Top Qaeda Interrogations," *New York Times*, May 13, 2004.

the victimizer and the victimized, simultaneously a sign of strength and weakness, open display and secretive concealment.

Stylish and sinister, attractive and repellant, ultimately Hentie van der Merwe's series "Trappings" is like whiteness itself, defined by paradox. In these photographs, whiteness is evident only through one of its facets, the military uniform. The macrocosm is visible solely through the microcosm, the monumental overcoat. In this sense, "Trappings" makes an interesting complement to another series of photographs, *Some Afrikaners Photographed,* produced by documentary photographer David Goldblatt, arguably the country's most famous photographer.

Part Two: David Goldblatt's* Some Afrikaners Photographed: *The Overcoat

In pairing the work of white South African photographer David Goldblatt with van der Merwe's, I want to discern how the former, using the more traditional format of documentary photography, seeks to photograph whiteness *qua* whiteness, to see it as a set of internal attitudes or characteristics rather than as a costume or masquerade. I therefore read the documentary works of Goldblatt as visual imagery that presents a progressive, politically productive vision of South African whites, a vision that assails white dominance in South Africa and provides an intriguing model for future attacks on white privilege elsewhere in the world.

Positioning Goldblatt's work in this way will likely engender little controversy in the twenty-first century, after the end of apartheid. Goldblatt has become the dean of South African art photography, respected and well-regarded both within South Africa and around the world. He is the recipient of major awards, and his work is exhibited

widely.[219] However, during apartheid, the criticality of Goldblatt's work, its social relevance, was a question for debate. Though now esteemed, his work was often ignored, including the landmark *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, which sold for R25 and was soon remaindered for R2.50. Though Goldblatt does not speculate about why the book failed to find an audience when it was first published, merely noting without comment that a copy reportedly changed hands for R6000 in 2005, it may have been because photography was still only dimly understood as art.[220] Ivor Powell suggests as much, noting the few newspaper reviews the book received were "tentative" and "mealy-mouthed," often choosing to "vex the (profoundly irrelevant) question of whether photography can be considered as art."[221] Politics played a part in the book's commercial failure, and Goldblatt's critical analysis of Afrikaners was greeted with derision by anonymous Afrikaner newspaper critic discussed by Powell. The headline of the review of several early photographs from the series published in the international photojournal *Camera* in 1969 screams, "Bloed sal kook!" [Blood will boil!].[222] The review is, according to Powell, "political dissembling under the guise of art criticism."[223] While

---

[219] Goldblatt is held in universally high regard by the South African colleagues with whom I spoke, both for his work as a photographer and for his 'good works,' including especially the founding of the Market Photography Workshop, a photography school for historically disadvantaged populations in South Africa. His work as an artist has been recognized by both the 2009 Henri Cartier- Bresson Award and the 2006 Hasselblad Photography Award. In recent years, Goldblatt was the first South African photographer to appear in a solo exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (1998), and has had two career-spanning, large-scale retrospectives: "David Goldblatt" (2002), which began at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona before traveling to several other venues, and "Intersections Intersected: The Photography of David Goldblatt" (2009), which appeared at Michael Stevenson, Cape Town, at the Fundacao de Serralves, Porto, and at the New Museum, New York. Both of these exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues: David Goldblatt, with texts by J.M. Coetzee, Corinne Diserens, Okwui Enwezor, Michael Godby, Nadine Gordimer, Chris Killip, and Ivan Vladislavić, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-one Years* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001); David Goldblatt, with essays by Ulrich Loock and Ivor Powell, *David Goldblatt: Intersections Intersected* (Porto: Fundacao Serralves, 2008).
[220] David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007), 16.
[221] Ivor Powell, "The Anxiety of Identity and *Some Afrikaners*," in *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, ed. David Golblatt (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007), 21.
[222] Ibid., 19.
[223] Ibid.

Goldblatt's work clearly was regarded by that critic as a radical attack on Afrikaners, others saw the work as not nearly radical enough.

In this sense, his work was assailed as irrelevant to the 'struggle' by some within the generation of photographers that came of age in the 1980s, photographers who, as Goldblatt notes, "might broadly be called 'struggle photographers.'"[224] Though, in more recent years, since the end of apartheid, the passions that animated these disputes have "passed," and Goldblatt has become "strong friends" with some of these younger men, at the time his disputes with these photographers were sometimes difficult.[225] Discussing his relationship with these photographers, Goldblatt singles out some from this group, several of whom were members of the Afrapix collective, including Guy Tillim, Cedric Nunn, Gideon Mendel, Peter McKenzie, Paul Weinberg, Omar Badsha and Santu Mofokeng. These men coalesced as a group in the wake of the 1982 Culture and Resistance Festival held in Gaborone, Botswana, a meeting of both resident and exiled South African cultural figures designed to discuss the role of art in transforming society.[226] Associating themselves explicitly with the struggle against apartheid, Goldblatt explains:

> They believed in the camera as a cultural weapon in the struggle for liberation. They produced a remarkable body of work and many of them showed great courage in the face of very active attempts at suppression by the security police.[227]

---

[224] This and the immediately following quotes are taken from an interview with Goldblatt conducted by Mark Haworth-Booth published in David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Intersections* (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 96.
[225] Ibid.
[226] A summary of the festival events can be found in Andrew Horn, "Festival of South African Arts," *African Arts* 16, no. 2 (February, 1983): 78-79.
[227] Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Intersections*, 96.

By contrast, Goldblatt's attitude was very different: "I maintained that however strongly we opposed apartheid, we should not be propagandists for anyone."[228] Goldblatt's differences with this younger generation of photographers led to disputes that were both ideological and personal: "For a time I think I was distrusted by some of them. They assumed me to be a sellout."[229] In an increasingly radicalized cultural environment, Peter Mckenzie, a central figure in this group of activist photographers, notes that photographers became "cultural workers with a directive that the struggle for liberation demanded action beyond just photography."[230] For activist photographers during apartheid, Goldblatt's work was problematic for two reasons: first, because of the way he chose to distribute his work, and, second, because of the subjects he chose to depict.

Not wanting his work to become 'propaganda,' Goldblatt felt it was "important" that his photographs "be used or seen in contexts that respected the integrity of the subjects and that were to true to [his] intentions."[231] Since editors and political propagandists worked to attach other messages to his images, Goldblatt tended to avoid allowing his work to be used for overtly political purposes, even in the service of causes with whose aims he was largely in agreement, like the African National Congress or the Black Sash, a multiracial women's group. Requests from these groups to use his photographs were turned down by Goldblatt, because they wanted to "use [his] photographs in contexts not intended by [him.]"[232] By contrast, most of the photographers associated with 'struggle photography' actively positioned their work in

---

[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] This quote is taken from an unpublished manuscript of an interview by Sean O'Toole of McKenzie and Jo Ractliffe (2005).
[231] This and the immediately following quotes are taken from an interview with Goldblatt conducted by Okwui Enwezor published in David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001), 17.
[232] Ibid., 18.

the service of political aims, making their images available to political organizations actively resisting apartheid.[233]

Also, while Goldblatt felt that photography itself could be "a political act," the younger generation of figures pushed for 'action beyond photography.' In Goldblatt's words, "Once I became seriously engaged in it, photography became my way of being politically active."[234] By contrast, the younger photographers were directly involved in other facets of the struggle: "community mobilisation, advocacy, protest meetings, funeral organisers, underground couriers," etc.[235] Education played a central role in the way that Afrapix construed its mission, and it organized workshops to make photographic knowledge, usually available only to middle-class whites, accessible to all. While Goldblatt would be active as an educator, and, indeed, would mentor many South African photographers, including several discussed in this dissertation (such as Zanele Muholi), for the younger generation, his lack of direct political activities was a cause for concern. In hindsight, in terms of their recognition of the importance of photographic education, the differences between Goldblatt, who founded the innovative Market Photography Workshop, and Afrapix seem slight. During this contentious era, however, such differences tended to become magnified.

Goldblatt also differed from the younger generation in that he tended to avoid images of conflict. Though the reality of apartheid is never far from the surface, he tended to address its history and its effects obliquely, employing a level of nuance and a

---

[233] The history and aims of the Afrapix collective is discussed in Pierre-Laurant Sanner, "Comrades and Cameras," in *Anthology of African Photography*, Pascal Martin Saint Leon and N'Gone Fall, eds. (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999), 253-61. Though censorship made the distribution of anti-apartheid images difficult, this group's leading lights struggled against the odds to get images before the eyes of the public.
[234] Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, 17.
[235] O'Toole, n.p.

degree of diffidence that would help make his work seem ideologically suspect during the era of violent conflict that accompanied apartheid's last years. The younger generation of photographers who came of age in the 1980s had very definite views about the role of practitioners of the medium at that time:

> Where did we as photographers find ourselves in this turbulent landscape [during the bloodiest period of political resistance to apartheid]? We witnessed intimately the struggle around us, both the euphoria as the popular movements gained momentum, and tragedy as the state responded violently to this challenge.[236]

Whether depicting South Africa's white minority or some other segment of the population, Goldblatt's work addressed these events with a great deal more circumspection. For example, in a photograph captioned "Fifteen year old Lawrence Matjee after his assault and detention by the Security Police, Khotso House, de Villiers Street, 25 October 1985," Goldblatt depicts a dignified young man staring straight into the camera. He is seated, shirtless. Both of his arms are covered by plasters casts, which extend from a few inches above the elbow to his knuckles. Goldblatt's photograph confines itself to the aftermath of the assault on this young man; a 'struggle photographer' would have worked to capture the action of the assault, if possible.

In addition to avoiding conflict photography, Goldblatt was much more willing then the younger generation of photographers to turn his lens on South Africa's whites. To some this made his work seem bourgeois, even reactionary. What, some asked, was the point of pointing one's lens on the white suburbs when the suffering of the black

---

[236] Quoted from "Preface," credited to 'The Photographers,' in Iris Tilman Hill and Alex Harris, eds. *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Aperture Foundation in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University with the cooperation of Afrapix and the Centre for Documentary Photography, Cape Town, 1989), 7.

townships was so acute?[237] I believe, however, that Goldblatt's sustained effort at understanding the visual culture of whiteness in South Africa was and is important to the work of documenting apartheid's cause, its effect and its legacy. Though different from the work of revealing the impact of apartheid on the townships, it was no less important. While the suffering of South Africans who were not white was a symptom of white supremacy, an acceptance of white privilege was its cause. Particularly in the book-length photo-essays, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975), *In Boksburg* (1982), and *The Structure of Things Then* (1998), Goldblatt makes a sustained effort to reveal this cause, to reveal whiteness and endeavor to apprehend South Africa's whites and their place within and culpability for the racial hierarchies of apartheid.[238]

This essay will focus especially on *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975), the first of these series. Though little noticed when first issued—Goldblatt wryly recalls that the book did not sell and was soon remaindered at a tenth of its initial price—it has become a classic, revisited by Goldblatt in both book and exhibition form.[239] A tightly composed photographic essay comprised entirely of black-and-white, documentary-style photographs with one overriding thematic focus, South Africa's Afrikaners, this series is

---

[237] Since many of those who were critical of Goldblatt in the 1980s later became friends with the man and came to respect his work and his personal integrity, people were reluctant to rehash these disputes with me years after the fact. The one photographer willing to speak to me on this subject in depth did so only under the proviso that he not be quoted by name. Asked about this era and his disputes with Goldblatt by Sean O'Toole, Peter Mckenzie would only say: "I really don't remember the detail of my disagreement with David … so I won't comment, save to say that photographers weren't immune to the tensions between black and white people and it took a long time, white or black, to establish one's bona fides, to be seen to be different from the press pack and to identify with the struggle." O'Toole, n.p.

[238] David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (Johannesburg: Murray Crawford, 1975); David Goldblatt, *In Boksburg* (Cape Town: The Gallery Press, 1982); David Goldblatt, *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then* (Cape Town/New York: Oxford University Press/Monacelli Press, 1998).

[239] David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Revisited*. Photographs from the series were shown in the exhibition *Some Afrikaners Revisited* at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town in 2006 and played central roles in both of the photographer's recent retrospectives.

not only important within Goldblatt's body of work, it has become central to the history of documentary photography in South Africa.

That Goldblatt uses documentary photography as a tool for his critical analysis of whiteness is significant. He seems to use a form of representation already implicated and inside the regime of power which he wishes to deconstruct. After all, photography, and documentary photography in particular, have been the targets of trenchant critiques over their entanglements as media and genre with prevailing structures of social and economic power, precisely those structures of power that enable white privilege to function.[240]

Documentary photography's authoritative rhetoric of transparency, realism and objectivity is structurally congruent to that of whiteness, which articulates itself discursively as neutral and un-biased by sectarian impulses. If photography's purchase on 'documentary truth' has been traditionally guaranteed by the non-subjective, non-position of the photographer, who is considered to observe but not disturb the action, the privilege of whiteness is similarly given traction by the racially unmarked status of white skin: "whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race."[241] Goldblatt situates his work in opposition to these aligned ideologies of representation and race by *racing* his own work, allowing for it to issue from, and reflect back, his particular position as a white South African English-speaking Jew. Despite a traditional black-and-white photographic aesthetic and a presentation of images that recalls the style employed by Walker Evans (an influence acknowledged by Goldblatt), Goldblatt's documents claim

---

[240] See, for example, the chapters "God's Sanitary Law: Slum Clearance and Photography in Late Nineteenth Century Leeds" and "The Currency of the Photograph: New Deal Reformism and Documentary Rhetoric" in John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64; and Martha Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 303-41.

[241] Dyer, *White*, 3.

authority only by acknowledging that they cannot stand outside the hegemony of racial representation.

The internal logic of the racial (and racist) ideology of apartheid-era South Africa regards race as a 'natural' and eternal characteristic of humankind. The role of whites in this system is to preserve race as a fundamental organizing category for society. As Leonard Thompson noted (before the fall of the apartheid system),

> The political mythology that legitimizes the South African social order rests on a core assumption about humanity. The core assumption is that races are the fundamental divisions of humanity and that different races possess inherently different cultural as well as physical qualities. In the modern South African context, white people, as Christians, have a God-given destiny to preserve their distinction from other races.[242]

Necessarily, during the years of apartheid, which he abhorred, he had to engage with its political mythology and racial assumptions. But the difficulty of representing this mythology without re-inscribing it should not be underestimated. Goldbaltt's ploy is a denial of race as a natural order and a description of it instead as a relation of power. As Peggy McIntosh notes, "White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks."[243] Goldblatt does not deny that whiteness maintains itself through a 'distinction from other races,' but he confronts his white viewers with the proposition that this distinction is a social construction. He makes visible that which needs to remain invisible to function: a whiteness which is not a biological race but a mechanism of power. In this understanding of race, elaborated upon

---

[242] Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 69.

[243] McIntosh quoted in Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis, "Making Systems of Privilege Visible," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, Rasmussen et al., eds. (Durham: Duke Unicersity Press, 2001), 316.

by Ruth Frankenberg, whiteness is seen less as a visible race than as "a location of structural advantage in societies structured in racial dominance."[244]

In taking as his subject something as abstract as a relation of power, Goldblatt is able to embrace those things about documentary photography which were being critiqued by others in the late 1960s and 1970s while still preserving an element of political efficacy for his work. Susan Sontag has rightly discerned the "supertourist" stance of much traditional documentary, a stance through which the photographer becomes "an extension of the anthropologist visiting natives and bringing back news of their exotic doings and strange gear."[245] This critique of documentary is also forwarded by Martha Rosler, who states that "documentary photography has come to represent the social conscience of liberal sensibility presented in visual imagery."[246] Rosler notes this fact as part of an extended argument elaborated in 1981 about the essential "meliorism" and "reformist" attitudes of traditional documentary practice, an argument that posits that "documentary photography has been much more comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics."[247] In her model, the documentary genre serves as a kind of dodge, a veneer of *concern* that does not deepen into militant mobilization against the current economic and social order. Rosler's description is persuasive. And yet, contrarily, I insist on the political efficacy of the photography of David Goldblatt, even though it sits squarely in this tradition of the social documentary.

---

[244] Ruth Frankenberg, "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, Rasmussen et al., eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 73
[245] Sontag, 41-2.
[246] Rosler, 303.
[247] Ibid., 304.

The theorization of the political limits of 'socially concerned' documentary photography was articulated just as writer-artists like Rosler and Allan Sekula were developing new models of critical artistic practice. On the face of it, Goldblatt's work seems anachronistic beside that of these artists. However, by embracing the exotic and touristic aspects of documentary photography, he is able to portray white normativity as strange, bewildering and uncanny. As Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne Davis write,

> The characteristics and attributes of those who are privileged group members are described as societal norms—as the way things are and as what is normal in society … Privilege is not visible to its holder; it is merely there, a part of the world, a way of life, simply the way things are.[248]

Goldblatt endeavors to reinscribe 'the way things are' under apartheid as that which is almost impossible to believe—even for those in the midst of this milieu. Goldblatt poses a question to South African whites looking at his photographs: is this who we are?

In images like *The Commando of National Party Stalwarts, October 1964* and *Picnic on New Year's Day, Hartebeespoort Dam, Transvaal, 1965* (respectively appearing on pages 69 and 153 of *Some Afrikaners Photographed*), Goldblatt depicts as deeply bizarre one element of Afrikaner culture considered normal, even laudable: the tight linkage of violence and masculinity **[FIGS. 5 and 6]**. Modern South Africa's Afrikaners (who speak the Afrikaans language and consider themselves white), see themselves as the descendants of the Dutch settlers who arrived on the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 to establish a refreshment station for ships traveling east to the spice groves of the Indian Ocean. In the twentieth century, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party, which ruled South Africa from 1948 until 1994, would create the policy of white supremacy and ruthless racial segregation called apartheid—which means "separateness"

[248] Wildman and Davis, 316.

in Afrikaans. Apartheid is an outgrowth of Afrikaner nationalism, which is characterized, even more than most nationalisms, by its understanding that the nation must remain always vigilant against those who would wish to destroy it. Among the forms this vigilance took was a near obsession with physical and military prowess.[249]

Like van der Merwe's, Goldblatt's exploration of the nature of whiteness in South Africa must grapple with the place of militarism in an Afrikaner-led apartheid ideology. The white minority's reliance on its armed forces ensured that white male children were prepared from boyhood for their role as defenders of the fatherland in organizations like the Voortrekkers, "a society for young Afrikaners, in which members [were] taught to be proud of their history and religion."[250] In school, white children were exposed to "attitudes of white supremacy … together with lessons on the physical characteristics and social positions of other race groups," and their physical fitness was also honed in the best available facilities.[251] For many white South Africans, equal pride was taken in the nation's rugby team and military and rugged masculinity exemplified both groups.

In Goldblatt's picture of the Commando, a sense of the hereditary nature of white supremacy is articulated. Dominating the foreground of the picture are three menacing men on horseback. In a sign of (presumably unintentional) conceptual rigor, all three straddle pure-white horses. Mimicking the 'heroic' mounted warriors who harried the British during the turn of the century South African War (also known as the Boer War), these riders are escorting National Party leader and Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd to a ceremony honoring the party's 50th anniversary. Each wears a suit, but their hats recall

---

[249] The fullest history of the historical development of Afrikaners is found in Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).
[250] *Children under Apartheid*, 28.
[251] Ibid., 37.

the sort that their forbearers would have worn into battle. This kind of ritualized reenactment of those events which were perceived as being crucibles for national formation was an important weapon in the arsenal of Afrikaner nationalism, staking the nation's claim to a vigorous historical lineage.

These ritualized events also served to indoctrinate youth into the circled wagons of the *volk*, bringing them through an act of initiation no different in character than those exotic, primitive African rites of which ethnologists seem so fond. In Goldblatt's picture, the man riding the horse on the left seems to be edging past middle age. The other two riders are younger, and could easily be the older figure's sons. If racism and white privilege are understood to be learned, socially constructed behavior, then the mechanisms that pass these lessons down are of crucial importance to anyone studying the problem. In this photograph, Goldblatt offers a primer in how Afrikaner children are taught to rule and to hate those over whom they rule.

This aspect of Goldblatt's message is obvious, and it is not altogether clear whether this element in his image would even disturb a viewer who takes white dominance for granted. What is more interesting about the image is the way the white viewer is placed in the unfamiliar position of one subject to the power of whiteness. A paradoxical entwining of visibility and invisibility is at the heart of the meaning of Goldblatt's photograph for white viewers. Their identification of their place in the image oscillates unstably between empowered rider (their avatar within the photograph) and the disempowered overridden (their place in relation to the riders). This unstable relation to the image makes white viewers aware of both the effect of white privilege on those against whom it is directed and their culpability for its maintenance.

Another interesting aspect of racism and racial dominance addressed by Goldblatt in these photographs is the manner in which racism also harms those who rest atop the hierarchy. As Mab Segrest writes,

> The pain of dominance is always qualitatively different from the pain of subordination. But there is a pain, a psychic wound, to inhabiting and maintaining domination. Our acknowledging that emotional cost helps keep our white ethical/political solidarity [with people of color] from slipping over into a new form of paternalism.[252]

In Goldblatt's photograph of the New Year's picnic, disturbing evidence of self-destructive violence, the self-inflicted wound, of racialism is portrayed **[FIG. 6]**.

This unnerving image is dominated by three children. In the foreground, an incongruously pale child lays splayed-out, corpse-like. Behind, a somewhat older child cradles a diapered infant in his arms. The baby sucks at a bottle while the child who holds him takes careful aim at his right eye with a toy revolver. As a viewer, we understand immediately that the gun is a toy, but this does nothing to limit the disturbance this image creates. The extremity of hard-line Afrikaner attitudes, an extremity which would find its counterpoint in the "one bullet, one settler" slogan of its most vociferous black opponents, is envisioned here as a kind of minor domestic drama. The Afrikaner ideology of strength, individuality and force of arms is revealed to be a drive for death, leading inexorably to a zealous culling of the weak that will end finally in total ethno-cultural suicide. The ritualized nationalism depicted in Goldblatt's world is unmasked in this photograph of a New Year's picnic as a ritual sacrifice, an infant sacrifice of profound (if metaphoric) barbarity and an eradication of innocence.

As Goldblatt's friend and colleague, the Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer, makes clear, the question of innocence is one Goldblatt ponders very seriously. Comparing

---

[252] Segrest, 45.

whites who lived during the apartheid regime to Germans alive during the Nazi-era, she acknowledges that all "bear responsibility for the acts of their fellows." But she is still left wondering whether there were "some who were innocent." If so, what are the grounds for this innocence: "is ignorance, nurtured by political and social brainwashing, a form of innocence to be claimed by its recipients?"[253] For Gordimer, a particular Goldblatt photograph from *In Boksburg* is a focus for these questions. In it, a young white girl in her tutu balances on her toe, arms aloft, eyes closed **[FIG. 7]**. A look of pure joy brightens her face almost magically. Gordimer wonders: "Is the aspirant dancer innocent? Could she be? If so, for how long, in and after apartheid South Africa?"[254] Reading this image against the one showing the picnic, one is forced to conclude that this girl's innocence can only be preserved willfully. By confronting his viewers again and again with the problem of childhood innocence, Goldblatt tries to make the force of will, the blindness inherent to racialism, both manifest and unnatural.

As a South African, as a part of the culture, Goldblatt pursues these questions with an immediacy spurred partly by autobiographical concerns. In his interviews and writings, Goldblatt situates the awakening of his awareness of and concern about race squarely in the years of his childhood. Certain aspects of almost any child's life in twentieth century South Africa led to an education in the dynamics of race. In an interview with Okwui Enwezor, Goldblatt has said,

> Like many South African white children, I was brought up largely by my nanny, an African woman whom I grew to love. I became very fond of her children … and I developed a closeness to them that affected how I saw myself in relation to the world.[255]

---

[253] Quoted in Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-one Years*, 437.
[254] Ibid., 438.
[255] Ibid., 14-5.

In *Some Afrikaner's Photographed*, Goldblatt includes a photograph about the relationship between a white child and his African nanny accompanied by the caption *A Farmer's Son with his Nursemaid, Heimweeberg, Nietverdiend, Western Transvaal, 1964* **[FIG. 8]**. The subjects of this image *seem* as innocent as the young ballerina who so captivated Gordimer, but close inspection reveals how profoundly racial difference has already begun to impact on their young lives.

The photograph seems to conflate the two parallel relationships that shaped Goldblatt's life: here, the nanny is a very young woman—certainly an adolescent—while the boy for whom she cares seems to be about ten years old. Both boy and nursemaid appear to my eyes as children, and it is unlikely that the difference between their ages amounts to more than a decade. And yet, in the photograph, the deep inequality at the heart of their relationship becomes visible despite their tender ages. While the young woman sits in a slightly slouched posture, the boy stands behind her with his back straight. He also stands on a raised plot of earth, artificially accentuating his height. Both look into the camera, but, while the boy opens himself to its gaze by positioning three-quarters of his chest towards the camera, the girl is turned three-quarters away from the camera and looks back at it over her shoulder. In a gesture of authority, the boy places his hands on his nursemaid's shoulders, rather in the manner in which an adult would lay his or her hands on a favored child. The girl meanwhile reaches around his leg to grasp his heel and the back of his bare ankle. It is a tender gesture, but the touching of the foot implies a certain level of submissiveness. Clearly, the boy feels in his body and shows by his gestures a degree of authority over his older companion. Reciprocally, she seems to acknowledge the state of affairs that exists between them. As he is white and

she is black, the boy is, in some way, in charge of the young woman who cares for him. The photograph presents a common and formative experience for white South African children but also poses a nagging question: will this boy learn from this experience in order to grow up abhorring the social injustice of racial inequality, turning his back on the structures of white privilege as Goldblatt tried to do?

Obviously not every white child brought up by an African nanny grows up to be critical of the larger racial structures which normalize such behavior. Part of Goldblatt's awakening criticality about race appears to be a result of being Jewish in a society in which Jewish-ness offered only provisional and marginal inclusion in among those considered white. In his interview with Enwezor, Goldblatt claims,

> At an early age, I became conscious of the difference in the way people were treated … Blacks and whites were treated differently. This disturbed me greatly, and I associated it with anti-Semitism which I experienced quite often.[256]

By becoming aware of racial difference in his youth, Goldblatt in effect lost his innocence. His photographs seem calculated to return this disturbance, this traumatic awareness of the crime of racism and the privilege of whiteness, to the public sphere.

So far I have focused on Goldblatt's subject matter, but one of the strengths of his work is his recognition that the medium of photography is without innocence. If photography is inextricable from the scopic regime of power through which whiteness exerts itself, if white privilege is acknowledged and seen to operate broadly across the medium's history, does this portend a kind of 'original sin' for the photographic representation of race? Does this connection make photography incapable of playing a role in the *critical* depiction of whiteness?

---

[256] Ibid., 14.

Richard Dyer, for example, baldly states that, the "aesthetic technology of photography, as it has been invented, refined and elaborated, and dominant uses of that technology, as they have become fixed and naturalised, assume and privilege the white subject."[257] Taking into account a general connection in the West between vision, knowledge and power, he justifies his position on the inherent 'whiteness' of the photographic medium by further tying it as a technology to what he describes as a "light culture," which "makes seeing by means and in terms of light central to the construction of the human image."[258] Light is seen as something with which white people "seem to have a special relationship."[259] Light—associated with Christ and His Angels, inspiration and intellect, and the clear skies over Northern Europeans, "the whitest whites in the white racial hierarchy—then becomes a symbolic thing in portraiture, a shorthand means of pointing to those enlightened and elevated qualities of inner being that would otherwise be invisible: virtuousness, moral rectitude, genius, a 'soul.'[260]

Dyer points to the work of Julia Margaret Cameron to provide an example of how the celestial connotations of light are used to signify in a portrait. In Cameron's image of Sir John Herschel, diffuse light seems to radiate from a great man who is touched with the spark of divine brilliance. Dyer quotes pioneering photography theorist Marcus Aurelius Root who describes the meaning ascribed to this trope by nineteenth century portraitists: "To delineate the human face and figure pervaded by expression, that bids the soul shine glowingly out through the same, is to transcribe the matchless pencillings of

[257] Dyer, 103.
[258] Ibid., 121.
[259] Ibid., 103.
[260] Ibid., 118.

the Divine Proto-Artist."[261] While the representational strategy employed by Cameron and discussed by Root are not new to photography, the medium does add something particular to the mix because of its unique ability to combine the palpable, the indexical present-ness of the subject before the lens, with the mysterious disembodied action of light itself. Photography allows the materialization of *both* translucence and materiality, dialectical terms literally pasted together by the photographic media. Photographic aesthetics can thus provide a means for ideologically distinguishing white from non-white: black people can be reduced to their opaque bodies and thus to their race, but white people are something else, a translucent, luminous 'spirit' that is realized in and yet is not reducible to the body. As Dyer puts it, "it is the mix, in the very medium [of photography] itself, of light and substance that is central to the conception of white humanity."[262]

In contrast to the blurred, spiritual character of Cameron's image, Dyer also notes how a sharp, hard-edged aesthetic came to be seen as appropriate to criminal, medical and ethnographic photography:

> There are appropriately hard-edged, relatively opaque subjects (the lunatic, the felon, the native) and appropriately soft-edged, more translucent ones (angels, fairies, saints and people like them). At the extremes there are the opaque non-white subject and the pellucid white subject, but in between the technology permits the reproduction of whiteness as a differentiated and hierarchised structure.[263]

Importantly therefore, photography can also discern differences among whites, sorting by class, for instance, and dividing the working classes from their 'betters' by means of the impenetrable grime that covers the skin of those who must work for a living.

---

[261] Quoted in Dyer, 105.
[262] Ibid., 115.
[263] Ibid., 113.

Making this point, Dyer points to an anonymous French daguerreotype of a blacksmith from the 1840s. He might just as easily single out one of Goldblatt's most famous works, one in which the white skin of a farm family is covered or marred by the dirt of labor **[FIG. 9]**. This image, one of the last in *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, is captioned *A plot-holder, his wife and their eldest son at lunch, Wheatlands, Randfontein, Transvaal, September 1962*. In it, mother and father look at their son across a meagerly arrayed table. Lunch consists of bread, peanut butter, and something tinned about to be ladled into mugs by the mother. On the left-hand side of the image, the son's begrimed face indicates that he has been hard at work on the farm. One wonders if his crossed arms and the none-too-pleased intensity with which he is glared at by his parents bespeak everyone's understanding and resentment that the boy's appetites for his meal and for his life are such that they will never be entirely sated. Or, perhaps he is praying, displaying the grim piety that is so characteristic of South African Calvinism. The family father sits beside him and is the real focus of the photograph. He is centrally framed and is situated directly across the table from Goldblatt's camera. Behind him, a white cupboard accentuates the darkness of his skin, a hue that is presumably the result of both the weathering sun and the dirt of agricultural labor.

Certainly, this image seems to demonstrate the lack of transparency, the opaqueness, which Dyer claims generally characterizes the depiction of underclass whites and allows a ranked, classed hierarchy of white privilege to be established. It also displays the hard-edged aesthetic deemed appropriate to the kind of scrutinizing attention associated with a relation between an empowered looker and a disempowered observed subject. But, generalities aside, when this particular image is considered in the peculiar

context of South Africa, a very different picture emerges, one which highlights the manner in which the criticality of Goldblatt's project seems to emerge very much in relief against the theoretical analysis crafted by Dyer. Goldblatt's image does indeed appear to show lower class whites, who, according to the classed structure of whiteness outlined by Dyer, would be 'less' white than those of the upper class. However, the people in Goldblatt's photograph—indeed, as Afrikaners, all of the people in *Some Afrikaners Photographed*— are, according to the racial mythology of apartheid, theoretically at the apex of the hierarchy of whiteness, a part of the *volk* tied to the land and (as Goldblatt puts it) "chosen by God to be leaders in [South Africa] and defenders of Christian-National values against atheism, communism, liberalism, humanism, and racial miscegenation."[264]

These farmers, depicted by Goldblatt with the 'impurity' of their quite real darkened skins and obvious poverty, seem an affront to the racially-based hierarchy of apartheid, which *de facto* (although not *de jure*) even ranked whites along a continuum of racial and ethnic superiority. The subtlety of apartheid-era South African whiteness is articulately voiced by Goldblatt himself in the 'mad' accounting of 'what he is' in the quote which begins my chapter. Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaners believed themselves better, purer and more 'African' than the later arriving English-speaking South Africans. According to this logic, Anglophone Jews, like Goldblatt, were less white still. Goldblatt admits to "feeling almost jealous of Afrikaners, because they appeared to have such a strong sense of their place in this country, a rootedness, a physical rootedness, which I felt too but which they generally denied to me." He vividly describes "one of the occasions when [he] was briefly held by the security police for questioning in connection

[264] David Goldblatt, *The Structure of Things Then*, 17.

with my work" when "the interrogator asked how [Goldblatt] could be a loyal South African if [he] were a Jew."[265]

The sorting out of gradations of whiteness is not special to South Africa, of course, but the apartheid-era obsession with zealously guarding the gates of whiteness is remarkable in its fervor. Richard Dyer notes that one "may distinguish between two broad ways of categorising race: one genealogical, concerned with origins and lineages of reproduction, the other more statically biological, concerned with identifying difference on and/or in the body itself."[266] Afrikaner racialism partook in both these ideological constructs, but in both cases a powerful avowal of certain facts was required. Afrikaner group consciousness was structured around an origin story, one which moves forward from the Dutch arrival in 1652 through an ongoing lineage of Afrikaans speakers. However, the Afrikaans language, surprisingly, is a creole one, and its differences from Dutch principally result from a liberal admixture of Malay and Khoi words. As Goldblatt succinctly states, the language "developed from the need of white officials and farmers of the early settlement at the Cape … to communicate with Asian and African slaves and with indigenous Khoikhoi."[267] Thus, the language that in the twentieth century would come to connote the highest gradations of whiteness for Apartheid's theoreticians was an impure animal from its genesis. It would be spoken in the twentieth century by both Afrikaners and those classified by apartheid as 'coloured' people of so-called 'mixed' descent (as if we are not all in some ways people of mixed descent). The 'Coloureds' were the biological product of the same promiscuous process of exchange among master, native and slave that produced Afrikaans as a language.

---

[265] David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, 16.
[266] Dyer, 20.
[267] Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*, 444.

For the perverse racial logic of white privilege that lay at the heart of apartheid to function, its narrative must be constantly be rearticulated and its boundaries must constantly be policed. Since whiteness, like other racial categories, is a biological fiction,[268] it derives an unstable and relative definitional coherence only operationally, through a range of legal, bureaucratic, cultural and social constructions. Whiteness is a regime of power, a product of enforcement. Whiteness (again, like all other racial categories) must be therefore understood both as an illusion, as a socially constructed entity with no biological basis, and as an ongoing social fact with very real and tangible consequences in the world. As Martha Mahoney says,

> Race is a phenomenon always in formation. Therefore whiteness, like other racial constructions, is subject to contest and change. Whiteness is historically located, malleable, and contingent.[269]

For whites and blacks in South Africa, the racial ideology of apartheid had unmistakable, demonstrable economic, political and social effects in the world. The distinctions between races were *unreal* in the sense that they were ideologically created and deeply illogical. But the distinctions between races were *very real* in the sense that they formed the core of large-scale efforts at social engineering aimed at the legalized oppression and disenfranchisement of the majority of South Africa's population. However, if apartheid functions through race and races can sometimes be indistinguishable from one another,

---

[268] Noel Ignatiev, who understands race as a social construction, notes, "Many black people have European ancestors, and plenty of so-called whites have African or American Indian ancestors. No biologist has ever been able to provide a satisfactory definition of race—that is a definition that includes all members of a given 'race' and excludes all others. Attempts to do so lead to absurdities: mothers and children of different races, or the phenomenon that a white woman can give birth to a black child, but a black woman can never give birth to a white child. The only possible conclusion is that people are members of different races because they are assigned to them. Of course, differences exist between individuals, and the natives of West Africa in general had darker skin and so forth than natives of the British Isles, but groups are formed by social distinctions, not nature" See "Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity: An Interview with Noel Ignatiev of *Race Traitor* Magazine," 607-8.

[269] Mahoney, 330.

how can apartheid operate? As it turns out, the system solely maintains its coherence through the application of a regime of discursive force, through a structure of power that is one of Goldblatt's primary areas of investigation.

In an image from his *Jo'burg Intersections* series, Goldblatt uses his caption to articulate something that would not be visible to the naked eye. The photograph depicts a woman twice in profile (once in a mirror). An empty beer glass and an Alcoholics Anonymous slogan taped to the mirror hint at a complex character. The one thing about this woman most salient to her character in apartheid-era South Africa, however, is invisible. While the woman certainly *seems* white, the caption explains: "Cynthia Freeman: sentenced to R100 or 50 days imprisonment suspended for 3 years for living in this flat in a White Group Area." This woman is 'coloured,' a racial category employed juridically to designate, within apartheid's elaborate system of ethnic classification, a mixed race population that was the outcome of centuries of cohabitation between indigenes, Europeans and imported slave labor from the Indian Ocean rim. Through this image, Goldblatt is able to hint at the way apartheid operated discursively to keep races separate and police the mixing of cultures, to maintain even the illusion of pure racial categories.

Within this discursive regime, race is always already a visual phenomenon, and it is presumed that racial distinctions are made through the visual perceptions of those bodies. Like apartheid's legal apparatus, the technology of photography also participates in the manufacturing of these perceptions. The ability to *see* apartheid, and by extension document it photographically, therefore involves a problem of perception and

representation, a problem foregrounded by Goldblatt in *Wedding on a farm near Barkly East, December 1966* from *Some Afrikaners Photographed* **[FIG. 10]**.

In this photograph, we see, from behind, a photographer (perhaps a professional, perhaps an amateur). Bending over, he leans over his camera to capture a woman, probably the mother of the bride or groom, in her Sunday best holding a bouquet, performing her bourgeois respectability on the occasion of the celebration of a marriage, that most eminently bourgeois of rituals. To her left stand the bride and the groom, and one supposes that the older woman is one of their mothers. The bride smiles awkwardly—her happiness seems forced—and looks at something outside the frame of the photograph. For once in her life she is dressed like a queen, but it is not clear if she plays the role comfortably. It *is* clear that the queen is always subordinate to the king: the groom demonstrates his mastery, grabbing his new bride's wrist and neck roughly. The image clearly offers a catalogue of middle class patriarchy. On the other side of the image, however, race intrudes unexpectedly. A black woman walks nervously out of the frame of the image. Though none of the whites spare her a glance, she looks over her shoulder at them nervously. She doesn't matter to them. But she can't afford to ignore them. In her white coat and against a whitewashed brick backdrop, her blackness stands out. Beyond that, however, it is difficult to discern what is going on here. The white figure in the foreground is lunging forward suddenly. He is blurred, in motion. His movement forward matches the unease of the black woman. Is he lunging forward in order to threaten her or merely to hasten her out of the way of the camera? Or, do the movements of the two figures have no direct relationship? Is the connection between these two figures merely an impression left by Goldblatt's composition? Whatever might

have been happening as this picture was taken by Goldblatt, the finished product is certainly laden with racially-charged imagery.

Goldblatt's image would not be as powerful an articulation of race relations in South Africa were it not for the inclusion of the figure of the wedding photographer, who serves as an avatar for the other photographer on the scene, Goldblatt himself. The wedding photographer's image would presumably not include this black passerby. Goldblatt's photograph cannot avoid her. I would argue that the presence of the photographer within the image establishes for the viewer the place of representation in the construction of racial identity in South Africa and acknowledges Goldblatt's own culpability in this regime. The act and effect of representing race make this image a kind of shorthand account for photography's history in South Africa: whiteness appears as innocence, blackness as marginality, and the entire edifice tries madly and desperately to ignore its own construction and operation.

Goldblatt's work is distinctive in the rigor with which it marries a traditional documentary mode to political awareness in the service of the critical depiction of whiteness. As I have already noted, documentary photography has been underrepresented in the evolving canon of 'critical white art,' a category which has tended to emphasize more conceptually-minded work. The documentary photography present in Maurice Berger's exhibition on this topic was by Max Becher and Andrea Robbins and by Wendy Ewald. Becher and Robbins were represented by their "German Indian Series" (1997-98), which consists of portraits of Germans who attend cultural festivals in the garb of Native Americans, examining a fascination within whiteness for the appropriation of racial otherness. Ewald's *White Girl's Alphabet—Andover*,

Massachusetts (2002) is a project created in collaboration with teenage students at the prestigious Phillips Academy in which the photographer and her students created a kind of visual and verbal dictionary that revealed the vulnerabilities and ambivalence that underwrite both whiteness and femininity. Beyond these works, one might also note the work of Tina Barney and Nicholas Nixon (especially the "Brown Sisters" series, begun in 1975).[270] While the documentary-style photographs of all of these photographers bear some similarities with the undeniably if obliquely political works by Goldblatt addressed in this essay, the rest are less explicit in their exploration of whiteness and not as self-consciously political in their aims. Of these projects, Ewald's comes the closest to being as overtly political as Goldblatt's work, but even here the comparison falters. Perhaps working in the contentious atmosphere of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa sharpened Goldblatt's attention to the political ramifications attendant on his focus on the social construction of whiteness in his country. Goldblatt's work is important therefore to the emerging category of 'critical white art' in two ways. First, it allows us to see in the work of other photographers like Nixon or Barney things which are implicit in their work but explicit in the work of Goldblatt. Second, it breaks the path for future works that set out to self-consciously investigate whiteness through documentary photography.

Conclusion

In this essay, by focusing on van der Merwe's and Goldblatt's art dealing with whiteness, I have been able only to sketch the tip of the iceberg of this crucial theme in South African art. In doing so, I have tried to reveal, through case studies, some of the

[270] Tina Barney, *Friends and Relations* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Nicholas Nixon with Peter Galassi, *The Brown Sisters: Thirty-three Years* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007).

parameters of this practice, its political relevance both within South Africa and globally, its connections to art beyond South Africa's borders, and to ways in which the body of theory called 'critical white studies' helps us to understand this art's relevance.

The usefulness of considering the pervasive representations of whiteness in visual media from the standpoint of critical white studies is that, once whiteness is revealed to be as raced as any other subject position, it might cease to function as hegemonic. The recognition and identification of visual strategies that accomplish this task of 'racing' whiteness is evidently an important task. The employment of such a strategy might allow one to strip away some of the aura of invulnerability that is bestowed by the mantle of normalcy, to undercut the universalizing authority of a humanism that is, in fact, specifically raced, gendered and classed. I believe the work of Hentie van der Merwe and David Goldblatt offers an intriguing model of how such a practice might be undertaken.

Chapter Three: 'Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation': Coloured and Creole Subject Positions in South African Photography

West Indian poet, playwright and theorist Derek Walcott provides a searing condensation of Caribbean creole identity in "The Schooner *Flight*" (1979), a poem widely regarded as one of his best.[271] The story of a kind of modern-day Ulysses, Shabine, a poor creole sailor returning to the sea, the poem is told from his point of view. On the subject of himself, Shabine notes, brutally:

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.[272]

This ambiguous assessment, brimming with pain and pride, encapsulates the uncertain future of the hybridized creole subject position. Creole, a term once specifically applied to ethnic groups, languages, and cultures around the Caribbean or along the coast of West Africa, has begun to gain a more general resonance as a term useful in the theoretical discourse on culture. Its usefulness is grounded in the term's ambiguity, the way in which it encompasses characteristics of both fixity and rootlessness. H. Adlai Murdoch, working from the OED standard definition of the word, notes "the play of difference that the term implies, for indeed a creole subject or culture may be black or white, African, Caucasian, or East Asian, colonial or metropolitan, or, for that matter, the product of myriad ethnic and linguistic influences and origins."[273] Applicable to language(s),

---

[271] Irish poet and fellow Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney describes it as "epoch making," adding: "All that Walcott knew in his bones and plied in his thought before this moves like a long swell of energy under its fluent verse which sails, well rigged and richly cargoed, into the needy future." Seamus Heaney, "The Language of Exile," in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1993), 304.

[272] Derek Walcott, "The Schooner *Flight*," in *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 55.

[273] H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 4. As this quote makes clear, the term 'creole' is remarkably multi-faceted. As Daniel

people(s), culture(s) and specific aspects of culture (like food or music), the term creole has had a wide usage and varied meanings. Initially describing people, the term came eventually to describe the language and culture associated with those people. Today, the term's meaning has expanded further and its cognate 'creolization' designates the socio-historical *process* by which creole people and things come to be created.[274] In recent years, therefore, *créolité* and creolization, alternate terms for the process by which creole peoples and things are created, have been the subject of much scholarly scrutiny and consideration as a means of theorizing hopeful political possibilities within the ever-accelerating processes of cultural mixing and the reconfigured economic relations that define globalization.[275] Grounded in and developed under *particular* social, historical and economic circumstances, the peoples and cultural processes which *creolité* and

---

Balderston notes, "One of the key terms used to describe New World cultures, this word is famously ambiguous." Daniel Balderston, "Creole," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana López (London: Routledge, 2000), 421. An effective summary of the term's uses and etymology and its ongoing historical transformation can be found in Robin Cohen, "Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power," *Globalizations* 4, no. 3 (September 2007): 369-384. Probably derived from Latin, the term was initially used in Spanish ('criollo') and then French in the seventeenth century to refer to the children of Europeans born in the Americas. As early as the eighteenth century, the term began to lose its racial exclusivity and came to designate "something or someone that had foreign (normally metropolitan) origins and that had now become somewhat localised." As Cohen notes, "The Creole had become different [from the colonizer], taking on some local 'colour,'" and enjoying "a figurative and emotional relationship with the local landscape and a social and sometimes sexual relationship with the local people." Ibid., 372.

[274] In addition to the aforementioned article by Cohen and book by Murdoch, useful glosses on creolization theory include Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999).

[275] J. Michael Dash defines *créolité* as, "A literary and cultural movement begun in Martinque in the 1990s, … shaped by Edouard Glissant's theories. It is as much a reaction against the Europeanization of France's Overseas Departments as a reaction against *negritude*. … *Créolité* advocates the use of creole and is centered on the diverse multi-ethnic identity of Martinque" J. Michael Dash, "Créolité," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana López (London: Routledge, 2000), 422. Key texts in the development of theories about creolization include Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité/In Praise of Creolness* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989); Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Important differences separate the writers associated with *Eloge* and Glissant. If one can generalize, the writers of *Eloge* anchor *creolité* in particular places while Glissant proposes creolization as a global phenomenon. Obviously, Glissant's theoretical framework is closer to my own, as I am moving the focus of critical gaze away from the Caribbean.

creolization take as their subject might provide a fruitful tool for making sense of chaotic contemporary globalization, which has a pervasive character that makes its outlines sometimes difficult to discern.[276] This chapter will explore cultural expressions of creolization in South Africa through the lens of photography by Ernest Cole (1940-90) and Berni Searle (b. 1964), who is also a sculptor and a video artist.

A socially-committed and politically-active documentary photographer during apartheid, Cole is best remembered for his work from the 1967 book *House of Bondage*, which included photographs by Cole, texts prepared by Cole with Thomas Flaherty, and an introduction by American reporter Joseph Lelyveld.[277] Produced after the photographer went into exile and never published in South Africa because of its anti-apartheid stance, the searing and trenchant book is a rarity there today.[278] Though there is demand for the book's reissue in South Africa, according to Peter McKenzie this is impossible, because the bulk of Cole's negatives disappeared into the chaos of his post-

---

[276] To take a prominent example of this discourse's rise in relevance, *créolité* and creolization were the subject of one of the 'platforms' associated with "Documenta 11" (2002). Curated by Okwui Enwezor and a large team of collaborators, the 2002 iteration of this massive Kassel-based exhibition was realized as a series of conferences, debates and events, or platforms, of which the exhibition itself was only the final event. Embraced in this manner, *creolité* and creolization are put forward by Enwezor as a critically important conceptual framework for understanding the cultural and political stakes of the art shown in the exhibition, which involved several South Africans including Kendell Geers, David Goldblatt, William Kentridge and Santu Mofokeng. Platform 3, addressing creolization, was held in St. Lucia in the Caribbean and included many important theorists, integrating figures from sometimes disparate Francophone and Anglophone discourses on the subject and including work addressing the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the Indian Ocean rim in an attempt to broaden and globalize the importance of creolization theory. Among those delivering papers and participating in discussions were Derek Walcott, Stuart Hall, Isaac Julien, Jean Bernabé and Françoise Vergès. In the introduction, Enwezor and his team describe *créolité* and creolization as a useful focusing of more general theories of hybridity. See Okwui Enwezor, et al., eds., *Créolité and Creolization: Documeta 11, Platform 3* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003).

[277] Ernest Cole with Thomas Flaherty, *House of Bondage*, with an introduction by Joseph Lelyveld (New York: Random House, 1967). Cole's most important work, this book is the only thing mentioned in his obituary in *New York Times*. After noting that the photographer died at age 49 of cancer in Manhattan's New York Hospital, the obituary adds: "For many Westerners, [*House of Bondage*] was their first sight of what life was like for blacks in the South African mines, compounds and townships." "Ernest Cole Dies at 49; Recorder of Apartheid," *New York Times*, 19 February 1990, A18.

[278] I was informed by a gallery assistant in Cape Town that he sometimes purchased copies of the book while traveling abroad, knowing he would turn a tidy profit on the resale market when he returned home.

exile life.[279] Though photographs by Cole from the 1960s sometimes illustrated later propaganda tracts produced by the international opposition to apartheid, the photographer's main work is confined within *House of Bondage*.[280] Today, though several of the photographs from this book are displayed at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg and some are held by the South African National Gallery, Cole is, as David Goldblatt laments, "[t]ragically lost to us," his "unequalled work on what it meant to be black under apartheid … yet to be fully appreciated."[281] Though a chapter from a new book by Darren Newbury tries to unearth and restore the original context for the making of Cole's photographs and a perceptive (though short) assessment of Cole's work can be found in Allan Sekula's essay "The Body and the Archive," in general, the photographer's work remains well-known only to photographic cognoscenti within South Africa and is under-analyzed outside the country.[282] This chapter employs creolization theory to provide a theoretical framework for the reappraisal of his photographs.

Berni Searle, on the other hand, is an increasingly prominent contemporary multimedia artist, whose work has been frequently exhibited around the world and is featured in several monographs.[283] This South African artist is particularly well-suited to

---

[279] McKenzie, interview with author, 12 July 2007.
[280] See International Defence and Aid Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Children under Apartheid: In Photographs and Text* (London: IDAF, 1980), 34, 81; or see International Defence and Aid Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Women under Apartheid: In Photographs and Text* (London: IDAF, 1981), 51. To give a sense for the context of Cole's work, other photographers whose work appears in these books include Steve Bloom, Peter Magubane, Tony McGrath and John Seymour.
[281] Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Intersections*, 96.
[282] Darren Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009) 173-218; Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 62-64.
[283] Berni Searle's bibliography includes: Berni Searle, *Berni Searle* (Cape Town: Bell Roberts, 2003); Berni Searle, *Berni Searle: Fresh* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2003), Berni Searle, *Berni Searle: Vapour* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2004); Sophie Perryer, ed., *Berni Searle: About to Forget* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2005); Berni Searle, *Berni Searle: Approach* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006). Interpretive assessments of Searle's work include Liese van der Watt, "Tracing Berni Searle," *African Arts* vol. 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 74-9.

a nuanced discussion about the place of creolization in South African history. Her own family history traces a network of cultural encounters from Mauritius to Saudi Arabia to Germany England and South Africa, and her work addresses, sometimes obliquely and sometimes more explicitly, both her own multicultural heritage and the effects of racism and colonialism on this history.[284] At the same time, she resists easy classifications, grounding the authenticity of her creole subject position not in her multicultural or multiracial family history but in the quality of her artistic interventions. Her creoleness is expressed not by who she *is* but rather by what she *does*, in the ways it is articulated through art.

Searle is perhaps best-known for her frequent employment of spices as part of her work, a theme which will be considered in depth in this essay. She began her career exhibiting sculpture and installation art, as, for example, at the "2nd Johannesburg Biennale" (1997) where she exhibited site-specific, spice-based work called *Com-fort* (1997), which I will be discussing later. Many of her more recent projects have had linked (but separate) video-based and photo-based realizations. Searle conceives of the photographs as independent works of art and not simply as stills from her videos, so the photographs are made with a separate camera, often operated by South African art photographer Jean Brundrit.[285] While Searle may not consider herself a photographer, she was included in the exhibition "New Photography 2007" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and in "Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography" at

---

[284] Annie E. Coombes, "Memories Are Made of This," in Berni Searle, *Berni Searle: Fresh* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2003), 14.

[285] Searle, *Berni Searle: Approach*, 112. This is an opportune moment to note that Searle fits into my story of South African photography less gracefully than many of the others discussed here. Though granting that she may not be a 'photographer' in the traditional sense, I feel that her presence in a high-profile photography exhibition certainly justifies her inclusion in this dissertation on photography's history in South Africa.

the South African National Gallery in 1999.[286] Among the many other local and international exhibitions in which Searle's work has appeared, some of the most notable include, "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art," a multi-site exhibition organized by the Museum for African Art, New York (2004), and "Global Feminisms," at the Brooklyn Museum (2007).[287] Searle has had numerous solo exhibitions, mostly at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town but also at venues in New York, Louisville, Tampa, and Cologne.[288]

Both Cole and Searle tactically employ creole subject positions that root themselves in the local specificity of South African history and identity—and, especially, in the history of the diverse, multi-racial population group known in South Africa as 'coloured'—but also float in global currents that are the constantly reinforcing cause and effect of a globalizing and ever more globalized culture.[289] Culturally and artistically,

---

[286] Martha Schwendener, "This Year's Models: Searching for Fresh Approaches in Photography" *New York Times*, 26 November 2007, E5.

[287] Other important exhibitions include "Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa," curated by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe for the 49th Venice Biennale (2001); "TEXTures: Word and Symbol in Contemporary African Art," at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (2005); and "Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body," at the San Diego Museum of Art (2009).

[288] Besides the Michael Stevenson Gallery, other venues for solo exhibitions by Searle include the Axis Gallery in New York, Seippel Gallery in Cologne, the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, and the USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, Florida.

[289] The term 'coloured' refers to a population of multiracial South Africans whose history stretches back to the founding of the Dutch colony in the seventeenth century and the arrival of whites and Asian slaves at the southern tip of Africa. Needless to say, it is an immensely controversial term with an incredibly complex history of usage. All this will be touched on in greater detail later in this chapter. But already one is faced with the problem of whether or not to capitalize the word. Mohamed Adhikari describes some of the intricate factors that enter into such a choice: "During the apartheid period and after, some scholars, myself included, refused to capitalize the first letter of the term *Coloured* in order to indicate both opposition to the enforced classification of people into racial and ethnic categories and distaste for ethnocentric values. … In this study, however, I resort to the more normal practice of capitalizing the 'C word' … This is partly a response to the gradual normalization of South African society in the postapartheid period and partly in recognition of a growing grass-roots sentiment neatly expressed by journalist Paul Stober: 'As a distinct ethnic group with over three million members, we deserve a capital letter.'" Mohammed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), xv. There are those who would contest the idea that 'coloureds' represent a distinct ethnic group, just as there are those who would contest the capital 'c.' Rather than weigh in definitively on these debates, I prefer to deploy the term un-capitalized and in quotations, alluding in this manner to its complicated history and unsettled present.

photographers like Cole, artists like Searle, and others, including Peter McKenzie and Lolo Veleko, whose work is considered elsewhere in this dissertation, endeavor to cross-fertilize the local and global, articulating one within the other in a constantly evolving process of cultural blending, in a manner which evokes the kind of hybridization described by theorists of creolization.[290] Like Walcott's Shabine, South Africa's creole character is an amalgamation of many things, and, like Shabine, it may be nothing or everything. After a long period of legally-enforced marginalization during apartheid, it

---

Who is it I am talking about when I use the term 'coloured'? Again, Mohammed Adhikari's words are useful: "I am driven to the tautology of stating that in this study, the term *Coloured* is used to refer to those people who regard themselves as Coloured. And whenever it is necessary to mention people who are generally regarded as being Coloured but who are known to reject the indentity, this is indicated …" Ibid. In a further complication, one of the people I am discussing here, Cole, was considered 'coloured' only by the apartheid-era government but not by himself or by any actual 'coloured' people.

[290] I am singling out the work of Cole and Searle as part of a general strategy to give more or less equal prominence throughout this dissertation to photographers working before and after apartheid, to those working in a documentary mode and those mining a more conceptual or formal vein, and to those who subjectively seem to me to be crucial to or typical of the growth and development of art photography in South Africa. Though much of this chapter will deal with the politics of 'coloured' identity in South Africa, only Searle would really fit both the definition of a coloured person enforced by the apartheid regime and the one now common in contemporary South Africa. (As we shall see, however, Cole obtained from the apartheid regime legal classification as coloured person through subterfuge.) It might be worth noting here a few of the other South African photographers and artists working with photography who identify themselves (or are identified by others) as coloured. In addition to Peter McKenzie, who is discussed in the introduction of this work, this list includes George Hallett (b. 1942), a documentarian, journalist and for many years a political exile from South Africa. Among the books Hallett has written or compiled are George Hallett and Peter McKenzie, *District Six Revisited* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2007; Hallett, George, ed., with an introduction by Mandla Langa, *Moving in Time: Images of Life in a Democratic South Africa* (Sandton, South Africa: KMM Review/University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004); for an article assessing Hallett, see Marie-Christine Eyéné, "The Human Face of History," *Art South Africa* 6, no. 3 (autumn 2008): 58-63. Gavin Jantjes (b. 1948), a painter and collagist, was also a long-time political exile. He is best known for his subversive 'paint by numbers' book *South African Colouring Book* (1974-5), which combines fragments of found text (from figures as diverse as B. J. Vorster and Frantz Fanon), appropriated images (including some taken from *House of Bondage*), and Jantjes's 'instructions,' which includes commands like "COLOUR THIS WHITES ONLY" and "COLOUR THESE BLACKS WHITE." For *South African Coloring Book*, see Okwui Enwezor, ed., *Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994* (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 110-113, 473-474. Jantjes has also edited an interesting theoretical text, Gavin Jantjes, *A Fruitful Incoherence: Dialogues with Artists on Internationalism* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998). Cedric Nunn (b. 1957) was a founding member of Afrapix and has continued to document South Africa. A few of his photographs on the effect of apartheid-era industrial policy on workers are published in Omar Badsha, ed., *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* (Cape Town: Gallery Press, 1986), 78-81, and "Blood Relatives," an exhibition exploring coloured identity, was shown at the Durban Art Gallery in 2006. Tracey Rose (b. 1974) is a young artist who stages performances and creates videos and photographs. For a selection of her early work, see Tracey Rose, Kellie Jones, and Emma Bedford, *Tracey Rose: Fresh* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2003); Tracy Murinik, "The Gospel of Tracey Rose," *Art South Africa* 2, no. 4 (winter 2004): 30-36.

may be at the heart of an evolving sense of South African identity, or it may continue to be consigned to the margins. The future role of creole identity in South Africa depends on whether it is grounded on a particular group of people, the 'coloured' population, or is seen as a process of cultural mixing in which all South Africans participate. The parameters of this issue can only be understood through an analysis of arguments among theorists within the discourse on creolization, debates among South Africans about the nature of 'coloured' identity and its place within the larger fabric of South African society, and a discussion of how Cole and Searle reflect and articulate creolization as a manifestation of globalization in South Africa.

The way in which artists addressing creolization reflect the larger circumstances of globalization, especially the centrality of itinerancy and migration, is alluded to lyrically in the character of Walcott's Shabine, who is an archetypal creole: a man of the seas and islands, both sailor and poet, endlessly mobile and yet always attentive to the specific details of his surroundings. In a series of sixteen numbered photographs, all entitled *Waiting* (2003), which are linked in their conception and realization to a video called *Home and Away* (2003), Searle addresses the same thematic, investigating the intersection of culture with politics and economics in the global age **[FIG. 1A and 1B]**. Commissioned by the Fundación NMAC Montenmedio Arte Contemporáneo in Spain, these works were created in the narrow body of water which separates Morocco from Spain, Africa from Europe.[291] The photographs show Searle floating alone in these waters. She wears a dark blue or black top tight to her body and a white skirt over a red skirt, both of which float freely and gracefully in the water, and her clothes contrast with the white and blue tones of the sea. In the photographs, which differ from the video in

[291] Searle, *Berni Searle* (2003), 45-51.

this respect, she is seen from below, her skirt forming a delicate filigree against the shimmering textures of the water.[292] We see her body only in fragments—her feet are especially prominent—with the whole obscured sometimes by her flowing garments and sometimes by the contorted body positions she assumes while floating. In other images, she is concealed partially by a smoky, opaque underwater cloud, meant to allude to squids' inky mode of self-preservation. In each of these literally airless images, a dream-like, mystical quality is produced that evokes a return to the womb, a rebirth. And yet, on the other hand, perhaps this floating figure is meant to call to the viewer's mind a drowning victim.[293]

The location where these photographs were made would certainly support the latter impression. The small stretch of water that separates Morocco from Spain, Africa from Europe, is a major route for irregular migrants into Europe. Each year, thousands make this short but dangerous journey, and, in the past decade, thousands have died in the process.[294] Historically, these waters have been a site of sustained cultural contact: transected on the east/west axis by trade routes linking the Mediterranean with the Atlantic, the straits were frequently crossed by armies moving north or south, most notably Arab and Berber armies who made Spain for centuries an integral part of the

---

[292] One precedent for this view is *Weeki Wachee Springs* (1947), a well-known American fashion photograph by Toni Frissell. Frissell shot a model floating in water through an aquarium-like window at a tourist attraction which normally featured 'mermaid' shows by synchronized swimmers. While Searle's color photographs from *Waiting* are fragmentary and have a menacing feel about them, Frissell's black-and-white photograph is still and crystalline. Toni Frissell and Sidney Frissell Stafford, *Photographs, 1933-1967* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), frontispiece.

[293] Searle's floating body is somewhat reminiscent of Ophelia's pose in the iconic 1852 painting of this Shakespearean character by John Everett Millais.

[294] Jorgen Carling, "Unauthorized Migration from Africa to Spain," *International Migration* vol. 45, no. 4. (October 2007): 3-37.

Islamic world, uniting that which is now divided, southern Europe and northern Africa.[295] As Albert Hourani puts it, from the eight century into the fifteenth, "the narrow straits which separated the two landmasses were no barrier to trade, migration, or the movement of conquering ideas or armies."[296] Today, what was once an avenue for the movement of goods and people, is now an interdicted border, less a point of contact than a line of division.

Searle captures this quality in her work: poised between birth and death, she marks a space of petrified motion, floating, like would-be African migrants, in a timeless limbo, able to neither progress to new circumstances or return to home. The straits are like South Africa in a way: a meeting point for African and European culture, a space of potential energy for cultural mixing long pent up and penned in by the forces of reaction. *Waiting* and *Home and Away* are somewhat anomalous in Searle's larger body of work in that they only indirectly speak to the specific history and culture of South Africa. But they make sense as a part of her artistic production in the way they speak to contemporary creolization and open a window onto the ways in which creolization theory might provide a window of understanding on South Africa's particular issues.

In the broadest sense, creolization theory is an attempt to quantify and describe certain kinds of interactions between cultures, especially those in which new cultural forms are created from the interaction of two or more existing cultural formations.[297] Historically, as Stuart Hall notes, the particular kinds of contacts to which the term

---

[295] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 41-9, 95-6, 284-5.
[296] Ibid., 95-6.
[297] As Robin Cohen notes, "When creolization occurs, participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in their original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms." Cohen, 369.

creolization refers are those that occurred "under the circumstances peculiar to transportation, slavery, and colonization."[298] Hall argues that this makes creolization always a kind of "forced transculturation," always "inscribed within power relations."[299] In this way, Hall argues that this term has a different connotation than other similar terms and that, for example, diasporic cultural mixing is distinguishable from creolization. The Caribbean, in which American, African and European cultures came together, served as a crucible in which the particular forms of creolization evolved, though not the only one I would argue. However, even if the applicability of creolization is broadened beyond the Caribbean, the theoretical paradigm's rootedness in the histories of particular places anchors it in both space and time. If creolization implies inequalities of power between participants in cultural exchange, as Hall suggests, but also is tied to particular territories, especially the Caribbean, then it may be a special form of hybridization. It offers a unique method of explaining contemporary cultural formation, especially given the extreme fluidity of cultural forms under conditions of globalization.[300]

---

[298] Stuart Hall, "Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the context of Globalization," in *Créolité and Creolization: Documenta 11, Platform 3*, Okwui Enwezor, and others, eds. (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 186.

[299] Ibid. Hall's point, it seems to me, is completely defensible in the broader theoretical sense. However, in the way in which the word creole is used in linguistics, every circumstance in which a creole language is created (in the terms of that technical discourse) might not be one of 'forced transculturation.' It may become clear at this point that, while I find this term and the theoretical discourse to which it alludes of remarkable utility for accounting for the work discussed in this chapter, the term's deployment in several more or less discrete academic discourses is something of a blessing and a curse, rendering it both usefully versatile and maddeningly imprecise.

[300] For a key text articulating 'hybridity' as a theoretical term, see Homi K.. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). On hybridization as a cultural effect of globalization, see Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, Or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple 2005). Cohen claims the term is usually used synonymously with creolization (implying a lack of difference between the terms), but he also complains about this state of affairs, ascribing it largely to a problematic lack of definitiveness among social scientists. He prefers creolization as an operative term more because of its connotations than because of precise definitional distinctions. Cohen, 371, n.3 382-3. Stuart Hall (partially) distinguishes creolization from hybridization, adding that, of these terms, "Creolization feels to me [like the term] we should be careful of infinitely extending, not because it cannot be seen to apply to other contexts, but because it is so deeply grounded in a complex historical specificity." Hall, 193. I would argue that South Africa is one of the locales of that 'historical specificity.'

H. Adlai Murdoch proffers an intriguing argument as to the relation of these two theoretical discourses, positioning creolization as a conceptual triangulation of hybridization and its other. He notes Homi Bhabha's understanding of the importance of hybridity as deriving from the way in which it exists as a 'third space' which displaces the original cultural moments and histories from which it emerges. Murdoch argues that,

> It is hybridity's role in formulating alternative discursive positions, rather than the binary framework driving hybridity itself, that becomes crucial in formulating an enabling framework for the Caribbean process of creolization, marking the division between a globalizing cultural hybridity and the specific difference grounding its regional instantiation.[301]

His argument seems to imply that creolization itself might mark a theoretical 'third space' between the extreme relativism of globalized hybridity and its opposite, which one could argue consists of a view that conceives, in its extremes (as, for example, in the work of Samuel P. Huntington) of interactions between cultures in which each culture is seen as having an essential, primordial character deriving from territory, race or religion and in which cultural differences assume a rigid and irreconcilable character.[302] Paradoxically, the kinds of cultural interactions described by creolization—interactions which I argue have occurred and are occurring in South Africa—destabilize fundamentalist assumptions of identity *and* anchor ideas of complete relativity. Creolization can be regarded therefore as a process that encompasses *both* fluidity and

---

[301] Murdoch, 5. For the passage from Bhabha from which Murdoch is working, see Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford, ed. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 221.

[302] On Huntington's ultra-conservative conception of divisive cultural interactions based around irreconcilable difference among more or less fixed cultural groupings ('Western Civilization' [including the United States], 'Islamic Civilization,' 'African Civilization' [including South Africa]), see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For one of the most persuasive and indispensable of the many critiques of Huntington's work, see Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006).

fixity, rootlessness and rootedness.[303] I am using the term and the theoretical apparatus to which it alludes to point to certain aspects of South African photography that can be characterized, in both process and subject matter, by the manner in which it simultaneously articulates and depicts the global and the local.

To understand the importance of creolization theory to the South African photography under investigation here, it is necessary to focus both on creolization as a cultural process and on the cultural manifestations of that process. Hence, on the one hand, this study focuses on how, in the hands of Cole and Searle, the process of creating photography mirrors the mechanisms of cultural formation described by creolization theorists, especially Edouard Glissant. In other words, these photographs evidence creolization as a process of cultural mixing and form of cultural resistance, and they do so not only in their subject matter but also (especially) in the cultural position from which they operate. On the other hand, in addition to showing evidence of creolization as a process, the work created by Cole and Searle *also* reveals creole elements in South African history, culture and identity through its subject matter.

As I will discuss, because of the creole character of South Africa's 'coloured' population, of one of its most important languages, Afrikaans, and because of the socio-historical circumstances which gave rise to these cultural manifestations, it makes sense to knit South Africa into the broader fabric of creolization, to extend creolization theory's

[303] If some argue that creolization theory triangulates the theoretical framework of Bhabha, on the one hand, and Huntington, on the other, others have suggested that creolization represents another kind of 'third space.' The work of Jan Pieterse suggests that creolization, like hybridization, represents a counter-theory to two dystopic visions of the future, positioned between fundamentalism (Huntington again) and a completely and infinitely standardized and uniform world wrought by the expansion of Western (especially American) consumer culture. See Jan Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 41-58. The stakes are similar, even if the frame of reference diverges. In this case, creolization can be seen as subversive of nationalisms and fundamentalisms because of its emphasis on global connectivity and of global consumer 'culture' because of its emphasis on the importance of local histories and identities.

geographical specificity beyond the Caribbean and apply its insights to an understanding of South Africa's distinctive culture. Historically, South Africa and the Caribbean basin were shaped contemporaneously by the same exchange of slaves, commodities and capital that spurred the worldwide expansion of European power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[304] Apartheid obscured the fact of creolization in South Africa by limiting the fluid interaction of cultures, but a contemporary recognition by artists of creolization's place in history may be one of the ways South Africa can continue to emerge from isolation and usefully participate in international artistic debates. In South Africa, as I will argue, beyond language, the so-called 'coloureds,' as a multiracial population, may be the most overt outcome of creolization and its attendant mixing of cultures and peoples. But, in many ways, almost everything in this country's culture—black, white, in between, and other—is a consequence of this phenomenon or a reaction to it. Cole and Searle both operate, in very different ways, from the creole subject position of the 'coloured.'

If creolization is the process by which certain cultural manifestations are formed, what are the results and where are they to be found in South African art and history? In Berni Searle's art, food is often employed as a metaphor for cross-cultural contact and for

---

[304] Since creole languages and cultures developed in more recent times in areas associated with the slave trade, those areas touched most deeply by Europe's global expansion in the early modern era, the areas most involved the global transfer of goods and people, are the richest areas for linguistic creolization: the Caribbean basin, North America, West Africa, and the Indian Ocean rim. Holm, vol. 1, 16-8. South Africa obviously sits at the nexus of these North Atlantic and Indian Ocean cultural spheres. Indeed, this was part of the reason for the arrival and eventual settlement of the Dutch upon those shores.

On the history of this period from the European perspective, see Glenn J. Ames, *The Globe Encompassed: The Age of European Discovery, 1500-1700* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008). On the African continent's involvement in this particular era of globalization, especially as it unfolded in the Atlantic, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On the ways in which their involvement in a globalized commodity trade made the Dutch into the world's first modern economy, see Jan De Vries and A. M. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a social history of early Dutch settlers attitudes about race and the impact of these attitudes on later eras, see Keegan.

the creation of new cultural forms. In her video *Nightfall* (2006) and in a related series of photographs, for example, she points our attention to the grape and to the process by which the grape is transformed into wine. South Africa's wine industry is associated both with beginnings of intercontinental cultural interaction in Southern Africa and with contemporary South Africa's place in the global economy **[FIG. 2]**.[305] Like the other kinds of food, drink and feasting Searle represents in her work, wine played a crucial role in the gradual incorporation of Southern Africa into the global economic system, and, hence, a crucial role in the process of creating creolized cultural formations in the region. Wine is symbolic of the historical events which brought together in the region new crops, new peoples and new economic systems under the circumstances of colonialization. The introduction of a wine-making industry to Southern Africa was an aspect of the Dutch attempt to create on the Cape of Good Hope a refreshment station for ships of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), ships shuttling between Europe and the spice entrepôts of South and South East Asia loaded with slaves, cloves and nutmeg.[306] Today, this industry remains important to South Africa's participation in the world economy, and the country's wineries are popular destinations for tourists, featuring prominently in the country's international marketing campaigns.[307] Much of the labor for this early wine-making industry was supplied by 'coloured' farm workers. Initially slaves and, even

[305] Stills from the video and the photographs from the associated series are reproduced in Berni Searle, *Approach*, 88-101.

[306] On the founding of the colony, see Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, third edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 31-52. For a readable, journalistic account of the Dutch spice trade and its historical legacy, see Michael Krondl, *The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 189-262. A more magisterial account of the complexities of Dutch culture in this period may be found in Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). The story of the introduction of wine-making to the new colony can be found in Hugh Johnson, *Vintage: The Story of Wine* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 236-242.

[307] Scarlett Cornelissen, "Producing and Imaging 'Place' and 'People:' The Political Economy of South African International Tourist Representation," *Review of International Political Economy* 12, no. 4 (October 2005): 682.

after the end of slavery, long-exploited, these laborers were often 'paid' until the end of apartheid through a now-illegal system known as the *tot* or *dop* system, which saw laborers receive a percentage of their wages in the form of second-rate wine.[308] High rates of alcohol abuse and endemic poverty were some of the more destructive legacies of this system.

As is typical of her art, Searle addresses this complex history in an allusive and poetic manner. The video, filmed on location in the heart of South African wine country, is shown on multiple screens on a v-shaped projection with a soundtrack featuring popular South African singer Zolani Mahola. In it, Searle interacts with an enormous mountain of discarded grape skins, sometimes climbing this mountain, sometimes falling down it, sometimes immersing herself in it. There is work here, an ecstatic kind of labor seen most clearly in the video's right-hand projection. The brightest of the three screens, it begins with a view of a bright blue sky soon partially obscured by a cascade of grapes. Searle is soon revealed, and the viewer sees her dancing atop the mound in a kind of trance-like state, turning slowly, arms raised. Her movements evoke the actions required to produce wine, the stomping of grapes that begins a process that can turns a prosaic fruit, through fermentation, into an almost magically potent elixir. As Felipe Fernández-Armesto notes, "Fermentation is … magical, because it can turn a boring, staple grain into a potion that can change behavior, suppress inhibitions, conjure visions and unlock

[308] Shelia Patterson, *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A Study of the Status of the Cape Coloured People within the Social Structure of the Union of South Africa* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1952), 82-3. Patterson notes in a somewhat overly judicious way the manner in which this system served as a tool in the arsenal of racial exploitation: "Behind both the tot-system and the system of part-payment in kind customary on farms throughout the country, there may … lurk the feeling, conscious or unconscious, that the established status-hierarchy is more easily maintained if the labourer is kept on a low economic level, without the independence … that a higher cash wage would bring, or the incentive to better his lot by hard work." Ibid., 83.

imaginary realms."[309] Similarly, Searle's dance evokes religious rituals fueled by wine, like the ancient rites associated in the Mediterranean with Dionysus and Bacchus.[310] These rituals are a kind of celebration of the process of transformation itself, of how nature becomes culture through human intervention. In this sense, Searle's video and photographs from this project both address through their subject matter an aspect of South Africa's creole history (wine-making) and use the metaphor of transformation to call to mind the process of cultural mixing. Grapes' transformation into wine becomes a metaphor for the cultural transformations that create creolized forms.

In the video, as Searle continues to dance, the video's point-of-view shifts, and Searle is soon seen climbing the mountain of grapes. Reaching the top, she seems to fall asleep and then slowly tumbles down the mound. It is a remarkable sequence: her fall is precarious, dangerous-looking, but is accomplished with a remarkable lack of self-consciousness. It feels free, though perhaps the kind of freedom that is evoked is the sort that comes from absolute surrender. In the photographs created side-by-side with this video, several show Searle at various moments during her fall down this artificial mountain, including *Descent I*, *Descent II*, and *Descent III*, *Yield* and *Freefall* (all 2006). In the video, the left-hand screen shows a similar sequence of actions, lit here, however, by the dim light of dusk.

Day and night, night and day, climbing and falling, falling and climbing, the repetitive quality of Searle's activities on these two projections evokes Sisyphus undertaking labors never fully accomplished and never adequately rewarded. In this

---

[309] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Near A Thousand Tables: A History of Food* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 4.
[310] Antonía Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 22-5.

context, however, Searle's exertions are related most clearly not to those of this figure from Greek mythology but rather to the work of South Africa's countless anonymous 'coloured' farm laborers. As a viewer of Searle's video and the associated photographs, we are immersed in, almost trapped by, the burdens of the history of 'coloured' people, an interpretation bolstered by the photograph *Centered* (2006) **[FIG. 3]**. In this image, Searle is shown from above, resting on top of a mound of grape husks, a mound whose edges extend beyond the frame of the image. Searle's body is partially covered by grapes, and she seems to be in the process of being buried by the grapes, which, if we look closely, we can see are staining her skin and the white dress she wears. The effect is one that calls to mind death and decay. However, in the context of agriculture, decay also fertilizes growth and rebirth. The symbolic cycle of life portrayed in *Centered* can be read as symbolic of the historical circumstances of creolized culture and the 'coloured' subject position. Old ideas about what it means to be 'coloured' in South Africa must give way in order to allow new ideas about the creole character of the country to become viable.

Cultural formations of the past must 'die' in order for new cultural forms to emerge. Until the end of apartheid, institutionalized racism and an imbalance of power relations effaced the historical visibility of creole cultural elements, making their contemporary recovery difficult. Today, their viability remains an open question. South Africa's creole character may now be free to emerge, but, for this to occur, the cultural fluidity absolutely crucial to the process of creolization must be present. And, for this fluidity to fully emerge, the fixed cultural forms endemic to the apartheid era must die. At present, creolization in South Africa remains poised between being and becoming.

One of the themes addressed by Searle's work, and, indeed, an important question addressed by this essay, is whether South Africa's creole culture is manifested specifically by one people—the so-called 'coloureds'—or is instead diffused throughout the culture. The stakes of this question are of critical importance, because, if creoleness is found only among 'coloured' people, it represents a minority position on the margins of contemporary South African society. If, instead, it is diffused throughout South African culture, creolization may be at the heart of contemporary South African cultural formation. This essay suggests a middle ground: that the 'coloured' subject position might provide a lens through which creole forms are made readily visible.

In order to understand the parameters of this question of the location of creoleness in South African culture, it is necessary to discuss in some depth the history of 'coloured' people in South Africa, a history often explored by Searle in her art. The term 'coloured' has a very particular meaning in that country, one distinct from any definitions the word has acquired in the United States. In South Africa, 'coloured' was a racial category employed juridically to designate, within apartheid's elaborate system of ethnic classification, a multiracial population that was the outcome of centuries of cohabitation between indigenes, Europeans and imported slave labor—the human analogue of the Afrikaans language. During apartheid, the statutory definition of 'coloured' was not fixed, in part because of the ambiguous character of a 'mixed' group within a system of 'pure' racial classifications.[311] "Coloureds" were one of three kinds of non-white people legally identified, along with "Asiatics" (mostly South Asian, sometimes grouped as 'coloured') and "Bantu" (the majority, 'black' Africans). At this point, 'coloured' people

[311] The government's various legal definitions for this group are succinctly described in Vernon A. February, *Mind Your Colour: The Image of the 'Coloured' in South African Literature* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1981), 3-11.

were distinguished by law from other kinds of people through the "basic criteria of *appearance*, *descent* and *general acceptance*."[312] As Vernon February adds, this is "very flimsy indeed."[313] Later legal definitions, therefore, endeavored to ground legal identity only in descent, as in *Proclamation 123* of 1967.[314] The legal instability of the 'coloured' category was further accentuated by the way in which the law further subdivided the group. For example, the *Population Registration Act* of 1950 identified seven kinds of 'coloured' people in a disparate list that includes both people who would have considered themselves culturally 'coloured' and Asian: 'Cape Coloured,' Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, 'other' Asiatics, and, simply, 'other.'[315] Assembled in this list are individuals who would have had clearly different physiognomies, have spoken different languages as their native tongue, and manifested clear cultural distinctions. On the one hand, 'coloured' identity is assaulted by law through atomization. On the other hand, it is undermined by the extreme diversity of who gets included within the group. Partly this problematic 'coloured' identity is a result of the apartheid government's strategy of 'divide and rule,' but it is also a result of the ambiguity inherent in this identity formation. The apartheid government's difficulty in stabilizing the legal identity of the 'coloured' group is a result of both the destructive power of ambiguity in the apartheid system's taxonomy of race and the way in which the history of this group is thoroughly intertwined with the history of Afrikaners themselves.

---

[312] Ibid., 5.
[313] Ibid. February's summary makes clear how the legal definition of the 'coloured' group is sometimes affirmative ('The Coloured Group shall consist of persons who *are* …') and sometimes negative ('A Coloured is *neither* this *nor* that …'). This is a true sign of the difficulty a racist legal system had in coming to grips with the fact of 'coloured' people.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid., 4. The 'Cape Malay' designation is reserved for 'coloured' people who have historically professed adherence to Islam. Usually South Africans with South Asian and Chinese heritage were not considered 'coloured.' The apartheid regimes erratic definitions of race are truly remarkable in a system that pretends to rely on static racial identities.

The complex history of the 'coloured' population is visualized by Searle in *Com-fort* (1997), a site-specific work shown at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town **[FIG. 4]**. In the piece, spice covers the ground in a pentagonal shape that mimics the military architecture of the surrounding Dutch-built fort, whose construction began in 1666. A saga of arms and spice, the story of the 'coloureds' begins in 1652 when the Dutch settled the Cape as part of their quest to control the spice trade. The Castle of Good Hope was the physical manifestation of the white ruling classes' ideological management of race and resistance to impurity and of the colonial enterprise which brought spices and people together in this new environment. Insinuating this space hundreds of years later, the unattached spice covering the floor in *Com-fort* seems poised to fill the room with a messy, aromatic cloud, mimicking the untidy process of creolization that occurred on the Cape among both Afrikaners and 'coloureds.' Ironically, despite some Afrikaners' historical claims for the purity of their whiteness, evidence of their impurity and of their close connection to the 'coloured' population is not lacking. For example, the initially small number of white women in the Dutch settlement means that both the 'coloureds' *and* the Afrikaners are racially complex entities. While the lightest-skinned offspring of the early colonists and slaves would evolve into today's Afrikaners, the rest produced the contemporary 'coloured' population. Indeed, as Afrikaner theologian D. P. Botha noted, skin color is not even a very useful marker of distinction between the two groups: "many whites are darker than a great many Coloureds and yet are not denied their place within society because of this."[316] If skin color provided only a fraught means of differentiation, so did language. Unlike other groups within what would become South Africa, who spoke non-European languages and thus provided a clear point of contrast, 'coloured'

[316] Quoted in February, 5.

people mostly spoke Afrikaans, making them linguistically indistinguishable from white Afrikaners.[317] Also, aside from a sizable Muslim minority in Cape Town, most 'coloured' people were members of the Dutch Reformed Church.[318] Though they belonged to different (segregated) congregations, 'coloured' and Afrikaners mostly held the same religious beliefs. Whether grounded on physiognomy or language, 'coloured' as a conceptual category continually destabilizes the static conceptions of race and culture on which apartheid rests.

In Searle's piece, the spice stays pure, never spilling over the rigid outlines she has derived from the fort. Spices, a metaphor for the mixing of peoples and cultures, are held in check by inflexible boundaries which remind us of the force of arms that demarcated distinctions among people and ordered exchanges between Europeans and those they confronted along the frontiers of empire. Power structured social relations on the Cape, preserving, in the face of a fusion of races and customs, categories of white, black, and 'coloured.'

As a multiracial population the 'coloureds' could fit only uncomfortably and ambiguously in the mono-racial categories necessary to apartheid's logic. Discriminated against by whites and denied a place in civil society, they were nevertheless allowed greater privileges than the black 'African' population. On occasion, the ambiguity aligned with 'coloured-ness' has allowed that group to be mobilized in the service of political reaction and sectarianism. For example, in the first multiracial, post-apartheid

---

[317] In Giliomee's words, "During the entire twentieth century activists for Afrikaans were confronted with a key issue that was never confronted squarely. Was the Afrikaner community a racial community whose language struggle was subordinate to the entrenchment of white supremacy? Or was it predominantly a language community whose social identity was shaped by the struggle for the acceptance of Afrikaans as a public language co-equal with English?" Giliomee, 389.

[318] Ibid.

elections of 1994 the 'coloureds' of the Western Cape province voted *en masse* for the political party of apartheid, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party—it was, as commentators of the day had it, "a bit like Jews voting for the Nazis."[319] These circumstances are explained, if not excused by Joe Meeks, a 'coloured' politician: "My people are terrible racists, but not by choice. The blacks today have the political power, the whites have economic power. We just have anger."[320] Even with apartheid ended, many 'coloured' people feel (or are made to feel) uncomfortable within contemporary South African society. As many within the community say, "Before, we were too black to be white. Now we are too white to be black."[321]

However, I believe the ambiguity of its status also permits the 'coloured' to be articulated as a subject position rather than a people, a subject position that contests all sectarianism, providing a ground from which to launch a progressive political critique. Cole and Searle take up this subject position and perspective in order to emphasize that ambiguity inherent within the mixing of cultures which contests the power of white privilege and the ideology of racial segregation.

Part of the usefulness of the 'coloured' position for critical artists is the way in which it shades imperceptibly into both the black and white poles of South Africa's racial spectrum. Indeed, despite the best efforts of those in authority during apartheid, there was always some permeability in the boundaries between racial categories. Linguistically, socially, visually and biologically, the 'coloureds' bridged the gaps between groups that were supposed to remain apart. It preserved within apartheid's ideological rigidity a space of fluid movement.

---

[319] William Finnegan, "The Silent Majority of Cape Town," *Granta* 48 (Summer 1994): 242.
[320] "Coloured and Trapped," *The Economist* 339, no. 7961 (4 April 1996): 36.
[321] Ibid. The words are Hadija Majiet's, but she is echoed by many.

Addressing the boundary and bridging the gap between 'coloured' and white, Searle's video work *Snow White* (2001) takes note of the sometimes indiscernible difference between 'coloured' people and Afrikaners **[FIG. 5]**.[322] The permeability of this boundary during apartheid, and the desire to take advantage of the privileges of whiteness, led to the practice of what, in this country, is often termed "passing." In South Africa, a "coloured" who crossed the color barrier was described as a "play-white," and this phenomenon seems to be one of the powerful motifs in Searle's video.[323] In a dual video projection (one image shows the action head-on, the other from above), the artist kneels as her body is covered by powdery flour. The flour changes Searle's skin tone, but in a drastic and theatrical way that seems antithetical to the much more prosaic, if terrifying, process of pretending to be white under apartheid. As the flour falls, it covers her body erratically, marking her as only imperfectly white, and perhaps through this effect we sense some of the futility of pretending to be something other than what you are thought to be. The flour collects in front of Searle's kneeling body, and, as the video progresses, water falls from above, touching her body and mixing with the flour. She makes dough from this combination; an act of domesticity that reminds her viewers that the pretense required to "play-white" traumatically cleaved those who did so from kith and kin. In *Snow White*, Searle reenacts the drama of "playing white," ritualizing its mechanisms at the same time that she mystifies its effects.

In much of her photographic work, Berni Searle uses her own body as her ground: her 'colour' is a site of representation, but she always partially obscures her own skin, complicating any recognition of the biological basis for her own status as a 'coloured'

---

[322] Searle, *Berni Searle*, 31-35.
[323] February, 3.

person. In her series "Colour Me" (1998-2000), she covers her skin with spices **[FIGS. 6A and 6]**.[324] Here, rather than performing whiteness, as she does in *Snow White*, she works through creole-ness in a specifically South African fashion. Using spices allows Searle to acknowledge the trade in spices, which brought the so-called Malay slaves from present-day Malaysia and Indonesia to the southern tip of the African continent. Searle, who has Malay ancestors, uses the dense colors she has applied extravagantly to her body to point to this history but also to complicate it.

Spices like brown cloves or yellow turmeric attach to Searle's skin as a kind of fantasy of skin color, a parody of the imprecise but strangely powerful language of race and color. Searle alludes to the real resonances of words like white, brown, and yellow and to the metaphors that attach themselves to them, even as she exposes the unreality of any abstract racial identities grounded in the specificity of a particular pigmentation.

In "Colour Me," Searle puts her body on display, but uses the spice to insist that that this display is all surface, is without transparency. Viewers are denied the possibility of participating in the scopic regime that lies at the heart of colonial power. Looking at the works, one cannot see *through* the skin and cannot discern the inner character of Searle's subject on the basis of surface appearance. For Edouard Glissant, opacity is the opponent of transparency, and opacity is a characteristic of creolization:

> The poetics of relation presuppose that each of us encounters the density (the opacity) of the Other. The more the Other resists in his thickness or his fluidity … the more expressive his reality becomes, and the more fruitful the relation becomes.[325]

Remarkably, the space of opacity—the site of a resistance to penetration—here becomes a place of relations between people.

---

[324] Searle, *Berni Searle*, 15-21.
[325] Glissant from the *L'Intention Poétique* (1969), quoted in and translated by Britton, 18.

In Searle's work, spices perform precisely this double function of resistance and relation. Goads to appetite, aphrodisiacs, medicines, and historically arousers of all sorts of great passions, spices offer tastes that launched 1000 ships and aromas that evoke profound pleasure. Viewing Searle's work, we are denied depth of character and instead are confronted with the seductiveness of spice, which becomes a metaphor for the uncomfortable desires and physical passions that apartheid repressed and the post-apartheid state might unleash. While Searle can still note that "race is inevitable in South Africa," the forms that relations among these races might now take *have* become subject to new possibilities.[326] The 'coloured' category, which prefigured the linguistic and biological directions to which these new possibilities might lead, may also provide an account of how opacity and relation might structure cultural exchanges in the new South Africa, grounding exchange between individuals in an ethic that respects difference.

It is not, I think, a coincidence that spices and other forms of food associated with cultural contact have been employed by other artists in recent years, artists who, like Searle, are considering cross-cultural contact as a theme in their work or hail from a place where the cultural heritage of creolization is important. Another African artist employing products associated with the era of European expansion is Meschac Gaba. This Benin-born, Netherlands-based artist used ginger in his installation *Ginger Bar* (2003) to grapple with some of the same issues with which Searle is concerned. A site-specific installation for the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale, *Ginger Bar* was a functioning bar in the shape of a boat serving ginger-infused alcohol to visitors.[327] The boat, alluding

[326] Sue Williamson and Sean O'Toole, "Berni Searle: Art Bio," *Artthrob* (2000/3), www.artthrob.co.za/03jan/artbio.html

[327] The work is mentioned in Marcia E. Vetrocq's review "Venice Biennale: 'Every Idea But One,'" *Art in America* 91, issue 9 (September 2003): 83. Monographs surveying Gaba's output include Meschac Gaba,

to both the trade in East Indian spices and the Transatlantic trade in slaves to which Benin was crucial, augments the historical phenomenon alluded to by ginger itself: the globalization and domestication of what was once a geographically grounded and bounded commodity. Another similar work by Gaba is *Sweetness* (2006) **[FIG. 7]**, a large sculptural installation made from sugar sculpted into a fantastic cityscape comprised of iconic buildings from around the world. Including such structures as the Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building, Sydney Opera House and Taj Mahal, the work appeared in an exhibition in Liverpool called "Port City," which focused on the city's history as a hub for trade.[328] Sugar, a commodity that played a central role in the expansion of slavery in the Americas, has a history similar to the nutmeg and mace employed by Searle: highly desired, it greatly enriched Europe's capitalist economies and moved people around the globe, in the process changing profoundly the way people ate everywhere.[329] Like Searle's work, these pieces use products that have become unmoored from local food cultures and fully internationalized to compare and conflate the roles played by food and by art as meeting places for cultures.

Internationalized commodities like spices and chocolate have also been popular with some Brazilian artists, including Ernesto Neto and Vik Muniz. Like South African culture, Brazilian culture has numerous creolized elements. As in South Africa, Brazil's food cultures, its languages and religions are influenced by the mixing of peoples and

---

Meschac Gaba (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2005), and Meschac Gaba, *Meschac Gaba: Tresses and Other Recent Projects* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2007). Interestingly, given the comparisons I am drawing between Gaba's work and Searle's, Gaba is represented by the same South African gallery as Searle: Michael Stevenson.

[328] Tom Trevor et al., eds., *Port City: On Mobility and Exchange* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007).

[329] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin: New York, 1986).

social structures from three continents.[330] Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Brazilian artists have explored, like Searle, the seductive power and historical resonance of spices and similar commodities like chocolate.[331] Neto, for example, is known for his abstract installation pieces, which usually employ large-scale, soft, biomorphic sculptures that create an enveloping environment for viewers.[332] Neto sometimes fills these forms with spices, as, for example, in a 2009 installation at the Park Avenue Armory in New York, where the spices added to the intoxicating stimulation of the senses.[333] Muniz also has used spices for his photographic work, but this Brazilian artist is even better known for his use of chocolate, another food with a fascinating global history.[334] In the 1990s, Muniz created a series of color photographs of drawings made with chocolate syrup on sheets of white plastic, including *Action Photo* (1997), which recreates in brown chocolate and white plastic one of Hans Namuth's famous photographs of Jackson Pollock painting in 1950.[335] In these works, Muniz uses chocolate to create copies of cultural icons, alluding to a form of cultural play where originality is lost in the welter of hybridization. The hybridized, rootless indeterminacy of chocolate—originally from the Americas, it is now mostly grown in Africa—here also alludes to the rootlessness of other cultural products, like Pollock's action painting technique, which is transmuted in

---

[330] Robin Cohen compares and contrasts manifestations of creolization in South Africa, Brazil and the United States: Cohen, 373-378.
[331] On creolized elements in Brazil's art culture and specifically on the development of the theory of anthropophagia, Brazil's contribution to the conceptual armature of creolization theory, see: Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal, "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (May, 1998); and Simone Osthoff, "Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica: A Legacy of Interactivity and Participation for a Telematic Future," *Leonardo* 30, no. 4 (1997).
[332] Ernesto Neto, *Ernesto Neto: From Sebastian to Olivia* (Berlin: Holzwarth Publications, 2008).
[333] Dorothy Spears, "Ernesto Neto: Park Avenue Armory" (review), *Art in America* 97, issue 8 (September 2009): 143.
[334] Sarah Moss and Alexander Badenoch, *Chocolate: A Global History* (London: Reaktion, 2009).
[335] Andy Grundberg, "Sweet Illusion: Vik Muniz's *Sigmund, 1997*," *Artforum* 36, no. 1 (September 1997): 102-5. Muniz asses his own output in Vik Muniz, *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005).

Muniz's work from painting, to chocolate drawing to photography. Like Neto's and Muniz's use of spice, Searle's employment of this medium alludes both to specific aspects of South Africa's history having to do with cultural contact and to a broader history of art in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Their work enters into a dialogue with Gaba's and others, suggesting that the global connections created historically by spices like ginger and by other commodities like sugar and chocolate might be continued today through art.

If the work of Searle has international resonances with post-modern and conceptually-oriented artists like the ones just discussed, Ernest Cole's has played an interesting role within ongoing debates about the political efficacy of documentary photography. In an essay in which he links the history of documentary realism to police photography, Allan Sekula singles out the work of Cole as an instructive example.[336] He admires Cole's work as a kind of "photographic practice engaged in from below, a photographic practice on ground patrolled by the police," seeing Cole as someone able to counter apartheid's "physiognomic system of domination in the world, with a descriptive strategy of his own, mapping out the various checkpoints in the multiple channels of apartheid."[337] In an essay which is in some ways quite bleak about documentary photography's ability to counter dominant cultural structures, Sekula concludes his discussion on an approving note:

> The example of Cole's work suggests that we would be wise to avoid an overly monolithic conception of realism. Not all realisms necessarily play into the hands of the police … If we are to listen to, and act in solidarity with, the polyphonic testimony of the oppressed and exploited, we should recognize that some of this testimony, like Cole's, will take the ambiguous form of visual documents, documents of the 'microphysics' of barbarism.

[336] Sekula, 61-4.
[337] Ibid., 61-2.

> These documents can easily fall into the hands of the police or their intellectual apologists. Our problem, as artists and intellectuals living near but not at the center of a global system of power, will be to help prevent the cancellation of that testimony by more authoritative and official texts.[338]

I concur with Sekula's positive assessment of Cole's work and its political relevance, and believe Sekula's consideration of these photographs is helpful in pointing out how important these decades-old images remain in the canon of documentary realism. However, I also think Cole's work is important within the discourse around contemporary art both in the ways it explores themes related to creolization and in the manner in which Cole himself negotiated the politics of identity of South Africa's 'coloured' people. Like Searle, who explores the boundary between 'coloured' and white categories in South Africa, Cole explored the one between 'coloured' and black.

As a teenager, Cole managed to have his racial status legally changed from "African" to "Coloured" **[FIG. 8]**. Many worked to change their racial classification under apartheid's laws, seeking social and economic benefits. Jobs in certain geographic locales (for example, Cape Town) were the sole preserve of 'coloureds,' and the high rate of unemployment among the African population made racial deception worth the risk. Cole took this risk to travel and make photographs with as little government interference as possible. He became 'coloured' so he could make a body of documentary photographs that viscerally presented the injustices of apartheid to the outside world.[339]

Changing from "African" to "Coloured" was a means of subverting the power of racial classification, which the apartheid regime arrogated to itself alone. Seeking this change of status therefore entailed legal jeopardy and could easily lead to imprisonment.

---

[338] Ibid., 64.
[339] See Lelyveld's introduction to Cole.

It also meant humiliation at the hands of the system. Staffed by supposed experts at distinguishing gradations of color and parsing the complexities of race, the Classification Board of the Bureau of Census and Statistics was the place of arbitration regarding the racial identity passes that governed lives under apartheid. The tools at the disposal of the Bureau's experts included the notorious "pencil test," described here by Troy Duster:

> Applicants were told to place a pencil in their hair. If, when they were told to 'shake their head,' the pencil fell out, they were classified as 'coloured'—but they remained black if the pencil was not easily dislodged by a shaking motion.[340]

Cole was spared this humiliation and instead peppered with questions about his background. According to his friend, the reporter Joseph Lelyveld, Cole was "too dark" to expect to change his race easily, but he did have two advantages. First, he could answer questions in Afrikaans, the language of the "Coloured" but not the "African." Second, as Cole himself put it, he could count on the fact that "no white man in South Africa thinks a black man can outsmart him."[341] The government examiner, convinced that Cole would offer some verifiable lie, pulled one last trump card from his deck and asked the young photographer how tall he was when he was eight. 'Coloured' people supposedly gestured to indicate the answer to this question palms down, "Africans" palms up. Cole was too savvy to be tripped up by this bit of racial esoterica. As he later recalled the moment: "I took all the time in the world to answer … I stood up so I could do it properly."[342] Cole left that examination properly 'coloured.' He had successfully *performed* his new race and *camouflaged* his old.

---

[340] Troy Duster, "The 'Morphing Properties of Whiteness," in Rasmussen, et al., eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 133 n1.
[341] Lelyveld in Cole, 18.
[342] Ibid.

I wish to suggest here a relation between Cole's work and Eduoard Glissant's notion of camouflage—a strategy of resistance forwarded in Glissant's theoretical writings. A deferral of meaning through detour, digression, tricks, and disguise, camouflage is an integral part of Creole languages, and an outgrowth of their connections to slavery. Glissant argues that camouflage arises in Creoles for practical historical reasons: in his narrative, the slaves need to communicate without the master understanding what is taking place, and camouflage obscures dangerous meanings. As he puts it, "the Creole language was constituted around this strategy of trickery."[343] Cole's 'strategy of trickery' is evident in his account of his work, where quick wits and deception are the keys to his success. Picked up by the police for interrogation at a moment near the end of his work on the photographs for *House of Bondage*, he explained to authorities that "his pictures were for a story on juvenile delinquency among Africans."[344] Amazingly, his story was believed and the police suggested he might want to become an informer. Instead, he fled into exile in the United States with his negatives—fled to where his real intentions, his real attack on apartheid's evil, no longer needed to be camouflaged or deferred.

As published in the United States, in the form of the book-length photo-essay *House of Bondage*, Cole's documentary photographs present a remarkably thorough picture of apartheid's effect on the majority of South Africa's population. Cole's pictures from this book are suffused with righteous anger, but the narratives and captions which accompany them make clear how much of this anger had to be hidden, displaced, disguised or camouflaged by Cole or his subjects. Divided into 15 chapters, various

[343] Glissant, 21.
[344] Ibid., 192.

sections of the book explore such topics as the mechanics of repression ("Police & Passes"), poverty and economic exploitation ("Below Subsistence" and "The Cheap Servant"), inequality of education and healthcare ("Education for Servitude" and "Hospital Care"), and side-effects of repression like alcoholism ("Shebeens & Bantu Beer"). Cole also tries to provide some nuance to his portrait of black South Africa, depicting the complexities of class and identity in this era in a chapter entitled "African Middle Class."

He closes the book with a chapter called "Banishment," which depicts the perils faced by those who opposed the apartheid regime. At great personal risk, Cole traveled into the countryside to interview and photograph individuals sentenced to internal exile, "almost entirely cut off from society."[345] It was, Cole claims, one of "the cruelest and most effective weapon[s] that the … government has devised to punish its foes and to intimidate potential opposition."[346] Cole's visit with the banished people at the isolated camp of Frenchdale was unauthorized and conducted with subterfuge: he arranged to have a friend drop him off and pick him up because a car from the city would have aroused immediate suspicion. Even so, the camp saw visitors so infrequently that the car's tracks were noticed and the police arrived to investigate. While Cole hid in the bush, the banished residents of Frenchdale greeted police questions with silence: "They fell silent, staring at the police with vacant and listless eye[s]."[347] Already "at the end of the line," these people "had little to fear from their noncooperation."[348] As is the case with many of the photographs in Cole's book, had the photographer been caught in the

[345] Cole, 179.
[346] Ibid., 176.
[347] Ibid., 179.
[348] Ibid.

act of making of them he faced potential imprisonment. As is also often the case with the presentation of these photographs in *House of Bondage*, documentary images designed to reveal the 'truth' about apartheid are paired with texts that discuss the high-degree of dissimulation necessary for the creation of those images.

Cole's book begins with a pictorial essay on the conditions of South Africa's mines, suggesting an economic basis for the maintenance racial inequality. Here again, Cole was required to conceal his real goals as a photographer. He initially visited the mines as a photographer with *Drum* magazine as part of project to create an advertising supplement to the magazine that would help the mines attract new workers. Knowing the mine's "grisly" reputation, no one on the staff was keen on the project.[349] One day the main photographer on the project took ill, and Cole went to the mine in his stead. Shocked by what he saw, he "resolved to learn more about the mines," and went on to visit "ten or more big mine compounds on the Rand."[350] He convinced African guards at the gate to let him in, sometimes showing up so often the guards assumed he worked at the mine. Once inside, racism allowed him to work more or less freely:

> To the white guards … I was just another Kaffir and they paid no attention to me. As a result, I had considerable freedom to see what I wanted to see.[351]

What he saw, and photographed, appalled him.

During apartheid, mines were terrible, dangerous places to work, with rural laborers, unable to earn anything off of the marginal lands to which they were confined,

---

[349] Ibid., 22. Unusually, *Drum* magazine's staff was multiracial and many of those who worked for the magazine were opposed to apartheid. This was especially true of the photographers. On *Drum*, see Okwui Enwezor, "A Critical Presence: *Drum* Magazine in Context," in *In/sight: African Photographs, 1940 to the Present*, Clare Bell, ed. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 179-228.
[350] Cole, 23.
[351] Ibid.

forced to sign long-term contracts that took them away from their families for months at a time and required them to work in unsafe conditions for long hours at a wage of less than a dollar a day.[352] Treated as if they were completely disposable cannon fodder, the indignity and exploitation endured by these men for their meager wages is crystallized by a photograph Cole captions: "During group medical examination … the nude men are herded through a string of Doctor's offices."[353] In the photograph, which spreads across two full pages, we see a dozen completed naked men standing in a row, lined up against a wall **[FIG. 9]**. The would-be miners are facing away from us with their arms raised high above their heads, ready for inspection by an unseen, but almost certainly white, doctor. Cole's text notes the paltry sums paid to men who are injured on the job—a little more than a thousand dollars paid out in increments of less than ten dollars a month to a man who had lost two legs above the knee—adding plausibility to this interpretation of the image. These men are completely anonymous in Cole's photograph, dehumanized and interchangeable as they are judged by the unseen doctor as if they were pieces of meat. Like most of the photographs in *House of Bondage*, the image is tightly focused on Cole's subjects, allowing us to see the scene through the photographer's eyes and to share in his shock. However, the textual context of this image and others like it always forces us to understand that it is Cole's trickery that gains us access to these scenes.

This strategy of dissimulation is especially legible in Cole's photographs of *tsotsi*, juveniles who managed to live outside the system through a life of crime. As Cole writes in the caption of a close-up picture of two tough-looking *tsotsis* sharing a marijuana cigarette: "These are tsotsis, youths who have turned to crime rather than work as white

[352] Ibid., 22-3.
[353] Ibid., 31. The photograph appears on pages 28-9.

men's gardeners or messengers—the usual jobs available to young blacks" **[FIG. 10]**.[354] In this tightly-cropped image Cole focuses on the men's faces and hands, showing us only a glimpse of the stylish dress for which *tsotsi* were so well-known. The sharp-dress and individual style typical of *tsotsi* can be seen more clearly in a photograph by Bob Gosani from *Drum* from the 1950s.[355] In this photograph, five gangsters sit in a sleek convertible, wearing attractive, flashy clothes. Cole tends to eschew the kind of glamour depicted in Gosani's photograph, portraying instead the criminality and chaos that define the *tsotsis*' existence. Nevertheless, the *tsotsi* are the ambivalent heroes of Cole's tale, the subject of a chapter that sits at the heart of his book.

Given the connection between *tsotsi* and the creolized language sometimes known as Tsotsi Taal, it is interesting to find these figures as representations of resistance in Cole's work.[356] Though *tsotsi* are violently predatory and their resistance to apartheid disorganized and imperfect—they were typically regarded with suspicion and distaste by the politically organized anti-apartheid movements—*tsotsi* nevertheless carved a space of creolized cultural resistance through fashion, anti-social behavior (including drug use), and, especially, through language. As much as their zoot suits and marijuana use, the creolized language Tsotsi Taal was a crucial marker of identity within this subculture.[357]

An obvious outcome of creolization is a creole language, of which both South Africa and the United States have or have had several, including Tsotsi Taal and

---

[354] Ibid., 134.
[355] Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-76* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann, 2000), 54.
[356] K.D.P. Makhudu explicitly identifies the language as a language of resistance: K.D.P. Makhudu, "An Introduction to Flaaitaal (or Tsostitaal)," in *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 402.
[357] As Glaser puts it, "A young male could be a member of the 'in-group' if he wore *tsotsis* [slang for stovepipe trousers], drank alcohol and smoked dagga freely, spoke *tsotsitaal* well, and demonstrated familiarity with the township environment." Glaser, 53.

Afrikaans (about which more in a moment).[358] Though the specifics of creole languages' syntax, morphology and phonology are of no particular importance to this study, several general aspects of the sociolinguistics of creole languages are of relevance to the general cultural history and art history under consideration here. As Pieter Muyksen and Norval Smith explain, it is critical to understand that "creole languages are not in the slightest qualitatively distinguishable from other spoken languages."[359] Therefore, that which makes a creole language creole must be sought not in linguistic form, but rather in the historical circumstances surrounding language creation and development. This means that, from the perspective of linguistics, "before we can claim a language to be a creole, we need to know something about its history, either linguistic or social or probably both."[360] Creole languages are always *historical*: they differ from ordinary languages "in that we can say they came into existence at some point in time."[361] If a language's creoleness is indicated less by form than by the socio-historical circumstance from which it emerges, whether in South Africa or the Caribbean, then these circumstances may shed significant light on the contexts from which creolized visual culture emerges in the same society.

---

[358] It may be useful to define this term as it is employed in linguistics. According to John A. Holm's *Pidgins and Creoles*, "A creole language has a jargon or a pidgin in its ancestry; it is spoken natively by an entire speech community, often one whose ancestors were displaced geographically so that their ties with their original language and sociocultural identity were partly broken. Such social conditions were often the result of slavery." John A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, vol. 1, *Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6. In terms of linguistics, the development of a creole language "is thought to be the opposite of pidginization: a process of expansion rather than reduction … Creole speakers need a vocabulary to cover all aspects of their life, not just one domain like trade; where words are missing they are provided by various means such as innovative combinations (e.g. Jamaican Creole [term] *hand-middle* [meaning] 'palm.'" Ibid. 7. This characteristic creative expansion of language which is seen to underscore the linguistic development of creoles is one of the reasons that creolization has become such a potent metaphor for the current conditions of cultural globalization.

[359] Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith, "The Study of Pidgin and Creole Languages," in *Pidgins and Creoles*, Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, Norval Smith, eds. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1994), 4-5.

[360] Ibid., 5.

[361] Ibid., 4.

As I have said, two of South Africa's languages bear evidence of creolization: one official, Afrikaans, and one very much unofficial, Tsotsi Taal (translates as 'Hoodlum' or 'Thug' language and also called Fly Taal).[362] Tsotsi Taal, a form of Afrikaans that draws vocabulary freely and widely from Bantu languages such as Tswana Zulu and from English, is of relatively recent vintage, apparently only dating to the early period of apartheid's institutionalization in the early 1950s.[363] Used mainly by young black men living in townships surrounding large cities like Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein, Tsotsi Taal "is regarded as 'street language' unsuitable for use in a family home."[364] Tsotsi Taal represented a form of antiestablishment communication, one which obscured the speech of those within the subculture from those outside it. In Cole's images of *tsotsi*, the creolized techniques of camouflage and trickery he so often ascribes to himself are displayed by his subjects, who, not coincidentally speak a creolized language.

In a sequence of two images seen in *House of Bondage*, a group of *tsotsis* use camouflage and deception to pick the pocket of a white man **[FIG. 11]**. In the top photograph, an older white man stands on the sidewalk of a busy shopping street, his feet set wide apart. He wears suspenders and his tie is tucked into his the waistband of his pants. He is staring angrily at a young black man who has his right hand under the white

---

[362] I am relying in part on discussions of these languages in two standard reference books on creole linguistics. On Afrikaans and Fly Taal, see John A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, vol. 2, *Reference Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 338-52. In Mark Sebba, *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), see, for a discussion of Afrikaans, 160-6, and, for a discussion of Fly Taal, 32-3. On the specific history of language and language policy in South Africa, see Rajend Mesthrie, ed., *Language in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[363] According to Holm, "Fly Taal apparently coalesced into its present form with the institutionalization of apartheid, when urban blacks were forced to move into segregated African townships such as Johannesburg's South West Township or Soweto, established in 1954." Holm, vol. 2, 351. Makhudu, who transliterates its name as Flaaitaal, places its origins earlier in the mineral rush of the late nineteenth century and sees its genesis among the mixed population drawn to the mines: Makhudu, 398.

[364] Sebba, 33.

man's chin. The black man seems to be saying something, while the white man appears struck dumb. Behind the white man, almost entirely obscured in the photograph, another black man is taking advantage of the distraction, apparently rifling through the white man's pocket. At the edge of the photograph, a white woman looks on at these events with evident concern. In the photograph at the bottom of the page, the aftermath of the theft is depicted. The white man pushes away at the men accosting him, who seem to have multiplied. There are now four young black men around him. In the caption, Cole describes how these thieves play on their mark's racism: "Whites are angered if touched by anyone black, but a black hand under the chin is enraging. This man, distracted by his fury, does not realize his back pocket is being rifled."[365]

Cole seems to recognize the limits of the kind of rebelliousness undertaken by the *tsotsi* in these photographs. Though their appeal is undeniable, their actions are, he argues, a symptom of inequality and not a solution to this social ill. Their criminality is a direct result of the social circumstances of apartheid and poverty and will persist as long as these problems persist. As he notes,

> The white community has the power to deal constructively with crime, but its response is cramped by its philosophy. It cannot see delinquency and crime in terms of the poverty and despair that encourage them. It cannot see how remarkable it is that so few Africans are, in fact criminals.[366]

Having acknowledged his misgivings, it seems clear to me that Cole's photographs of *tsotsi* display some appreciation for their ability to fight back against the system. Even if this ability is limited, it does exist. As he writes, "Better than most, the tsotsi knows how to beat the system."[367] Though *caused* by the system, gangsterism nevertheless put

---

[365] Ibid. The photographs appear on the facing page.
[366] Ibid., 124.
[367] Ibid.

tsotsis outside the system to some degree, opening a space for creolized cultural forms characterized by camouflage and deception, forms including their own language, Tsotsi Taal.

It may be less than surprising that Tsotsi Taal, a language of urban life, a 'language of the streets,' should evidence the kind of creative mixing that underwrites the creolized forms explored by Cole and Searle. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that Afrikaans, the Dutch-based language that in the twentieth century would come to denote the highest gradations of whiteness for apartheid's theoreticians, the very core of Afrikaner linguistic nationalism, was, from the beginning, an impure animal.

Today, Afrikaans is one of South Africa's eleven official languages—during apartheid it was one of two, along with English—and it is spoken as a first language primarily by two groups: (white) Afrikaners and (Afrikaans-speaking) coloured people.[368] That these two groups, kept apart by apartheid's racialism, speak the same language is a result of the language's origins. It developed through polyglot communication among the varied population of settler and slave on the coast in the seventeenth century. Three groups were largely responsible for the development of Afrikaans, groups brought together in Southern Africa as a direct result of the commercial endeavors of the Dutch: European settlers who arrived on the Cape in 1652; the indigenous Africans they found in this region, usually known as the Khoikhoi (or Khoekhoe); and enslaved people brought by Europeans mostly from Asia.[369] Adding to

---

[368] On the linguistic history of Afrikaans, see Paul T. Roberge, "Afrikaans: Considering Origins," in *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79-103. On the evolution of evolution of government language policy and South Africa's past and present official languages, see Sarah Murray, "Language Issues in South African Education: An Overview," in *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 434-49.

[369] Murray, 79. Sebba lists the languages in contact with Dutch, the lexifer or root of Afrikaans, as Creolised Portuguese, Malay, Khoi, and possibly German, French and Xhosa. Sebba, 160.

this already complex mosaic is the fact that none of these groups were themselves monolithic entities. Europeans coming to the Cape were mostly from the Netherlands, but also included German- and French-speakers. The term Khoikhoi describes many related subgroups.[370] And the more than 60,000 slaves imported into the European colony in the seventeenth and eighteenth century included both Africans and Asians, consisting of people from the modern-day countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Madagascar, Mozambique and Angola.[371] The groups comprising this remarkably diverse population were "quite distinct during the first decades of the Cape Colony," with boundaries between peoples "defined by physical appearance, culture, religion and language."[372] However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the isolated circumstances of this frontier colony eroded these boundaries in such a manner that the "[d]escendants of these groups had … come to share in a common vernacular that was unique to southern Africa."[373] (One must hasten to add, however, that the subsequent colonial and apartheid-era history of South Africa is defined by the reestablishment and reinforcement of these boundaries.[374] This is obviously one of the things that renders this earlier

---

[370] Emile Boonzaier, et al., *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996).

[371] Murray, 81. For a chart for the places from which slaves had been imported in the eighteenth century, see Vernon A. February, *Mind Your Colour: The 'Coloured' Stereotype in South African Literature* (London: Keegan Paul International, 1981), 14. In this list, the vast majority are from the Indonesian Archipelago, India and Bangladesh.

[372] Murray, 79.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Explaining the fluidity of the frontier era vis-à-vis the later colonial era, Timothy Keegan claims, "the lines of exclusion and inclusion … tended to harden as economic pressure on the frontier intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century." Timothy J. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1996), 31. Obviously, this should not imply the early Cape Colony was some sort multiracial utopia—the very act of colonization and the presence of racially-based slavery give lie to that notion. What Keegan is attempting to do is describe how attitudes hardened over time as the colony became more integrated into the broader discourse of European imperialism, making the sort of cultural mixing that defined the period during which Afrikaans developed less likely later. While noting that the "ideology of the colonial frontier was thus decidedly predicated on the ideal of racial or ethnic exclusiveness," Keegan adds that, "this did not imply that subjugation of the great mass of African farming peoples encountered beyond the Khoisan frontiers was either a practical

moment's cultural fluidity of relevance to contemporary issues.) The origins of Afrikaans as an African vernacular language, the youngest member of the Indo-European language family and the only one born on the African continent, were shaped by creative encounters among this varied population, encounters which were culturally creative despite being structured through inequalities of power and characterized by extreme displacement.

Debate has raged for many years both within the specialized discourse of linguistics and within the wider public sphere over whether or not Afrikaans, because of or in spite of its multi-linguistic, multiethnic, multi-continental origins, is technically a creole language. During apartheid, the answer to this question was freighted with heavy political stakes: "The possibility of Afrikaans having creole origins was embarrassing for the White political movement which had promoted it as the vehicle of (Afrikaner) nationalism."[375] The Afrikaaner architects of apartheid attempted to ground Afrikaner group identity on distinctions of race (whites are differentiated from non-whites) and, within race, of language (white Afrikaans-speakers are differentiated from white English-speakers).[376] Apartheid's theoreticians were therefore at pains to deny the creole character and multiracial origins of the very language that seemed to establish Afrikaners

---

possibility or even a desired ideal." He continues, "White supremacy as a total system of hegemony and subjugation" was a later development and "grew from the centres of power—meaning (in the main) centres of imperial power—outwards, and the other way around. It was not on isolated frontiers that such an ideal took root." Ibid., 36.

[375] Sebba, 161.

[376] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 50-53, 388-94, 428-31, 487-8. The author notes, "When [D.F.] Malan said that South Africa 'belonged' to the Afrikaners [in 1948] he did not have the white-black struggle in mind but the rivalry between the Afrikaner and the English community." Ibid., 487.

as a special group. A 'creole' Afrikaans, created through cultural interaction, would undermine the very idea of separate cultural identities.[377]

Despite the efforts of Afrikaner nationalists to obscure this fact, Afrikaans, while not a creole language, has a creole character. Holm notes that many believe that Afrikaans "could safely be called a semi-creole," that is, a language that has both creole and non-creole features.[378] According to Sebba, who notes a variety of reasons mostly related to grammar to support his assertion, "even those creolists who believe that Afrikaans has been through a process of creolisation would regard Afrikaans, at least in its standard form, as *partially* rather than fully creolized."[379] Whether Afrikaans is a 'semi-creole' or is 'partially' creolized, it is certainly true that it developed, as Sebba says, "in social conditions which *could* have given rise to a creole" and did so in other places.[380]

In an installation entitled *Julle Moet Nou Trek* [You Must Move Away] (1999), realized in collaboration with Afrikaans-language poet Anoeschka Von Moek, Searle grapples with the historical legacy bequeathed to contemporary South Africa by Afrikaans' complex development as a creole element in South African culture, an element whose creole character was consistently denied, displaced or misunderstood

---

[377] Sebba underlines the historical connection between the politics of race and the politics of language: "The idea that the races of human beings can be, and should be, 'pure,' has caused a great deal of turmoil and suffering in the twentieth century. Almost as obstinate and damaging an idea is the notion that language can be, and should be, 'pure.'" Purists "deplore language as 'corrupt' when it deviates from the written standard, uses too many foreign words, or involves a mixture of languages." Sebba, 4. South Africa is not the only place and Afrikaans the only language to recoil from creolization.

[378] Holm, vol. 1, 10. He elaborates, "The question of the role that creolization may have played in the formation of Afrikaans stems from the fact that its morphology is much simpler than that of Dutch, and a number of its syntactic constructions are found not in Dutch but in the African and Asian languages with which it was in contact." Holm, vol. 2, 338. Holm notes that the degree of creolization is greater in non-standard forms of Afrikaans, especially those primarily associated with multiracial people, than in standard Afrikaans, which is closest to standard Dutch and is based on the speech of educated whites. Holm, vol. 2, 345-7.

[379] Sebba, 161.

[380] Sebba, 162.

[FIG. 12]. *Julle Moet Nou Trek* was created for the exhibition "Bloedlyn" (1999), shown in Cape Town and in Oudtshoorn at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, a major Afrikaans cultural festival.[381] The exhibition paired visual artists with writers to examine the relationship between these two forms of art-making. Searle's installation for the exhibition, which she says "deals with aspects of a lost heritage … of language," incorporates a number of elements, including the text of a poem by Von Moek called "Trekslet."[382] According to Annie Coombes, the poem "uses the rich *double entrendre* of the Afrikaans vocabulary to conjure up an image of the language itself as a promiscuous woman."[383] The text of the poem, also found in the catalogue for "Bloedlyn," is read off a long glass vitrine, inside of which Searle has placed oil and water.[384] On either side of this element, Searle has placed two large boards on the gallery floor. On top of each of these is orange-colored clay powder, evoking the spectacular hues of the Karoo, a semi-desert region that covers much of Western South Africa. Using her body as a kind of stencil, the artist created reverse-silhouettes in this colorful earth. These silhouettes, which recall the work of Ana Mendieta, another artist whose work incorporates a broad range of cultural influences, simultaneously offer an indexical trace of the artist's own body and a generalized imprint of absence.[385] Both of these life-size bodies are seen in profile so that the two forms seem to face one another

---

[381] Lien Botha, ed., *Bloedlyn* (published by the editor, 1999).
[382] Artist's statement in Botha, 10.
[383] Coombes, "Memories Are Made of This," 14.
[384] Botha, 11.
[385] Like Searle's work, which is about loss and displacement, Mendieta's *Siluetas* are in part about exile. As she writes, "My exploration through my art of the relationship between myself and nature has been a clear result of my having been torn from my homeland during my adolescence. The making of my Silueta in nature keeps (makes) the transition between my homeland and my new home. It is a way of reclaiming my roots and becoming one with nature. Although the culture in which I live is part of me, my roots and cultural identity are a result of my Cuban heritage." Quoted in Mariana Ortega, "Exiled Space, In-between Space: Existential Spatiality in Ana Mendieta's Siluetas Series," *Philosophy and Geography* 7, no. 1 (February 2004): 25.

across the central vitrine. Though they are not mirror images, each body is shown with arms raised over the head and legs apart as if running. These two matched bodies give the impression of being two long-separated sisters running headlong towards one another, arms raised in ecstatic greeting. Yet, facing one another across the always unmixable oil and water, these two figures are frozen, unable to complete their embrace. The whole installation has the feel of a collection of elements held in stasis, of parts meant to come together whose consummation is always held at bay.

Both the poem and the various components contributed by Searle to the installation take as their inspiration a Khoisan story recorded in 1936 in Johannesburg on the occasion of an international exposition.[386] Khoisan peoples are the indigenous inhabitants of Southern Africa, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists present long before the arrival of either Bantu-speaking groups like the Xhosa, Zulu and Swazi or Europeans.[387] The recording of this story, which is heard as part of the installation, is told by a man named ǁKhaku in both ǂKhomani and Afrikaans.[388] It is the story of a hunt, in form probably not much different from narratives passed among communities of indigenous peoples on the Cape for thousands of years. These narratives are the verbal analogues of the cave paintings and geoglyphs that dot the landscape of South Africa and represent some of the oldest forms of art in Africa.[389] This particular story, however, is far from ancient, telling of a hunter who is told by a white farmer that he has to leave because he is chasing away the farmer's gemsbok. It is a story of dislocation and displacement that

[386] Artist's statement in Botha, 10.
[387] On the history of visual representations of the Khoisan, see Rory Bester and Barbara Buntman, "Bushman(ia) and Photographic Intervention," *African Arts* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 50-59, 93.
[388] Artist's statement in Botha, 10.
[389] Peter S. Garlake, *Early Art and Architecture of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29-50.

describes how colonial encroachment devastated a traditional way of life but also created new cultural formations.

The installation pairs one of Southern Africa's most ancient languages with Afrikaans, one of the regions newest, a language which owes its existence to migration, trade and globalization. Seemingly presenting a stark contrast, the installation nevertheless foregrounds the telling of stories. The way culture is passed on, created and recreated through spoken word, writing and visual images. The installation is about loss, yet it is also about the creation of new creolized cultural forms like Afrikaans which is, in part, a result of interactions between Europeans and Khoisan peoples. The installation both collects elements related to the history of cultural transmission and transformation in Southern Africa.

One of Searle's recent videos, *Alibama* (2008), also offers clear examples of both the effect and the process of cultural mixing. The work springs from the traditional Afrikaans-language song, "Daar Kom die Alibama," which alludes to the sighting of the Confederate States of America blockade-runner, the *Alabama*, in Table Bay in 1863. This song's connection to the history of the United States is even more remarkable in light of its popularity with South African blackface minstrelsy performers in the nineteenth century and with modern-day 'coloured' carnival performers who call themselves Coons.[390] As in America, blackface was popular in South Africa in the nineteenth century with both white and non-white performers. Unlike in America, it has remained in use to the present day, although only among the 'coloured' men who participate in New Year's Day festivals in Cape Town. During apartheid, troops of

[390] On the cultural traditions discussed here, see Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999). The song "Daar Kom die Alibama" is discussed on pages 83-4.

blackface carnival performers, known as *kaapse klopse*, provided an avenue for popular resistance, often using satire to slyly attack white authority. Today, in a changed climate marked by new racial sensitivities, these performers and their colorful costumes have become an embarrassment, a relic of bygone days potentially off-putting to the swarms of tourists Cape Town hopes to attract. In the video, this song is performed not by the so-called Coons, but rather by a Cape Malay choir, one of a different kind of troupe whose more restrained performances are also associated with New Year's celebrations. Also clubs, these all-male groups take their name from the colonial term applied in earlier centuries to slaves brought to South Africa from what is now Malaysia and Indonesia by the Dutch. Performing a repertoire of songs ranging from Dutch folk songs to American pop songs, these choirs also display the influence of Asian and Islamic singing styles. The choirs are accompanied by instrumentalists playing guitars, mandolins, banjos, the traditional *ghoema* drum, and sometimes other stringed instruments. In competition, they wear suits and ties, and they never perform in blackface. The choirs are seen as more dignified than the Coons, but many members of the minstrel troupe choirs are also members of Malay choirs.

In the video, footage of the setting sun over Cape Town harbor is initially accompanied by the singing of "Alibama" by the Cape Malay choir. This is disrupted as the camera shows Robben Island and the report of the cannon fired daily at Cape Town's colonial-era Castle. The scene shifts to reveal a red paper boat floating in a water bath as black streamers trail around it, darkening the water. It is watched by Searle and her young son, and she begins to teach the lyrics of the song to him. He sings along haltingly, eventually laying his head down and drifting off to sleep.

Obviously, this video embraces culture mixing as a subject, deploying elements that relate to the remarkable history of contact on the Cape. Afrikaans folk songs, local iterations of blackface minstrelsy, choirs whose music encompasses influences from Asia, Africa and Europe: all these things are alluded to in the video, which also references the boats that plied the oceans to bring them together. Beyond this, the video also considers the mechanisms by which these cultural manifestations are created. Singing "Alibama" to her son, Searle is passing on to him a small piece of the many rituals, traditions and cultural artifacts that comprise a creolized South African identity. This is a painful legacy, and yet, in the video, the song, an embodiment of this legacy, becomes a kind of lullaby. Lulled to sleep by the song, one imagines it infecting the boy's dreams, no doubt to be combined with new and other elements. This song and landscape over which it travels in the video have meanings which are fluid and which must inevitably change over time. The passage of the song from mother to child in the video becomes a metaphor for the mechanisms of cultural transmission and mixture at the heart of the process of creolization. In a more specific sense, the teaching of the song also might become a metaphor for the lessons South Africa's creolized culture might teach the world.

This evocation of a humane and organic creolization of culture calls to mind a sequence of photographs from Cole's book, a sequence which contrasts sharply with Searle's manifestation of creolization's process and its possibilities. Almost exactly at the center of *House of Bondage*, Cole reproduces fifteen photographs across three pages, a sequence of images central enough to his purposes to warrant two of these pages being

reproduced again as the end papers to the book **[FIG. 13]**.[391] Each of these photographs shows a sign in either Afrikaans or English, or in both languages. Every sign is a written articulation of the principle of racial segregation, each offering some variation of "Whites Only" or "Non-Whites Only." Two telephone boxes sit side-by-side, for example, one with a sign reading "Non-Europeans / Nie-Blankes" and the other with a matching sign, "Blankes / Europeans."[392] Cole's pictures of these square and rectangular signs are organized into little boxes and rectangles on the page, separated by almost invisible black borders which make them seem to blur together into one overwhelming image. In *House of Bondage*, the layouts usually feature only one or two photographs on each page, and, when multiple photographs are shown, they are separated by white borders. By contrast, the proliferation of photographs on these pages and the black boundaries serve to emphasize the actual proliferation of such signs across the landscape of the country. As Cole writes, "The infectious spread of *apartheid* into the smallest detail of daily living has made South Africa a land of signs."[393] These pages offer a glimpse at apartheid's discursive power, at the way segregation is enacted through the written language of street signs and through the legal apparatus that requires these signs. Ultimately, the signs pictured by Cole are all stop signs, each standing in the way of cultural contact, each symbolic of the government's efforts to staunch the free flow of cultural interaction. Searle's *Alibama* and Cole's sequence of photographs suggest a choice between the fluid interaction cultures and their strict segregation. In contemporary circumstances, one choice opens onto creolization while the other recapitulates apartheid.

---

[391] The photographs are introduced by a text labeled "For Whites Only:" Cole, 82-5.
[392] A colonial legacy, the euphemism 'Europeans' would disappear over time in favor of the blunter term 'White,' but its meaning is clear enough here.
[393] Ibid., 82.

The work of Cole and Searle both represents the effects of creolization and enacts the process of creolization. This allows their work to articulate important but too-often overlooked aspects of South African history and speak more broadly to global audiences about the mixing of cultures. Using the discourse of creolization to understand their work allows us to launch from the specificity of circumstances in South Africa and suggest the possibility that the model offered by the work of Cole and Searle might have global implications. South Africa's ongoing metamorphosis from bastion of white power to cauldron of creolization should be looked at closely by those seeking to intervene in debates over immigration in the United States, or over the complicated process of urbanization in the Southern hemisphere. Whether South Africa will continue to evolve into a model of multiracialism and true democracy, a shining beacon for the rest of Africa and the world, is still open to question. The current marginality of 'coloured' people raises questions. But the creole, 'coloured' positions worked through strategically by Cole and Searle gives grounds for the hope of progress and for the continued elaboration of an important model of critical artistic practice. It is an important project, if a precarious one.

Chapter Four: Photography after Apartheid?
Mikhael Subotzky, Zanele Muholi and 'Lolo' Veleko

In the Introduction and in each of the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have discussed photographers active both before and after the end of apartheid, with the exceptions of Cole, van der Merwe and Searle (to some extent). Cole died before apartheid ended. My considerations of van der Merwe and Searle, whose careers have mostly unfolded since the end of apartheid, focused on the presence of the past in the present, on the ways in which their work addresses continuities in the South African experience, like the historical legacies of white colonialism and the roots of creolization in South Africa. So far, then, this dissertation has largely considered photography in South Africa from the late 1960s to the present as a continuous phenomenon. Looking across this time frame for similarities in the artistic practices and commitments of these women and men, I have found several areas of common interest: all endeavor to analyze through photography political and social structures, to create through art a non-racist, multiracial South African culture, and to construe artistic practice in the broadest possible sense, where the goal of the photographer is not merely to make photographs but to educate for and collaborate within the formation of civil society. As I have argued, by intertwining these three efforts, the South African photographers under discussion here work politically both by crafting photography and by articulating themselves as citizens of a South Africa whose values are truly democratic.

In this chapter, I will look at the work of three young photographers, all of whom have seen their careers flourish since the end of apartheid: Mikhael Subotzky (b. 1981), Zanele Muholi (b. 1972) and Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko (b. 1977). Unlike van der Merwe and Searle, these photographers all operate within the traditions of South African

documentary photography. Subotzky's uncle is well-regarded South African photographer Gideon Mendel, who Subotzky thanks in his first published photobook as his "mentor and teacher."[394] The young photographer's commitment to a certain brand of 'concerned photography' has been recognized by his nomination to the Magnum photographer's collective in 2007.[395] Both Zanele Muholi and Lolo Veleko attended the Market Photography Workshop, absorbing that school's understanding of photography as an agent of change.[396] Indeed Zanele Muholi regards Workshop founder David Goldblatt as her mentor. Like all of the other photographers under discussion here, these three photographers have engaged with socio-historical circumstances as more than just observers or recorders, and their photographs represent the outcome of collaboration, social service and political activism. These photographers model, through their practice, the ideals at the heart of a new South Africa, a South Africa now meant to exist as a reality and not merely an idea.

---

[394] Subotzky notes his debt to his uncle in his monograph. Mikhael Subotzky, *Beaufort West* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 80. Mendel is the recipient of both the W. Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography in 1996 and the Amnesty International Media Award for Photojournalism in 2003. For the photographer's apartheid era work, see Omar Badsha, Gideon Mendel, and Paul Weinberg, eds., *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Aperture Foundation in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, 1989). His recent work can be found in his monograph *A Broken Landscape: HIV & AIDS in Africa*. Produced in association with the NGO Action Aid, the book pairs Mendel's photographs with first person testimonies from people living with HIV/AIDS. See Gideon Mendel, *A Broken Landscape: HIV & AIDS in Africa* (Barcelona: Editorial Blume in association with ActionAid, 2002.

[395] Subotzky also received the F25 Award for Concerned Photography, Milan, 2006 and the 2008 ICP Infinity Award in the category Young Photographer. Subotzky, *Beaufort West*, 80. Ivor Powell argues that one of the main reasons for his success "is that Subotzky is so startlingly traditional in his practice as an artist in the photographic medium," adding, "Mikhael Subotzky's practice as a photographer is deeply, if unconsciously, rooted in and heir to [the] history of photography and journalism in the context of the South African psychodrama." Ivor Powell, "Mikhael Subotzky," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 22-23 (Spring-Summer 2008): 115-6.

[396] Much of the biographical information on these two artists is taken from interviews conducted by the author on June 29, 2007 (with Veleko) and June 27, 2007 (with Muholi). Both of their work with the Market Photography Workshop can be found in Brenton Maart and T.J. Lemon, eds., *Sharp: The Market Photography Workshop* (Johannesburg: Market Photography Workshop, 2002).

The photographers under discussion in this chapter represent an elaboration of rather than a break from the kind of South African photography I have considered thus far. My argument here is that South African art photography as a whole has not necessarily changed in style or genre since the end of apartheid. Clearly, as the work of these three photographers demonstrates, the importance of the documentary mode in South African photography has not diminished. The form this photography now takes has changed somewhat, however. These photographers and others working since the end of apartheid have tended to favor color photography over the black and white style common among 'struggle photographers.' Recent documentary work is sometimes also more adventurous in format. Subotzky, for example, creates large-scale panoramic views that offer a 360 degree view of the scene he depicts. The finished images bear little resemblance to the utilitarian political documents produced by someone like Ernest Cole. Finally, recent documentary work frequently eschews action. 'Struggle photography' was journalistic at heart and therefore favored incident and event over analysis. A photographer like Veleko, who makes quiet, still, carefully-composed images, follows in the idiosyncratic path marked out by David Goldblatt rather than in the mainstream of apartheid era documentary photography. However, even more important than this ongoing evolution of the formal parameters of documentary practice has been the change in subject matter that has marked the years since apartheid's end.

For me, these three photographers are joined together as a group by a common thematic concern typical of post-apartheid photography: the gap between expectation and reality in contemporary South Africa.[397] Of course, they are not alone in pursing the

[397] I should hasten to add that these three photographers are not and do not consider themselves to be part of any group, formal or informal. I am unifying them here and distinguishing them from the other

broader question of how the post-apartheid world is or is not like the one dreamed of and fought for during apartheid, and it is useful to provide some broader context for their work within contemporary South African documentary photography. One could also cite certain recent photographs by David Goldblatt and Guy Tillm as work which explores ground similar to that staked out by the three younger photographers considered here. For example, in the 2004 series "Municipal People" (examples of which can be found in his 2005 book *Intersections*), Goldblatt photographs municipal bureaucrats and elected officials: mayors, councilors, clerks, public relations officers, etc.[398] The faces of new municipal authorities governing groupings of towns and villages, the individuals in these portraits occupy positions largely without precedent in South African political tradition. In Goldblatt's portraits a few of his subjects appear 'in action,' standing at filing cabinets or inspecting construction sites, but most sit at particle board desks or in sparely decorated committee rooms. The portraits are dignified to be sure, but, completely devoid of emotion, they express none of the heroism one might have expected from those thrust into office by a triumphant revolution. These portraits are the antithesis of the imagery codified on anti-apartheid propaganda posters of bygone times. Without clenched fists and militancy, Goldblatt's portraits show people getting down to the much more prosaic business of actually governing. Tillim's series "Jo'burg" (2004) depicts urban renewal efforts in decaying inner-city Johannesburg and the often deleterious effect these seem to have on those they are intended to help.[399] Tillim's photographs show people struggling on the margins of society, still outsiders despite the change in regime,

---

photographers under discussion only because I feel their work provides a useful collective lens through which to address certain trends in contemporary South African photography.

[398] David Goldblatt, *David Goldblatt: Intersections* (Munich: Prestel, 2005).

[399] Guy Tillim, *Jo'burg* (Trezelan: Filigranes Editions, 2005).

clinging uneasily to their precarious high-rise perches as the city changes around them. Articulated in different ways by Goldblatt and Tillim, the questions grappled with by the three photographers specifically under consideration in this chapter are ones which are central to understanding what the post- in post-apartheid might mean: How is power wielded? For whom is it exercised? In what way do the forms it takes match that which was promised by advocates for democracy during the struggle against apartheid?[400]

In addition to their common interest in this issue, the three photographers addressed in this chapter form a coherent object of study in several other respects: they share their youth, incipient international fame, and a commitment to political idealism in their work and civic service in their practice. Mikhael Subotzky has pursued an ever-widening investigation of the place of prisons and the status of prisoners in contemporary South Africa. This is an issue which, given the previous government's use of the prison as an instrument of repression and the ANC's commitment to the prison as a space of rehabilitation and reeducation, provides a powerful lens on how things have and have not changed in South Africa in the last decade and half. Zanele Muholi, a black lesbian

[400] Some possible answers to these questions are proposed by Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. She argues that the post-apartheid government abandoned promises for economic redistribution articulated in the Freedom Charter, a statement of principals adopted in 1955 by the ANC and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2007), 245-73. She claims that the South African government has instead made a "decisive turn towards Thatcherism." With 22 million South Africans still living in poverty, she argues that "the results of its experiment in trickle-down justice are scandalous" Ibid., 271. Klein writes, "Perhaps the best measure of the betrayed promises of freedom is the way the Freedom Charter is now regarded in different parts of South African society. Not so long ago, the document represented the ultimate threat to white privilege in the country; today it is embraced in business lounges and gated communities as a statement of good intentions, at once flattering and totally unthreatening, on a par with a flowery corporate code of conduct. But in the townships where the document … was once electric with possibility, its promises are almost too painful to contemplate. … 'What is in the Freedom Charter is very good,' S'bu Zikode, a leader of Durban's burgeoning shack dwellers' movement, told me. 'But all I see is betrayal'" Ibid., 272. Though none of the photographers under discussion here specifically explores the macro-economic issues discussed by Klein, each address particular issues related in some way to this larger theme.

political activist, is likewise looking at the gap between the rights theoretically promised to lesbians and gay men by South Africa's progressive Constitution (adopted in 1996), which specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and the discrimination and violent assault actually experienced by many black lesbian, gay and transgender South Africans. Lolo Veleko considers a more diffuse question in her work: where is the space for and what are the constraints on free expression in contemporary South Africa? In one form or another, these photographers ask what words like liberation and freedom really mean in the new South Africa and probe for ways to picture the discrimination, injustice and repression that has survived reports of its post-apartheid demise. Taken together, these photographers tell an illuminating story about the present and perhaps the future of South African photography.

Part One: Prisons and Prisoners: Escaping Apartheid's Legacy or Extending It?

In a photograph titled *Jacks Shines Swanepoel's Shoes, Beaufort West* (2006) **[FIG. 1]**, Mikhael Subotzky depicts three figures in a small, open-air prison courtyard in an image that seems to encapsulate the tensions between South Africa's post-apartheid 'liberation' and its still-ongoing investment in old-style punitive incarceration. Taken in a small prison in Beaufort West, like almost all of Subotzky's photographs, this image is in color and is printed in a relatively large format, depending on the edition either 50.5 x 41.5 inches or 40 x 32 inches. Subotzky has captured the scene from a vantage point at the greatest possible distance from the figures, two of whom are in the center of the courtyard while the other stands with his back against one of the walls. Subotzky's

camera is also backed up against one of the walls that enclose the courtyard, a vantage point that enables him to reveal as much of the environment as possible.

The viewer is offered by this point of view the opportunity to systematically assess the entire mise-en-scène in which these three figures are situated, drawing his or her own conclusions about the nature of their interaction. The size of the courtyard is difficult to determine, but I would guess it measures around thirty by forty feet. It is open to the air, and, on the upper edge of the photograph, above walls which seem to be roughly eighteen to twenty feet tall, a patch of deep blue sky is visible. Most of the photograph is taken up by the walls themselves, which are capped with barbed concertina wire. Painted in two colors, a salmon-colored hue above and white below, the walls are stained in several spots, and the paint is chipped conspicuously, revealing the bare concrete beneath. The courtyard's floor is bare concrete and is also chipped in spots. The walls are punctuated by several windows and doors. As one would expect of a prison, these are sturdily built and designed to restrict access. From the evidence available in the photograph, the prison's physical plant seems to be in decent shape: though the stains and chips reveal wear, there is nothing to indicate deeper state of disrepair, and the bars and windows appear to be secure.

Though the photograph reveals a great deal about the physical state of this prison, Subotzky's image is most interesting for what it shows about the interactions between prisoners and guards in a contemporary South African prison, interactions that remain tense with imbalances of power and unresolved racial issues. At the center of Subotzky's photograph are a guard and an inmate. The inmate is black, the guard white, and both of them wear uniforms. Swanepoel, the guard, wears an ill-fitting, olive drab military-style

uniform. He wears sunglasses and has a close-cropped haircut, further emphasizing his military bearing. Swanepoel sits in a desk chair, which has likely been moved into the courtyard for the occasion. His right leg is extended and Jacks, the inmate, is busily polishing the guard's plain black shoe. Jacks is crouched over the shoe and wears an orange, prison-issue jumpsuit patterned with black circles. While Jacks is slim, Swanepoel is heavy set, a difference that further emphasizes the distinction between the two men. Both of them stare intently at the shoe, inspecting the process closely.

Subotzky's photograph raises as many questions as it answers. Is the image he presents to us one defined by race? Does it matter that the inmate is black and guard white? The guard is empowered, the inmate servile. Does this imply the continued presence on the South African scene of regimes of power associated with white supremacy? If one focuses only on the central part of this photograph, the scene would not seem out of place in a photograph by Ernest Cole, suggesting that social distinctions associated with apartheid have not entirely disappeared. And yet, other elements in the photograph belie this notion. Above the third figure in the photograph, another inmate who stands casually with his hands in his pockets, is a painted sign reading in black letters "Innocent until proven guilty / LEGAL AID BOARD." Below this, in larger red letters, are three more lines of text advertising the name and phone number of a local legal aid firm. This acknowledgement of constitutional protection and offer of practical legal assistance suggests that things have changed a great deal since the end an era when indefinite, repressive detention was the norm in South Africa. As a whole, the photograph offers mixed messages about the relationship of race and power in contemporary prisons.

Like most of Subotzky's photographs, *Jacks Shines Swanepoel's Shoes* is diffident, even detached. The scene is captured at the greatest possible distance from the action, and there is, in fact, little action to capture. The people depicted seem aware they are being photographed. Indeed, many of his photographs' subjects seems to have arranged themselves for the occasion. Though Subotzky has definite views about the things he photographs and about his own reasons for photographing them, his authorial presence is muted. Instead, the viewer is left to interpret what he or she sees, to decide what these images tell us about the profound legacy of apartheid on contemporary incarceration in South Africa.

Prisons played a powerful role in enforcing the repression of the apartheid regime. As Fran Buntman notes, "Detention and imprisonment were key instruments of apartheid repression."[401] Accordingly, prisoners and places of incarceration have come to occupy a powerful place in the collective mythology of post-apartheid culture as people and sites of remembrance through which the traumas of apartheid might be embodied and

[401] Fran Buntman, "Imprisonment in Apartheid South Africa I: Personal Histories" [Book Reviews], *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, 3 (September 2005): 663. The history of this phenomenon is sketched out in a study on prison conditions in South Africa prepared by Human Rights Watch in 1994. As the authors describe, "The development of the prison system [in South Africa] was closely linked to the progressive institutionalization of racial discrimination." Pass laws limiting the movement of nonwhite citizens, laws which were crucial to the institution of apartheid, "criminalized a vast number of otherwise law-abiding citizens." Human Rights Watch, *Prison Conditions in South Africa* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994), x. Obviously under such circumstances the bulk of prisoners were not white, and non-white prisoners (and staff) faced racial discrimination. Ibid., 17-23. Human Rights Watch also notes that, because of the political role played by the prison system, "South African prisons have historically authorized exceptionally brutal punishment, in comparison with international standards" Ibid., 29. Though the prison system became more brutal during apartheid, the roots of that penal regime are found in the colonial era. After initial efforts to establish non-racial reform prisons on the lines of then-progressive European ideas, penal segregation was instituted in South Africa in 1892. See Florence Bernault, "The Shadow of Rule: Colonial Power and Modern Punishment in Africa," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 74-5. Local attitudes fostering the creation of segregated prisons are summarized by an 1884 Cape Town magazine quoted by Bernault: "[in prison] the coarser criminal, the black, the brute, has a more comfortable life than probably he had before his "punishment" commenced, while … the white man has every decent susceptibility [to be] everlasting shocked and outraged." Ibid., 75.

commemorated.[402] However, in contemporary South Africa, prisons and those inhabiting them have also become the locus for critical debates about crime, about both the reality and the fear of crime and where one leaves off and the other begins.[403] South Africa is a country where Nelson Mandela, a man who spent nearly a third of his life behind bars, could then serve as head of state, a fact almost serving to sanctify the prison experience. But it is also a country where most prisoners are feared and mistrusted, where crime

---

[402] Two of South Africa's most notorious and most historically significant prisons have been made into museums since the end of apartheid. Both Johannesburg's notorious Old Fort Prison Complex, commonly known as Number Four, and Robben Island Prison off the coast of Cape Town are now sites of commemoration, preserving memories and providing learning opportunities. The conversion of Number Four into a museum and nearby construction of South Africa's Constitutional Court is discussed both in the Constitution Hill Foundation's *Number Four: The Making of Constitution Hill* (New York: Penguin, 2006) and in a volume edited by Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, *Light on a Hill: Building the Constitutional Court of South Africa* (Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2006), which focuses especially on the architecture of the new court building. Constitution Hill, as the entire complex is now known as, pairs the commemoration of past injustice with the enshrinement of new values in the architecture of the court building. In *History after Apartheid*, Annie E. Coombes discusses the contentious process involved in designating Robben Island as a national heritage site. She describes the influence on this process of conflicting forces arising both from within the country from various political interests and from outside in the form of international tourism. See Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). She compares the difficulties involved in memorializing Robben Island's troubled history with those associated with Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, another former prison associated with a movement for national liberation, and with Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, DC. Interestingly, she notes with approval an art installation temporarily housed in the visiting area of the prison entitled "Thirty Minutes." Featuring prominent South African artists like Sue Williamson alongside the work of ex-prisoner Lionel Davis, Coombes sees this exhibition as a way of bringing to life certain kinds of experiences otherwise lost in the official narrative of the prison provided for tourists. One of the goals of this chapter is to consider the specific and special contributions visual art might make to the effort of processing and reprocessing the recent history of imprisonment in South Africa. For another review of this exhibition, see Shannen Hill, review of "Thirty Minutes," *African Arts* 32, 2 (Summer 1999): 76-7. Another general account of the general challenges of historical preservation on Robben Island is provided by Harriet Deacon, "Intangible Heritage in Conservation Management Planning: The Case of Robben Island," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10, 3 (July 2004): 309–319.

[403] As a recent newspaper article drawing on a nation-wide public opinion survey reveals: "Most South Africans believe crime-fighting efforts of the past four years have not worked despite evidence of an overall decline in the crime rate." While the actual crime rate is shockingly high, in public perception it is worse. Such fear has led to predictable attitudes regarding the importance of imprisonment as a crime-fighting tool. As the article continues: "South Africans are hardening their hearts towards criminals with an increasing number saying the government should move towards punitive measures rather than relying on social transformation to fight crime." Sello S. Alcock,"Crime Still Makes Us Quake," *Mail & Guardian*, 16 February, 2009. In this way, the South African response to crime is analogous to the one in America described by Jerome Miller, who claims that the 'politics of crime' are defined by what he calls 'moral panics,' which have been associated historically in the United States with welfare, immigration and crime. Miller argues that public perception of crime is fed more by media coverage and political manipulation than by statistical evidence. See Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150-166.

seems to actually imperil the prospects for democracy and where prisons seem to be one of the few practical solutions to problems posed by criminality.[404] As in the United States, where the premise that all are equal in the eyes of the law is challenged by the fact that other racial groups are jailed at much higher rates than whites,[405] the complex politics around the issue of incarceration in South Africa pose a serious problem to democratization, creating new divisions in a society that needs desperately to heal itself.[406] As Subotzky puts it, thoughtfully describing the role he sees for his own work,

---

[404] Examining crime and policing in South Africa, Mark Shaw noted in 2002: "There can be little doubt that if South Africa were less crime-ridden the prognosis for the consolidation of democracy in the country would be better." Mark Shaw, *Crime and Policing in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Transforming under Fire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 155. The desire to use prisons as a primary solution to this problem is discussed by Stephan Terblanche and Geraldine Mackenzie in an article describing the institution of mandatory minimum sentences in South Africa. The authors note of this development, "The South African public does not have a high regard for its criminal justice system. This is an inevitable result when, almost daily, mainstream newspapers carry reports of serious violent crime on their front pages." On the other hand, the authors note, "the public appears to have an unrealistic expectation of the ability of the criminal justice system, and of imprisonment in particular, to cure the ills of a rather sick society." Stephan Terblanche and Geraldine Mackenzie, "Mandatory Sentences in South Africa: Lessons for Australia?" *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 41, 3 (December 2008): 413.

[405] According to a survey from the Pew Center on the States, while roughly 1 in 54 men ages 18 and over were behind bars in the United States in 2008, around 1 in 15 black men and 1 in 36 Hispanic men were incarcerated compared to around 1 in 106 white males. Pew Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008* (Philadelphia and Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008), 6. According to Marc Mauer, though disproportionately high rates of incarceration have deep historical roots in the United States, they are in some ways a phenomenon of the twentieth century: while black offenders represented 21 percent of those admitted to prison in 1926, they represent a striking half of all prison admissions at the early years of the twenty-first century. Mauer considers this change to be partly an unintended result of desegregation: "When black crime spilled over into white communities … the heavy hand of justice was employed to its full extent." Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*, second edition (New York: The New Press, 2006), 133. In a population increase largely fueled by a disproportionately high rate of incarceration for racial minorities, the national prison population in the United States grew by more than 500 percent between 1972 and 2003, yielding an incarceration rate that was far higher than either Russia or South Africa in 2004. Ibid., 1, 21. On the effect of racially disproportionate imprisonment on communities in the United States, see also Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[406] The complex forces mobilized around this issue are summarized by Florence Bernault: "Press campaigns, emerging academic research and pressure from NGOs and human rights activists have increased public awareness about the fate of prisoners and the need to reform the penal systems. This sometimes goes hand in hand with public pressure for more repressive confinement policies, for instance in post-apartheid South Africa, where the dismantling of racialised facilities and efforts to reform prisons did not curb rising criminality and mounting public concern. Yet the notion of prisoners' rights plays a new role in the South African debate, and has now taken root in a majority of African countries." Bernault, 91.

> … in South Africa there isn't a distinct victim/perpetrator divide. The problem is that so much of the way crime is represented in the popular media polarises victim and perpetrator, us and them, the law-abiding citizens and those who law-abiding citizens have to fear. I almost see that as a new kind of apartheid—between those that fear and those that are feared. And part of the role I see for my work is to open up these stories and these situations, to try to dissolve these polarised divisions—so that we see all these situations as part of each other.[407]

In three extended series on which he has worked since 2004—"Die Vier Hoeke" [The Four Corners] (2004), "Umjiegwana" [The Outside] (2005), and "Beaufort West" (2007)—this is Subotzky's intention: to bring nuance to the consideration of crime and imprisonment, to provide a context that makes understandable both the socio-historical structures situating the prison system within South African society and the actions of individuals within those structures.[408]

Through these photographs, Subotzky is also examining the gap, the polarization, between the promise of 'liberation' that marked apartheid's end and the reality of a

---

[407] Subotzky, *Beaufort West*, 79.

[408] The aforementioned *Beaufort West* monograph is Subotzky's first published book. Images from this series can also be found in a small volume produced in conjunction with the exhibition of these photographs at Goodman Gallery Cape: Mikhael Subotzky, *Mikhael Subotzky: Beaufort West* (Cape Town: Goodman Gallery Cape, 2007). This recent work was also featured in an exhibition at the Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam in Amsterdam (FOAM) in 2007 and in New York's Museum of Modern Art's annual "New Photography" exhibition in 2008. The first exhibitions is reviewed in Marek Bartelik, "Mikhael Subotzky," *Artforum International* 46, no. 6 (February 2008): 307-308, and the second in Karen Rosenberg, "Art Review: Splitting a Gallery in Half to Focus on Social Strife," *New York Times*, 12 September 2008, E33. The second most recent series was featured in "Die Vier Hoeke and Umjiegwana," a 2006 exhibition at the Goodman Gallery. Work from the earliest series, begun as a final-year project during his study at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, was first exhibited at the Nelson Mandela Cell at Pollsmoor Prison in 2005 and then at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg in 2006. Selections from this series appeared in the "VIes Recontres Africaines de la Photographie," Bamako, Mali, 2005 and in "Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography" at the International Center for Photography, New York, 2006. In this chapter I am also relying on an unpublished monograph featuring this early series: Mikhael Subotzky, *Die Vier Hoeke* (unpublished, 2004). Discussions of his work in art journals include, Ivor Powell's (op. cit.); Jack Crager, "Mikhael Subotzky," *American Photo* 18, no. 6 (November-December 2007): 66-67; and Michael Godby, "Mikhael Subotzky: Inside South Africa's Prisons," *Aperture*, no. 188 (Fall 2007): 32-39. Subotzky's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including "The Loaded Lens," Goodman Gallery Cape, 2007; "Contemporary Art Photography from South Africa: Reality Check," Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, 2007; "Personae & Scenarios—New African Photography," Brancolini Grimaldi Arte Contemporanea, Rome, 2006; and the 2005 Turin Triennial.

teeming prison population incarcerated in struggling, often brutal facilities. Specifically, he examines the gap between the pre-liberation ANC promise of a rehabilitative prison system and a post-liberation approach to incarceration that continues to link incarceration with retribution.[409] Subotzky seeks to crystallize this situation photographically, to make it connect to larger issues in South African society, visualizing the macrocosm of post-apartheid South Africa in the microcosm of its prisons.

In part, therefore, Subotzky has aligned his work with that of those who have sought to identify certain penal sites like Robben Island or Johannesburg's Old Fort

---

[409] The Freedom Charter (1955) includes this proposition: "Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance." If enacted, this penal program would obviously have represented a profound change from the practice of the apartheid regime. The post-apartheid prison system did not make as clear a break with the apartheid-era system as might be imagined. In fact, as Human Rights Watch noted in 1994, despite the implementation of "[s]ignificant reforms" and the fact that "conditions have improved in some respects," in South Africa "many aspects of prison life remain depressingly unchanged from the years of official apartheid." Human Rights Watch, ix. Facts like the more recent introduction of mandatory minimum sentences (see Terblanche and Mackenzie) the current overcrowded and violent conditions depicted by Subotzky make clear that system is still all too focused on society's desire for retribution. Perhaps the most profound indictment of the contemporary South African prison system's ability to re-educate and re-integrate prisoners into society is found in Subotzky's series "Umjiegwana," in which released prisoners are shown to be scraping along at the edges of society, still marginalized and still ill-equipped to be productive citizens.

This difficulty the South African regime had breaking with colonial prison practices is shared with other African postcolonial governments. Defining the role of the prison, Norval Morris and David J. Rothman claim that the modern prison's purpose—varying in degree and across time and place—is to reduce crime through incapacitation and/or deterrence, to express society's desire for punishment or retribution, and to reform the prisoner and make him or her more likely to be law-abiding in the future. See Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, "Introduction," in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, eds. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xi-x. In Europe and North America prisons were promoted as sites for reformation, usually emphasizing that aspect of the prison's purpose, at least on the level of ideology. However, when the prison was exported into colonial situations, humanitarian goals were often deemphasized. According to Florence Bernault, "While the reformed penitentiary in Europe promoted the virtue of punishment and the rationality of social control, colonial prisons encouraged the preservation of social antagonisms vital to white hegemony and contributed actively to the task of ascribing race as the major marker of difference between rulers and ruled." Bernault, 73. She argues that, while "the Western penitentiary reframed free individuals as equal citizens and legal *subjects*, the colonial prison primarily constructed Africans as *objects* of power," emerging "as places of captivity rather than of custody, reviving, far from Europe, a specific breed of penal archaism." Ibid., 55. In colonial Africa, Bernault write, "Prison regulations and architectural design worked to achieve three basic goals: the separation of black and white convicts, the de-individualisation of black prisoners, and the maintenance of very low standards of living for African convicts." Ibid., 73. Rather than break with this ideology of imprisonment, Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown note that "postcolonial regimes more often than not consolidated rather than dismantled the prison for their own purposes." Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, "Introduction," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 4.

Prison Complex (also known as Number Four) as places crucial to national memory.[410] Significantly, he first exhibited his series "Die Vier Hoeke" on Freedom Day in the Nelson Mandela Cell at Pollsmoor prison. Less famous than Robben Island, Pollsmoor was the prison to which Mandela was transferred as the first step in the long process which would culminate in his final release.[411] The statesman's years there are commemorated by this cell, which, unlike his cell on Robben Island, is largely inaccessible to visitors, because Pollsmoor, again, unlike Robben Island, remains an active maximum security prison. Visitors to the opening of Subotzky's exhibition were forced to navigate the prison's security system and enter into a space of contemporary incarceration **[FIG 2A and 2B]**.[412] I want to stress the similarities and differences between his practice in this case, which seeks to introduce an art-going public into the prison and to construe the prison as an *active* socially and politically contested site, and efforts to memorialize Robben Island and Johannesburg Central Prison. These have become sites which preserve apartheid and colonial history, historicizing the apartheid prison experience. These sites therefore seek to effectively immerse visitors in the past, and, where possible, make that past significant in the present. Subotzky works in the opposite direction, in a manner particularly well-suited to his kind of photography: he works to keep a historical legacy vital and meaningful by ensnaring viewers in the

---

[410] See Coombes; Deacon.

[411] Mandela spent from 1982 to 1988 in Pollsmoor.

[412] Sue Williamson, who attended the opening, records her impressions of the experience: "Freedom Day. Young photographer Mikhael Subotzky is showing his own work and photographs he workshopped with prisoners at Pollsmoor Prison. Seems like the right kind of event to take place on this particular holiday, and certainly the process of being handstamped with the Pollsmoor stamp, handing in cellphones and being admitted through metal doors heightens the senses. All the prison staff seem excited that such an event could take place within the walls, and the opening programme includes speeches by prison staff and Ahmed Kathrada, and singing by the prison choir. All the while the hum of prison voices and sounds surrounds us." Sue Williamson, "Sue Williamson's Diary," *Artthrob*, 27 April 2005 (www.artthrob.co.za/05may/diary.html).

present, looking at the prison as a contemporary social space with a history rather than as a historical phenomenon which reverberates in the present.[413]

In addition, Subotzky's work operates at the intersection of photography, the prison and the larger historical structures which connect them, shedding light on a cultural nexus as old as photography itself. This enables his work to also speak to issues vital to another important socio-historical phenomenon: the telling of photography's history. In his discussion of the social, political, cultural and economic circumstances which stimulated the desire for an invention like photography in Europe in the early nineteenth century, Geoffrey Batchen describes a blurring of the distinction between observing subject and observed object embraced both by early practitioners of photography and by prison reformers like Jeremy Bentham. Bentham is the man who invented the panopticon, a system of incarceration which is designed to allow the observation of all prisoners.[414] Indeed, Subotzky's frequently-produced panoramic photographs, 360 degree images he stitches together from eighteen separate frames, recreate some of the effects of the panopticon, which disciplined through both observation by the warder and self-observation by the prisoner. In the panoramic photographs made by Subotzky in cells in Pollsmoor Prison the camera sits in the middle of the room like the warder in the panopticon, recording each figure whose gaze, directed

---

[413] Subotzky's prison photographs, especially those from "Die Vier Hoeke," acknowledge the legacy of apartheid without losing sight of the need to document the present. For example, one photograph, *Flynn, Voorberg Prison* (2004), shows the scowling face of Mr. Flynn, who worked for 33 years in Voorberg Prison, standing in front of a hall of cells. The caption explains that these now-unused cells housed apartheid-era inmates. Flynn explains, "In those days there was more blood on this floor than there was polish." Subotzky, *Die Vier Hoeke*, n.p. A photograph like this provides valuable context for the ways in which history informs present prison conditions. However, the bulk of the photographs in all of his prison series focus on the contemporary experience of prison life.

[414] Geoffrey Batchen, "Desiring Production," in *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001), 20-22. Batchen draws on the work of Michel Foucault to articulate his argument.

into the lens, is mirrored back to him in the form of the finished photograph. In certain of Subotzky's photographs Bentham's mechanisms are appropriately reintroduced in the service of his investigation of the modern experience of incarceration.

The historical link of the technologies of photography and penology at their inception heightens the stakes of any study of a photographer who uses the first instrument to investigate the second. As photography and the prison developed, their ties increased, and the photograph became a critical mechanism of prison discipline, employed especially in the service of identification.[415] Historically, the prison itself also became a photographic subject, though a paradoxical one. As Clare Anderson and David Arnold write in an essay on the visual history of the colonial prison, the modern prison presents "a recurrent tension between the seen and the unseen."[416] They note the need for the prison's workings to be both mysterious and manifest, resulting in a vacillation between what must remain invisible and what can be shown, a kind of selective visibility.[417] The advent of photography "opened up the exterior and interior of the colonial prison in unprecedented ways."[418] Photographs (or sketches or prints after photographs) appeared in books and periodicals, and, perhaps surprisingly, photographs of prisons and prisoners were also sent and received in post-card form. Such images almost always worked in the service of colonial administrators and prison authorities,

---

[415] See Sandra S. Phillips, Mark Haworth-Booth, and Carol Squiers, eds., *Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1997).
[416] Clare Anderson and David Arnold, "Envisioning the Colonial Prison," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 304.
[417] Anderson and Arnold write that, "Although the prison was a prominent, often highly visible symbol of colonial rule, its interior, as a working institution, was often left open to the public imagination." Ibid., 311. On the other hand, "if the power of the prison as a deterrent or reforming institution were to be impressed upon the public, if the prison were to satisfy those who ordered it into existence or were responsible for its financing and governance, if it were to impact on the conduct and morality of society at large, then it was necessary to produce some tangible signs of its abiding presence and transforming effect." Ibid., 304-5.
[418] Ibid., 319.

however. Forms of prisoner self-representation were frequently curtailed in an attempt to limit spaces of freedom for the incarcerated.[419] Subotzky's efforts to open his work to the possibility of prisoner self-representation, through his choice both to photograph murals and tattoos done by the prisoners and to make his earliest images in the context of workshops in which select prisoners were taught photography by Subotzky, helps allow his work to function critically within the body of 'authorized' prison photography.[420] The rich tradition of interdependence between photography and the prison system into which Subotzky inserts himself makes his investigations of this theme particularly resonant and also links him with a number of artists around the world interested in similar issues.

If, as I have suggested, Subotzky's work can be seen both at a crucial juncture in the history of photography and within a broader framework within the corpus of South African photography, it is also possible to connect his work to an international artistic dialogue on the theme of incarceration. Imprisonment obviously has a set of specific valences within South Africa, but, for example, detention related to conflicts in the Middle East has given the issue an international profile. The ever-growing prison population in the United States has made it a pressing concern within that country, as well. Artists interested in this issue in these areas have been responsible for works which address imprisonment in a manner similar to Subotzky's photography. One can see, for

---

[419] Anderson and Arnold note, "there appear to be relatively few [colonial-era] visual images of the prison or fellow inmates produced by prisoners themselves," adding "few inmates of colonial prisons in Asia or Africa had access to drawing materials, let alone photographic ones, or the skills needed to use them." Ibid., 326. Prisoners did sometimes represent themselves by modifying the prison environment or themselves through graffiti or tattoos, respectively. Ibid., 327.

[420] These workshops were conducted in 2005. Interestingly, Subotzky includes a selection of these prisoner-made photographs on his own website in a section labeled "Prison Photo Workshops," allowing their work to be compared to his. He explains that their work was exhibited beside his in prison and that he was subsequently able to secure two participants meaningful employment in the photography industry. For more on these photographs, visit Subotzky's website: imagesby.com.

example, an interest in confinement—and a special attention to the mechanics of surveillance—in certain recent works by Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal (b. 1966) and Mona Hatoum (b. 1952), a Beirut-born, Western-based artist with a Palestinian background. Attentive to the symbolic resonance of cages, in the works *Light Sentence* (1992), *Incommunicado* (1993), and *Untitled (Baalbeck birdcage)* (1999) Hatoum uses everyday objects to evoke the experience of imprisonment for her viewers.[421] In the last work, for example, she recreated and enlarged an antique birdcage, scaling it to the dimensions of the cells at Alcatraz Prison.[422] In 2007, Bilal created the work performance piece "Domestic Tension," in which he chose to live in a gallery for a month under constant surveillance and allow himself to be shot with paintballs from a gun controlled by viewers watching via the internet, testing the goodwill of his virtual 'captors.'[423] For artists like Bilal and Hatoum, the prison is evoked in order to foreground for viewers issues surrounding the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, the displacement and detention of refugees, and the indefinite detention of prisoners at now-notorious sites like the Bagram Theater Internment Facility, Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp and Abu Ghraib Prison. Working in the mode of traditional documentary photography, American photographer Lori Waselchuk, who, interestingly enough, spent many years working in South Africa, has recently finished a project looking at the domestic prison policy of the United States. Working in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, in the series "Grace before Dying" (2009), she depicts the experience of dying in prison from natural causes. An outgrowth of a magazine assignment, the stark black-

---

[421] Mona Hatoum, *Domestic Disturbance* (North Adams: MASS MoCA, 2001), 20-1, 27-8, 67-8.
[422] Ibid., 68.
[423] Wafaa Bilal, *Shooting an Iraqi: Art Life and Resistance under the Gun* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2008).

and-white photographs also examine the prison's hospice program, where inmates care for fellow prisoners dying as the almost inevitable result of tough mandatory minimum sentences that leave prisoners behind bars for exceptionally long periods of time.[424] As with all of the photographers under discussion in this dissertation, Subotzky participates in an international artistic conversation about crucial social issues. However, to understand the contribution he makes to this conversation, it is necessary to understand the specific history of imprisonment in South Africa as it has unfolded before, during and after apartheid.

Apartheid incarceration practices differed in degree rather than in kind from those of the immediately preceding era: they were brutal and overtly political.[425] Nelson Mandela famously declared in *Long Walk to Freedom*, an autobiography begun secretly during his time as a prisoner and published not long after his release from nearly three decades of imprisonment,

> It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside of its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones—and South Africa treated its imprisoned African citizens like animals.[426]

---

[424] Images from this series and information about it are available on the artist's website: www.loriwaselchukphotos.com/Exibitions/ex_home.html. Nominated for the 2009 Santa Fe Prize for Photography, the work has been exhibited at correctional facilities in the South Eastern United States.

[425] Though apartheid took institutionalized racism in South Africa to new lows, it did not inaugurate it, and prisons were employed in the creation and maintenance of racial distinctions long before the inauguration of apartheid. Bernault notes this historical sweep: "Between 1916 and 1986 more than 17 million blacks were imprisoned for pass law violations." Bernault, 75 n63. She connects the South African situation with certain general features of the colonial prison in Africa: "The colonial prison was instrumental in manufacturing cheap labour for settlers and consolidating racial inequalities." Ibid., 68. On another front, one might note that South Africa also saw the invention of the modern concentration camp during the South African War (also known as the Boer War), when hundreds of thousands of South Africans of all races were confined by the British in an effort to deny aid and comfort to Afrikaner guerrilla bands. Tens of thousands of these prisoners died, leaving a powerful mark on the collective identity of the Afrikaner people. See Elizabeth Van Heyningen, "Costly Mythologies: The Concentration Camps of the South African War in Afrikaner Historiography," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 495-513.

[426] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 174-5. Mandela is elaborating on an aphorism often attributed to Fyodor Dostoyevsky: The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.

One reads the passages in this book and others that describe Mandela's experience of political imprisonment, especially his earliest experiences of South Africa's jails in the 1960s, and comes away feeling as if he certainly had come to 'truly know' the ugliest apartheid-era South Africa had to offer.[427] And Mandela, though a key symbol of the imprisoned anti-apartheid resistance both inside and outside his country, was of course only one of many to find themselves behind bars in this era. Those active in the fight against apartheid pursued this endeavor under the constant threat of imprisonment, but, because of Pass Laws designed to restrict the free movement of all non-white South Africans, most South Africans faced everyday the possibility that they might find themselves locked away simply for being, in the eyes of authorities, in the wrong place at the wrong time. During apartheid, South Africa jailed an incredible number of people: as a headline from Johannesburg's *Star* newspaper quoted by Joseph Lelyveld screams, "SA'S PRISON POPULATION HIGHEST IN FREE WORLD."[428] In the 1960s, for example, "the political prisoners confined numbered many thousands and, for those jailed

[427] Mandela's more than 27 years in prison began in 1962, and the first 18 of those years were spent mostly in the isolation section (Section B) of Robben Island Prison, which, when Mandela arrived, "had come under a … brutal regime designed to humiliate and demoralize prisoners." Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 181. Cut off from almost all contact with the outside world, early in his imprisonment Mandela was exposed to the whims of sadistic guards (including some neo-Nazis), forced to endure crippling labor in a lime quarry (without eye protection for three years, his eyes would suffer permanent damage), and subjected to repeated indignities. Ibid., 205, 218-20. Over time, the political prisoners with Mandela on Robben Island, "with much stronger motivation and cohesion than the warders, established their influence" and conditions improved. Ibid., 201. In 1982, Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison, where his treatment "was much more civilized than it had been on Robben Island," and, in 1988, he was transferred finally to Victor Vester Prison where he was given a warder's house with a swimming pool instead of a cell and was tended to by a personal cook. Ibid., 201, 375. Increasingly accessible to those outside the prison walls, Mandela was treated at the end of his time in prison with the deference and respect due a man of his stature but denied to him for so long.

[428] Lelyveld, 40.

for violating the pass laws (restricting the movements of blacks), in the tens of thousands at a time."[429]

In light of these circumstances and the political issues at stake, literary and photographic exposés of prison conditions proliferated during apartheid. The practical difficulties of photographing prisons made the former kind of account much more common, and a large body of writing emerged from apartheid's prisons. Diaries by major political figures like Ahmed Kathrada and Albie Sachs, poetry by Dennis Brutus and Jeremy Cronin, and journalistic accounts form together a kind of collective narrative of prison life, a body of prison literature as impressive as any of the world's.[430] Of the last type of writing, one of the most notable examples is Henry Nxumalo's "Mr. Drum Goes to Jail," originally published in *Drum* magazine in 1954.[431] Arranging to have himself arrested—hardly a difficult feat—Nxumalo spent four miserable days in the notorious Johannesburg Central Prison. Cataloguing poor and unsanitary conditions,

---

[429] Aryeh Neier, "Confining Dissent: The Political Prison" in *Oxford History of the Prison*, eds., Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 377.

[430] See Ahmed Kathrada, edited by Robert D. Vassen, *Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada's Prison Correspondence, 1964–1989* (Cape Town, Mayibuye Books in association with the Robben Island Museum and East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1999); Albie Sachs, *The Jail Dairy of Albie Sachs* (London: Harvill Press, 1966); Dennis Brutus, *Letters to Martha, and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1968); Jeremy Cronin, *Inside* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984). As Fran Buntman notes in a collected review of several republished apartheid-era prison accounts, "Writing about being a detainee and prisoner of white minority rule became an important way to record what apartheid was, how it worked, and what it did to people in South Africa." Buntman, 663. Prison writing holds, therefore, a privileged place in South African literature. With so many educated and politically-engaged people incarcerated during apartheid, it is no surprise that a substantial body of writing should be produced, despite difficult conditions and censorship. Brian Macaskill in a discussion of the prison poems of Jeremy Cronin notes the "considerable corpus of South African prison writing," citing among the contributors Herman Charles Bosman, Ruth First, Albie Sachs, Alex La Guma, Dennis Brutus, D.M. Zwelonke, Hugh Lewin, John Ya-Otto, Indres Naidoo, Molefe Pheto, and Breyten Breytenbach. Brian Macaskill, "Jeremy Cronin's Lyrical Politics," in Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, ed., *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 188.

[431] Though the original publication of this material is inaccessible to me, I consulted a republished version (which omitted the photographs that accompanied the original account) in Henry Nxumalo, "Mr. Drum Goes to Jail," in *Ourselves in Southern Africa: An Anthology of Southern African Writing*, ed. Robin Malan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 171-76.

Nxumalo also memorably describes frequent beatings and abuse to which he and the other prisoners were arbitrarily subjected.[432]

Nxumalo's article was originally accompanied by a series of photographs made, with some ingenuity, by *Drum* photographer Bob Gosani (1934—1972). Perhaps the most notable photographic exposé of prison life made during apartheid, Gosani's photographs were taken with telephoto lenses from the roof of a nurse's home which overlooked the Fort, a perch reached through subterfuge. The photographer and another *Drum* reporter were accompanied by white *Drum* employee Deborah Duncan, who posed as a photographer out to shoot the city skyline. While Duncan distracted their host, Gosani pointed his camera down to the prison below and captured photographic evidence of the 'tauza' (or 'tausa') dance.[433] A humiliating means for ensuring that prisoners were not smuggling contraband into prison after a day's labor outside the walls, the 'tauza' required prisoners to strip naked, jump like a monkey, and bend over with arms stretched out—a series of actions, as Nxumalo notes, intended to dislodge anything placed between the legs or rectum.[434] Gosani's pictures made impossible outright denial or dismissal by the authorities of the state of affairs described by Nxumalo, and the photographs are exemplary of the South African documentary tradition, particularly the muck-raking sort

[432] "In the four days I was in prison … I was kicked or thrashed every day. I saw many other prisoners being thrashed daily. I was never told what was expected of me, but had to guess. Sometimes I guessed wrong and got into trouble." Ibid., 174.
[433] Mothobi Mutloatse and Jacqui Masiza, eds., *Tauza: Bob Gosani's People* (Johannesburg: Struik, 2005), 18-20. The photographs in question are reproduced on pages 109-11.
[434] The journalist describes this "common routine of undressing prisoners" and adds: "I didn't know how it was done. I opened my mouth, turned round and didn't jump and clap my hands. The white warder conducting the search hit me with his fist on my left jaw, threw my clothes at me and went on searching the others. I ran off, and joined the food queue." Nxumalo, 174.

pursued by *Drum* in the 1950s.[435] Together, Nxumalo's words and Gosani's photographs plunge their audience into the world described by Mandela.

Apartheid-era accounts of prison life sometimes aimed to influence an internal audience (as the Gosani images published in South Africa's *Drum* make clear), but, primarily, accounts of apartheid prisons addressed an external audience, one more easily reachable because government censorship of information on South Africa's prisons profoundly limited the publication of material within the country.[436] Arguably, this particular aspect of apartheid-era censorship was less harmful than it might initially seem. After all, the majority of South Africans certainly understood what it was like to live in a prison. In a sense, the experience of incarceration *was* the experience of apartheid.

Subotzky's photographs can be linked to but distinguished from apartheid-era documentary photography of prisons, an enterprise largely defined by Gosani's work. In his photographs of the 'tauza' dance, Gosani seeks to reveal the scandalous facts of prison life in order to encourage change in prison governance and in society at large. Subotzky at times creates images that echo—if not entirely embrace—this venerable muck-raking tradition. Certainly, his visceral images of the aftermath of prison violence display some of the raw power that animates Gosani's photograph of the 'tauza.' But a

---

[435] See Anthony Sampson, *Drum: Making of a Magazine* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2005); and, on photography in *Drum*, Okwui Enwezor, "A Critical Presence: *Drum* Magazine in Context," in *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, Clare Bell, ed. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim, 1996).

[436] Section 44(1)(f) of the 1959 Prisons Act criminalized the publication of any 'false' information regarding prisons, placing the burden of proof for the veracity of the information on the publisher rather than the authorities. As Human Rights Watch notes, "the courts tended to interpret this sub-section very strictly and lawsuits were costly and time-consuming," so "prison-related items virtually disappeared from the South African press for many years." Human Rights Watch, 3. Remarkably, forwarding information about prison conditions to even one person was interpreted as a violation of this law, allowing for the interdiction of even private correspondence. Sections (e) and (g) of the same law "banned the taking or publication of photographs or sketches, and the publication of prisoners' own writings, respectively." Ibid., 3n11. Though section (f) was repealed in 1992, as of 1994 sections (e) and (g) remained in force, and fines were levied against South African journalists for publishing photographs of prisons as late as 1992. Ibid., 4.

photograph like *Christopher Sibidla's Body, Maitland Morgue* (2004) **[FIG. 3]** is fundamentally different from Gosani's. The photograph shows the nude corpse of a burned man resting on plastic tarp on a gurney in an otherwise unadorned room. His skin is mottled, red patches showing the places where his skin was burned away by fire, and a gruesome autopsy scar runs from his pelvis to his neck. As Subotzky explains, Sibidla and two other inmates died when a fire broke out in the single cell they shared, segregated from other inmates after initiating an act of gang violence at a prison church service. Though conspiracy theories flourished in the wake of the incident, according to Subotzky the consensus regarding the incident was that the men lit the fire themselves, protesting the unwillingness of prison authorities to return them to communal cells.[437] Showing the results of harm inflicted on prisoners by other prisoners or by themselves, Subotzky's photographs typically do not involve harm delivered on prisoners by guards. Photographs like "Christopher Sibidla's Body" are shocking, certainly, but not scandalous in the manner of Gosani's work, which appeals to the conscience of the viewer through its depiction of the unchecked power of those in authority over powerless inmates, who are dehumanized and humiliated. Subotzky's photographs, by contrast, immerse viewers in a Hobbesian world of intra-inmate conflict with which the under-staffed warders are largely unable to cope.[438]

---

[437] In his mock-up for a publication of this series, Subotzky includes a section of text describing the incident, followed by a two page spread with the photograph of Sibidla's body and a reproduction of an apparent suicide note ("I'm sorry mum and dad"). The next pair of photographs shows the burnt cell and Sibidla's place of burial. The group of photographs following this depict the body's journey to its final resting place and the rituals involved in the funeral. Subotzky, *Die Vier Hoeke*, n.p.

[438] One of the photographs from "Die Vier Hoeke" makes clear the hurdles that warders face in attempting to regulate South Africa's prisons. The photograph shows the funeral of warder Ricardo Skippers who was shot in his home by gang members affiliated with gang members in the prison in which he worked. Subotzky,*Die Vier Hoeke*, n.p. The possibility of revenge killings of this sort makes it difficult for prison authorities to maintain discipline.

A simple binary dividing right from wrong underlies the effectiveness of Gosani's prison photography—the humane treatment of prisoners is right, the inhumane treatment of prisoners is wrong. This is replaced in Subotzky's work by an acknowledgement of complexity and of the difficult decisions faced by all stakeholders in the prison system. In this regard, Subotzky includes in the series "Die Vier Hoeke" a photograph showing warders searching prisoners in a manner similar to the one depicted by Gosani ("Strip Search, Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison" (2004)), but balances this evocative image with a set of photographs showing contraband weapons and drug paraphernalia seized from prisoners. In this case, the viewer is forced to question simple assumptions: in the twenty-first century, is a search of this sort inhumane or sensible?

Arguing for a progressive investment in the understanding of social structures, for the attainment of social justice through education, Subotzky's work can be distinguished, in its embrace of complexity and its grasp for holistic analysis, from the kind of documentary photography made by Gosani (or by Ernest Cole), which endeavors to motivate viewers to fight for social justice by fighting a specific injustice like apartheid. Subotzky's work might come closest to Gosani's documentary tradition in his photographs showing how overcrowding effects the general well-being of inmates in contemporary South African prisons. *Cell 508, A Section, Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison* (2004), one of his most striking panoramic photographs, shows a typical cell at Pollsmoor housing 54 men in a space designed for 18 **[FIG. 4]**. Common in South African prisons, overcrowding is a critical issue for the South African prison system and one of long standing.[439] Again, however, it is a problem with no easy solution. Should

[439] Human Rights Watch noted overcrowding in its 1994 report on the prisons, reporting on a cell in Pollsmoor Prison that measured only 642 square feet but held thirty-five inmates. Human Rights Watch,

the problem of prison overcrowding be solved through less prisoners, more prisons, stronger social safety networks in society at large, or some combination of all three of these ideas? Far from offering easy answers to this question or offering an endorsement of any of these options, Subotzky's photographs instead reveal how fraught each of these courses of action might be. It is clear in his photographs that some prisoners have committed acts which warrant their segregation from society. One can see also through his photographs that many South African prisoners are warehoused in conditions that make rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society unlikely. And, one can see that South Africa's prison population both mimics and results from social ills like poverty, economic inequality and government corruption.

In "Die Vier Hoeke," "Umjiegwana," and "Beaufort West," Subotzky therefore takes viewers through a systematic analysis of the ways in which the prison system interfaces with society, beginning within the prison walls, then following released prisoners on their often difficult journeys to the 'outside,' and finally looking at a specific prison as an element integrated within the civil society and the social fabric of one small South African municipality. Viewed sequentially, these series offer a succession of shifts in emphasis or point of view that add to the analytical rigor of the body of work as whole. Viewers are able to see the prison as a microcosm of South African society in the first series. The next situates prisoners within the macrocosm of post-apartheid society as marginal figures. The last series integrates the first two so that viewers might see the microcosm within the macrocosm and vice versa.

11-2. Terblanche and Mackenzie report a prison occupancy rate in 2007 of 142 percent: Terblanche and Mackenzie, 410.

"Die Vier Hoeke," stays appropriately enough mostly within the 'four corners' of two prisons: Pollsmoor and Voorberg. The key exception to this rule is the remarkable series of photographs in which he follows the body of Christopher Xolile Sibidla to his burial in the Eastern Cape. In this series, the only escape from prison is death. Subotzky exploits his panoramic format to great effect in this series, using it in images of overcrowded cells and prison walls to impart a feeling of claustrophobia. Many of the photographs in this series stress the kinds of informal authority that are exercised in the absence of official prison authority.[440] Prison gangs assume some of this authority, and evidence of their activities is found in the form of tattoos that mark many of Subotzky's subjects. The photographs of gangs and the drug use and violence they foster are the most startling of this series, but many other photographs focus more prosaically on the self-sufficiency of prison society and culture, showing prisoners at recreation and work. Among the photographs are images of football (soccer) games and exercise, prison kitchen, butcher and laundry facilities, and work on the extensive farm attached to Voorberg prison, which supplies food to many nearby facilities. In this series, the prisons are depicted as a kind of closed system, a world unto themselves in the conflicting forces shaping South African society can be studied in isolation.

"Umjiegwana" follows individuals out of this isolation and into the buffeting winds of everyday life in the new South Africa. Prisoners trade the overcrowded, sub-standard conditions that are the hall-mark of prison life for the overcrowded, sub-

---

[440] As an anonymous prisoner from the United States notes in a diary presented by Norval Morris: "It is not always appreciated by the general public that immediate power within the prison belongs to the prisoners. Ultimate power, of course, lies with the prison authorities, but guns and weapons cannot be taken into the security areas of a prison where prisoners move—unless one is running a concentration camp—since the prisoners always greatly outnumber the staff." Norval Morris, "The Contemporary Prison: 1965-Present," in *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, eds. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 221.

standard conditions that are the lot of the poor and marginal in urban South Africa. The tattoos that defined status within the hierarchical culture of the prison are the thing that marks released prisons as outcasts. Experiencing grinding poverty and deprivation on the outside, some of the ex-prisoners Subotzky pictures are even nostalgic for incarceration. If one of the goals of a modern penal system in a democratic society is to rehabilitate prisoners and allow them to become productive members of society, clearly something has gone wrong in South Africa.

"Beaufort West" struggles to figure out what that something is. Beginning and ending in published form with photographs of this small prison facility incongruously located in the middle of a traffic roundabout, in between Subotzky focuses on the diverse town of Beaufort West, showing viewers those things which foster crime and imprisonment. In contrasting photographs of rubbish dump residents who earn their livelihood scavenging and selling rotten fruit as pig feed and participants and spectators at the local horse show, Subotzky demonstrates economic inequality. In photographs of people engaged in burglary and prostitution, of the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, he shows the reasons people end up behind bars. But, by attaching these depictions to other photographs showing the doings of the still largely white South African middle class, he tries to put these reasons into perspective as part of a larger web of economic, social and cultural phenomena.

Prisons were at the point of the spear of apartheid repression, and they became a flashpoint in the conflict between oppressors and oppressed, a meeting ground where the battles of the apartheid era were fought on a daily basis and in close quarters. Considering how apartheid was experienced by the majority of South Africa's

population, however, one begins to realize that the experience of incarceration was one shared by many, even those who never found themselves behind bars. Throughout the years of apartheid all South Africans who were not white lived with the restriction of free movement, unable to move freely within their own country, kept under constant surveillance, susceptible to the threat of search and seizure at any time, limited in the free exercise of economic activity, able to read, hear and see only what was permitted by the government. South Africa is now struggling to overcome this legacy, and, as Subotzky's photographs suggest, prisons again occupy a critical position in society. They will be either the rock against which South Africa's pretensions to social justice will break or the crucible in which new kinds of citizens will grow. The success or failure of efforts to integrate South Africa's prisons into the social fabric and to reintegrate into society the people housed these prisons may well be an indicator of the success or failure of the country's experiment in democracy.

Subotzky's interest in this issue is evident enough through the years he has spent documenting photographically contemporary South Africa's ambiguous attitudes about incarceration, but his commitment goes beyond the making and display of photographs. Subotzky chose to create many of his prison images in the context of workshops in which select prisoners were taught photography by Subotzky, and he has gone on to try to find gainful employment for these workshop participants after their release. Subotzky demonstrates the social mission underlying his work though both the images he creates and the manner in which he creates them, a trait he shares with the next photographer I will consider in this study.

Part Two: Lesbian and Gay South Africans: 'How Safe Am I?'

Meeting and interviewing artists is one of the obvious, if often overlooked, pleasures of writing about art. In a good interview, the interviewer is able to learn lots of useful, thought-provoking things about what a particular artist has done and how she or he has done it. For me, however, hearing these practical bits of information pales in comparison to the value of learning about *why* an artist makes images or objects. Obviously, this is one of the things that draws me to South African art. Given the particularities of their country's history, South Africans are called upon more than most to justify a social role for their work (or, on the other hand, to justify why their work has no social function). Needless to say, the decades-long fight against apartheid and the still ongoing fight against inequality and poverty in South Africa ensure that art for art's sake is not a very popular notion among South Africa's young artists.

Each of the artists to whom I spoke on my research trip to South Africa impressed me with how articulate they were in expressing their reasons for doing what they do and in conveying their absolute commitment to the task of creating culture, a task which is to them absolutely indispensable in South Africa's current social and political environment. It does not go too far to say that these artists inspired me to reassess my own commitment to my work and to clarify my own thinking about what I can do to try to ensure that, on some level, my own work is useful and relevant to society.

I am venturing into territory that may seem personal and is certainly subjective. Still, as I describe the circumstances of my meeting with Zanele Muholi, it will become clear why such personal issues so preoccupy me. Indeed, it should also become clear why this question of justification is crucial to my explanation of the interest I have in

Muholi's work. The only way I can explain Muholi's work is by highlighting *why* she makes the work she does. Because, for her, the creation of her work is literally a matter of life and death.

Born in Durban in 1972, Zanele Muholi is an activist photographer. Her activism is inextricably linked to her own identity: as a black lesbian, Muholi is concerned with visualizing the intimate lives of women like her, women she considers her community. In her photographs, she seeks to create images that will allow South African society at large "to know we exist," documents "showing what your community is all about," which is, ultimately, "women who are intimate with other women."[441] For this reason, Muholi claims "I can't call myself an artist."[442] She sees photography as a "tool," as a facet of her overall project – an important facet to be sure, but a facet nonetheless. Inextricable from her image-making and subsuming it is her work as a community organizer. When I spoke to her in 2007, she was working as a community relations officer for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), a black lesbian organization based in Gauteng which she helped found. When I spoke to her at their offices on Constitution Hill in a converted apartheid-era women's prison in the shadow of South Africa's Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, FEW was in the midst of a flurry of activity. Muholi and the other women there were planning a memorial service for a young lesbian couple who had been murdered, a murder Muholi was quite convinced was a hate-crime. This incident was not an isolated one, and a glance at Muholi's photographs or a conversation with her – even one conducted under less harrowing circumstances—reveals that, in order to

[441] Zanele Muholi, interview with the author, 27 June 2007.
[442] Ibid.

depict the intimate lives of women like her, Muholi must show the aftermath of victimization and violence.

Violence and violation are all-too-common manifestations of the repression and rage that confront non-heterosexual black female sexuality in South Africa. As activist, human rights lawyer and lesbian Wendy Isaak has argued, expulsions from families, so-called 'curative' rapes, and murderous assaults make it evident that black lesbian women in South Africa are living in a state of emergency.[443] Under these circumstances, non-heterosexual black women who have not already been the victims of assault are terrorized by the prospect of it. In 2005, Muholi acknowledged her own fear:

> The truth is, *ngiyesaba*—I'm shit scared. There is a song in Zulu that says '*lemini iyeza nakuwe*'—this day will come to you, too. It is mostly sung at funerals. The thought of lesbian rape, attempted rape and assault terrifies me.[444]

In her interview with me, in the aftermath of yet another brutal attack on her community, she matter-of-factly wondered, "How safe am I?"[445] Going on to tell me that she was in the process of securing a residency in Canada, she explained that, in the event of her murder, she wanted to make sure her documentary work was organized and accessible to those who might come after her. The not-unfounded fatalism embedded in such a notion was all the more unnerving coming from someone more or less my own age expressing herself with intensity but total equanimity. As I say, there is nothing melodramatic about this woman. And there is nothing melodramatic about her work.

All of Muholi's photography is documentary in its intent, but, in terms of style and tone, her photographs vary widely, as befits her straightforward utilitarian goals. In

---

[443] Wendy Isaak, "A State of Emergency: Hate Crimes against Black Lesbians" (www.equality.org.za).
[444] Muholi quoted in Charlene Smith, "Anti-gay Venom becomes Part of the Art," in Zanele Muholi, *Only Half the Picture* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006), 93.
[445] Zanele Muholi, interview with the author, 27 June 2007.

Muholi's photography, aesthetic decisions are subsidiary to the demands of subject matter. Some of her photographs are black and white, others color. Many of her images are in sharp focus, while a few are in softer focus, an effect which, in her hands, tends to make these photographs appear more dramatic. Muholi generally employs a level point of view, positioning her camera at medium distance from her subjects; however, she sometimes employs more acute angles, and positions her camera in close proximity to the things she photographs. Her desire to create images that are useful to her political purposes makes her open to such stylistic variation. There are two things that unite all of her work: a consistent focus on the human figure and a remarkable sensitivity to her subjects. This sensitivity is required for the daunting task Muholi has undertaken: depicting from the inside a community under great external threat.

Aftermath (2004) **[FIG. 5]**, for example, depicts a 17 year old girl raped two days before by an acquaintance. His motive: "to show her she is not a man."[446] With no one else to confide in, the girl turned to Muholi and eventually allowed her to take this photograph. The black and white photograph is printed in medium format, about 24 by 15.5 inches. A dark and shadowy image, *Aftermath* fades towards black around the edges, especially on the top left-hand corner, accentuating the intimacy of the portrait. It shows only part of the girl's body, however, a choice which serves to both protect her anonymity and focus the viewer's attention on the locus of her attack. In the photograph, the girl holds her hands in front of her pelvis in an obvious and understandably protective gesture. The scar she allows us to see clearly, believe it or not, is the result of a previous violent attack. As Muholi notes, "She already has a scar from a previous incident, yet

[446] Zanele Muholi quoted in Nonkululeko Godana, "Is Anybody Comfortable?" in Zanele Muholi, *Only Half the Picture* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006), 91.

received new emotional scars from her rape."[447] As Charlene Smith notes, a photograph as open and as painfully revealing as this one "is an indication of how much Muholi is trusted by her subjects to tell their story and depict their pain without resorting to victimization."[448] In a photograph like this, however, the viewer can see plainly that the remarkable sensitivity Muholi brings to bear in the making of such an image in no way diminishes the brutality of its effect on the viewer, the stomach-turning discomfort it creates for us as we examine it. For Muholi, revealing the impact of such attacks, forcing recognition of the humanity of lesbian victims of violence, is imperative, an endeavor absolutely necessary in the fight to end such violence.

Her goal in creating images like *Aftermath* is a deceptively simple one. She wishes to allow her viewers—or, if necessary, to force them—to see that black lesbians and gays are simply "human beings."[449] Matter of fact and unsensationalized, this photograph is nonetheless shocking in what it reveals about the humanity of its subject and the inhumanity of her attackers. In effect, it forces us to choose between the two. We must identity with one or the other. Either we empathize with this woman or we stand in the shoes of her attackers. A stark choice to be sure, and one which further emphasizes this photograph's ability to unsettle. For Muholi, images like this one "are not about causing controversy." While they may shock, they are designed to engender a simple human response: "an understanding of what they [the victims] suffer."[450]

Oddly, images exhibited alongside "Aftermath" that frankly and honestly depicted the sexual activities of non-heterosexual black women proved even more shocking to

---

[447] Muholi quoted in Godana, 91.
[448] Smith, 93.
[449] Zanele Muholi, interview with the author, 27 June 2007.
[450] Muholi quoted in Godana, 91.

some viewers than those depicting violence and the aftermath of violence. An attendee of an exhibition that featured *Dada* (2004) **[FIG. 6]**, a photograph of the torso and thighs of an otherwise nude woman strapping on a dildo, even demanded from Muholi "an apology for having to be put through such trauma."[451] To say that such a reaction misses the point of Muholi's work is to underscore the invisibility and delegitimization of black lesbian sexuality against which Muholi is fighting.[452]

Barbara Smith has bemoaned this enforced invisibility in the context of the United States, arguing that, "for survival, Black lesbians, like any oppressed group, need to see our faces reflected in myriad cultural forms."[453] Seconding fellow critic Jewelle Gomez, Smith suggests that representations of black lesbians are most profound when they "encompass the essential qualities of verisimilitude and authenticity," meaning they are "true to life" and reflect "a relationship to the self that is genuine, integrated, and whole."[454] She calls for portrayals which place, "Black lesbian experiences and struggles squarely within the realm of recognizable human experience and concerns."[455] It seems to me that the kind of cultural representations for which Smith is calling are exactly the sort Muholi is attempting to provide through her photographs. Indeed, adjectives like

---

[451] Muholi quoted in Godana, 91.

[452] The reluctance to accept the raw sexuality of such photographs may be also part of a larger disinclination to represent the erotic in African art. Françoise Pfaff avers that the "lack of eroticism in African films may … be related to the fact that eroticism does not seem to be a dominant or publicly displayed trait in the collective agrarian societies from which they have emerged." Françoise Pfaff, "Eroticism and Sub-Saharan African Films," in *African Experiences of Cinema*, eds. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (London: British Film Institute, 1996), 259. Pfaff explains further, "Inasmuch as sub-Saharan film-makers are to a large extent still influenced by traditional values and a sense of sociopolitical commitment, eroticism appears as rather limited in their works. Nevertheless, as these film practitioners and their audiences become increasingly Westernised and urbanised, it is to be expected that their motion pictures will give a larger place to the kinds of commercially beneficial sexually suggestive scenes which are rather frequently found in present-day Western cinema." Ibid., 260.

[453] Barbara Smith, "The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 107.

[454] Ibid., 109.

[455] Ibid.

'integrated' and 'whole' feel like very appropriate descriptions of Muholi's project. In another passage that provides insight on Muholi's practice, Smith also notes the necessity of activism to the work of a cultural critic, especially the critic who is a black woman:

> If a black woman scholar's only connection to women's issues is via women's studies, as presented by white women academics, most of whom are not activists, her access to movement analyses and practice will be limited or nonexistent. I believe that the most accurate and developed theory … comes from practice, from the experience of activism.[456]

In her work, Muholi is trying do exactly this, to integrate authentic cultural representation with direct activism in a fight against cultural marginalization, working to ensure that representation of black, female, non-heterosexuality no longer constitutes a 'trauma,' something to be repressed neurotically.

In South Africa, as in the U.S., the kind of homophobia that lies at the heart of the so-called 'trauma' experienced by that gallery-attendee sits-by-side with the commonplace depiction of a fraudulent, commodified vision of 'lesbian' sexuality in pornography, a kind of hyper-visible but fake lesbian sexuality that serves to further obscure authentic representation. Considered in contrast to that scopic regime, whose power is underwritten by its objectification of the female body in the service of (heterosexual) male desire, Muholi's images are remarkable for their intimacy. The women in Muholi's series of photographs of Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta are subjects not objects of desire **[FIG. 7]**. In one of these color photographs taken within their home, the two women, a couple, stand in a small washtub, cleaning one another. The image is deeply erotic but wholly unspectacular. The photograph articulates its meaning through their desire for one another rather than through an accession to viewer's desire for them. The desire that animates this photograph is therefore non-heterosexual

[456] Ibid., 105.

and female. In an image like this one, there is authentic desire and intimate human connection arising within the image and brought to life by its subjects.

In her photography, Muholi is working therefore to create a space for authentic representations of non-heterosexual black sexuality, representations that are generated from within the community rather than without, a body of images that contests both the invisibility wrought by repression and terror and the hypervisibility created by inauthentic, sensationalized images circulated in the mass-media, including pornography. It may seem paradoxical to suggest that black lesbians suffer from both invisibility and hypervisibility, but it makes sense when both are seen as manifestations of an underlying societal homophobia. Though contrasting in their aspect, invisibility and hypervisibility have the same cause and the same effect: the eclipse of honest depictions of non-heterosexual sexuality.

Before we continue to consider Zanele Muholi's strategies for addressing this state of affairs, it is necessary to turn our attention to another paradox, the coexistence in contemporary South Africa of sometimes virulent homophobia alongside a remarkably progressive legal framework guaranteeing the rights of gay and lesbian citizens. In order to understand South Africa's curious mix of legal progressivism and widespread homophobia, we have to turn the clock to the era of apartheid. As noted in an earlier chapter, the white supremacist apartheid regime was both racist and homophobic. The Immorality Act of 1957, later renamed the Sexual Offences Act, which infamously criminalized interracial sex, also targeted many other kinds of sexual offences, mandating tough penalties for a wide variety of non-normative sexual activity. To quote Glen Retief, "If the targets of morality legislation [were] many, it is also true that homosexuals

[were] singled out for attack in numerous instances. … Homosexuality [was] treated as inherently sick and immoral."[457] Under the apartheid regime, gay men were subjected to greater repression than non-heterosexual women, but both groups were often subject to hostility and sometimes to outright harassment. The government's repression of homosexuals led some within the opposition, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu and high profile African National Congress member Albie Sachs, to vocally support gay rights after the end of apartheid. In this vein, Desmond Tutu proclaimed that, "if the church, after victory over apartheid, is looking for a worthy moral crusade, then this is it: the fight against homophobia and heterosexism."[458] For his part, Sachs, formerly the ANC's constitutional lawyer and now a Constitutional Court Judge, drew a direct connection between the need to eliminate oppression on the basis of race and on the basis of sexuality.[459] Such sentiments would ensure that, when South Africa's post-liberation constitution was promulgated in 1996, it would be the first in the world to explicitly protect the rights of gays and lesbians. Sachs, in particular, would make good on his words, authoring a Constitutional Court ruling to the effect that the exclusion of same-sex marriages in South African law "represented a harsh if oblique statement by the law that

[457] Glen Retief, "Keeping Sodom out of the Laager: State Repression of Homosexuality in Apartheid South Africa," in *Defiant Desire*, eds. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 100-1.
[458] Quoted in Sheila Croucher, "South Africa's Democratisation and the Politics of Gay Liberation," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, no. 2 (June, 2002): 323.
[459] To reiterate Sachs previously quoted words on the matter, he noted at an Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) press conference in 1990: "What has happened to lesbian and gay people is the essence of apartheid—it tried to tell people who they were, how they should behave, what their rights were. The essence of democracy is that people should be free to be what they are. We want people to be and feel free." See Derrick Fine and Julia Nicol, "The Lavender Lobby: Working for Lesbian and Gay Rights within the Liberation Movement," in *Defiant Desire*, eds. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 271. Of tangential interest is the fact that Sachs was also responsible for assembling the Constitutional Court's remarkable art collection.

same-sex couples are outsiders, and that their need for affirmation and protection of their intimate relations as human beings is somehow less than that of heterosexual couples."[460]

From a human rights perspective, it is hard to deny that same-sex marriage is an impressive achievement for South Africa's lesbians and gays and their allies, an achievement documented, and, indeed, celebrated by Muholi in a photograph like *Nomonde Mafunda, Key accounts co-ordinator, and Tumi Ndweni, Entrepeneur, on the occasion of their civil union marriage* (2007) **[FIG. 8]**. The photograph is a simple and straightforward document of two women's exercise of this right. In the color photograph, both women are shown from the waist up, one dressed in woman's business suit and the other in man's shirt and tie. They face the camera without undue emotion and a certain degree of dignity. Only a little background is visible behind the figures, but there is enough to suppose that they stand in an office building, suggesting that this image was captured either immediately before or after their civil union. It is, in this sense, simply a wedding portrait, one which would indistinguishable from any other were it not for the women's seriousness and for the fact that both of the betrothed are women. And Muholi's simple, spare representation of the scene seems to suggest that the latter fact ought not to be notable at all. As the example of the United States demonstrates, the right to same-sex marriage is an important one, fought for by lesbians and gays throughout the world but still denied to many, and it is for this reason documented with some solemnity by Muholi.[461]

---

[460] Media summary from the Constitutional Court of South Africa (www.constitutionalcourt.org.za/site/gaylesb.htm).

[461] On the debate over same-sex marriage, see Andrew Sullivan, *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con, A Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

However, as the photographer notes, despite such important civil rights, there is also a problem with South Africans "pretending we come first," that is, in pretending that South Africa is special in the world when it comes to securing the rights of lesbians and gays.[462] As a contrasting photograph like *Aftermath* makes clear, homophobia and violence directed towards lesbians and gays remains a serious and frightening problem. Non-heterosexual South Africans may have important rights not enjoyed in other countries, but what are we to make of an incident like the murderous one that began this part of my chapter? Non-heterosexual South Africans have the right to marry, but do they not also have the right to live? In contemporary South Africa, remarkable rights for homosexuals are counterbalanced by remarkable repression, especially within black communities.

The roots of this tension extend into the apartheid era, when the progressive views of figures like Tutu and Sachs existed alongside less open attitudes among people who found it hard to see common ground between the struggle against racism and that against homophobia. Enrolled at the University of Cape Town in 1989, Hein Kleinbooi, for example, found that,

> my white gay comrades told me that the oppression they experienced as homosexuals was equivalent to the oppression I experienced as a black South African growing up on the poverty-stricken Cape Flats. And my black liberationist comrades told me, whenever I brought up the issue of gay rights, that I was 'hijacking the struggle.' Caught somewhere between these two misguided attitudes was my own identity, struggling to find its place.[463]

More alarming than such mutual incomprehension was outright hostility of the sort that found expression during Winnie Mandela's trial for kidnapping and assault in 1991. Her

---

[462] Zanele Muholi, interview with the author, 27 June 2007.
[463] Hein Kleinbooi, "Identity Crossfire: On Being a Black Gay Student Activist," in *Defiant Desire*, eds. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 264.

defense, conducted by George Bizos, "codified homosexuality as sexual abuse, and characterised homosexual practice as a white colonising depredation of heterosexual black culture."[464] A protest placard carried by one of Mandela's supporters outside the court articulated the defense strategy more bluntly, reading "Homosex is not in black culture."[465] Homosexuality was situated during this trial as a white exploitation of black culture, as another form of insidious colonialism. As Rachel Holmes notes, participants in the trial articulated the idea that, "homosexuality among black people is the result of members of the black culture becoming tainted by homosexuality in white culture."[466] In interviews, Muholi frequently rails against such attitudes, which claim that homosexuality is somehow inherently and essentially un-African, and her photography is intended as a direct counter to this position.

Zanele Muholi's work and her very existence ought to be enough to dispel the pernicious homophobic argument that homosexuality is not genuinely African, and to argue from the historical evidence that this position is invalid almost seems to cede the grounds of debate to the bigots. Nevertheless, as Lee Wallace explains, it is a fact that, "The belief that indigenous homosexuality did not exist in sub-Saharan Africa is … contradicted by a number of 20th century accounts that attest to the many and diverse

---

[464] Rachel Holmes, "'White Rapists Made Coloureds (and Homosexuals)': The Winnie Mandela Trial and the Politics of Race and Sexuality," in *Defiant Desire*, eds. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (New York: Routledge, 1995), 284-5.

[465] Ibid.

[466] Ibid., 294. The association of homosexuality with 'Western decadence' has been made elsewhere in the developing world. M. Jacqui Alexander, for example, discusses debates around and the creation of the 1986 Sexual Offences Bill in Trinidad and Tobago, noting the remarkable way in which state management of sexuality, a legacy of colonial slave economy, has become re-inscribed by the post-colonial state as part of a discourse on 'morality.' Specifically criminalizing lesbian sex (as 'serious indecency'), the bill was designed to fend off forms of sexuality associated with Western decadence. Ironically, as Alexander suggests, the bill attempts to curb such Western decadence with the language and ideological underpinnings of colonial-era Victorianism. See M. Jacqui Alexander, "Redrafting Morality: The Postcolonial State and the Sexual Offences Bill of Trinidad and Tobago," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 133-152.

same-sex practices evident in different tribal societies."[467] Wallace reports on recorded instances of such practices of great variety and from all over the continent. For example, Wallace notes the fieldwork of Eve Meyerowitz, which reports that "lesbian affairs were virtually universal" among unmarried and recently-married girls among the Akan people of present-day Ghana.[468] A completely different kind of practice is described by Melville J. Herskovits in an essay titled "A Note on 'Woman Marriage' in Dahomey," written in 1937 and recently republished in Andrew Sullivan's reader on the same-sex marriage debate.[469] Herskovits reports on a West African cultural practice wherein a wealthy, infertile woman marries another woman to produce offspring with the assistance of a surrogate father. His experience suggests that the practice he describes is part of a larger cultural formation: "Reports of the occurrence of 'woman marriage' in parts of Africa as far distant from one another as northern and southern Nigeria, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the Union of South Africa indicate the possibility that there may be other instances of this institution that have gone unrecorded."[470] Interestingly, while the practices described by Meyerowitz and Herskovits were certainly not caused by colonialism, they were ended by it, at least indirectly. It was the intervention of Christian missionaries that undermined the prevalence of such practices and substituted a much more rigid model of marriage and same-sex relations.[471]

Whatever the historical roots of homophobia in Africa may be, Muholi is forced to confront it today. As recently as August of 2009, Muholi's work was publicly attacked

---

[467] Lee Wallace, "Discovering Homosexuality: Cross-Cultural Comparison and the History of Sexuality," in *Gay Life and Culture: A World History*, ed. Robert Aldrich (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 257.
[468] Ibid., 259.
[469] Melville J. Herskovits, "A Note on 'Woman Marriage' in Dahomey," in *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con, A Reader*, ed. Andrew Sullivan (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 32-5.
[470] Ibid., 32.
[471] Wallace, 259-60.

as "immoral" by an important figure in the South African government, Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana, in an incident reported on in March of 2010.[472] Xingwana was scheduled to give a speech at the opening of the exhibition "Innovative Women" in Johannesburg, which the ministry had subsidized financially. Reportedly, upon seeing Muholi's photographs, which formed a part of the exhibition, Xingwana left prematurely. Her reason:

> Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this. It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building.[473]

Once the story began to circulate in the media, Xingwana altered her story, elaborating on it without taking back her earlier statements. She would later claim to the press that her concern was not a result of homophobia. Rather, she was disturbed because of the eroticism of the images, in effect claiming that Muholi's photographs are pornography. Xingwana would state to the press, and I quote at length:

> To my mind, these were not works of arts but crude misrepresentations of women … masquerading as artworks …
>
> Further, as a public representative and as a South African, I uphold the laws of our country and the constitution. I have fought for liberation and women's rights for the most part of my life. However, I believe the rights that have been entrenched in our constitution include the rights of children. This is why we have laws in this country that protect children against exposure to pornographic material.
>
> I therefore would not, for any reason, be part of any tendencies that undermine the rights of people. I accept and respect the rights of people of different sexual orientation. The claims that I am homophobic are baseless and insulting to me.

---

[472] The incident in discussed in three linked articles in South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper: an un-credited article titled "Lulu Xingwana describes lesbian photos as immoral" (3 March 2010), Verashni Pillay's "Xingwana: But is it art?" (4 March 2010), and Lisa van Wyk's "Xingwana: Homophobic claims 'baseless, insulting'" (5 March 2010). All of these news articles were accessed from the website of the *Mail & Guardian* (www.mg.co.za).

[473] van Wyk, n.p.

> I have not imposed censorship on any artists and the funding polices of my Ministry and Department are very clear. …
>
> What I think is necessary in our country today is a long overdue debate on what is art and where do we draw the line between art and pornography.[474]

Muholi found this explanation less than credible. She would say in response to the minister's statements, "It's paralyzing."[475] In Muholi's view, "such callousness from someone who happens to hold a position of power is a violation of human rights."[476] If her work is meant to fight for civil rights, it seems as if this will entail a continued battle against homophobic attitudes among at least some in positions of power in the government.

In a sense, the very existence of her photographs is designed to counter the views held by those who would try to marginalize her identity and her community as un-African. Her photographs seek to document the authentic reality of her life and the lives of her friends, to reveal these as anything but 'immoral.' One could cite, for example, her 2007 photograph of Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo, who she photographed on Good Friday outside the gay-friendly Hope Unity Metropolitan Community Church **[FIG. 9]**. The couple sits on a park bench in their church clothes, happily cradling their child. They are, from all appearances, a model family, deeply invested in their family and their community. However, photographs of this sort are only as good as their mode of distribution, and, as an art historian, this is one of the things I find most interesting about her work. She is taking advantage of art's distribution network to spread her images and bring about a meeting of disparate communities. In this, she is following well-trod paths

---

[474] Quoted in Pillay, n.p.
[475] van Wyk, n.p.
[476] Ibid.

in South Africa, a path marked out by more famous documentary photographers like her mentor David Goldblatt. For Muholi, the importance of the art world is in part bound up with the distinction between the audiences that frequent its spaces and the people depicted in her images. As she suggests, the subjects of her photographs do not understand what the galleries are all about, but the gallery audience does not understand the lives of her subjects either, creating different audiences to which she can articulate the same issues. Concerned with the distinction between public and private, by exhibiting in art galleries, Muholi is able to accomplish her linked goals of "claiming the space" with her art and of providing a "reality check" for gallery audiences.[477]

Muholi's work might be compared to that of more prominent international photographers like Deborah Bright or Catharine Opie, but her work is particularly South African in the way in which she inextricably links her work as an activist with her practice as a photographer. She seeks to reveal the distance between the legal rights and protections offered her community and the circumstances that beset this community in the less-rarefied world of everyday life. Ultimately, her work is less concerned with investigating issues related to lesbian identity (or indeed with defining such an identity) than it is with documenting both for outsiders and insiders the existence of a community under profound threat.

Part Three: Clothing and Creative Freedom in the New South Africa

Since the end of apartheid, the profile in the United States of South African art has grown significantly. During the apartheid-era, South African art's relevance outside the country, its special cachet, was linked with its political stance, its cultural opposition

[477] Zanele Muholi, interview with the author, 27 June 2007.

to white supremacist governance. Today, the so-called South African miracle, the advent of multi-racial democracy in the country in 1994, has made South African art of even greater interest internationally as a kind of sign of racial progress, of the possibilities for success by anti-racist movements worldwide and for the peaceful reconciliation of racial grievances. If during apartheid South African art enjoyed a kind of reflected glory from the heroic struggle against apartheid, today it seems to posses a special appeal because of the remarkable success of that struggle, a success which seems to contrast markedly with the apparently endless stream of bad news emerging from elsewhere on the African continent in the Western media. Work by artists striving to articulate and reflect new concepts about what it is to be South African, therefore, appear to offer to audiences outside the country an encouraging vision of reconciliation and progress, hard won and tentative to be sure, but progress nonetheless.

In this sense, one of the attractions of contemporary South African art for audiences in the United States seems to be the notion that we, as Americans, can learn from it something important about ourselves and helpful to the reconciliation of our own racial issues. On the face of it, there seems to me to be nothing wrong with this idea. However, it seems evident that the lessons we take from it ought to be the right ones, and this requires a good deal more context than the typical art exhibition provides. As globalization makes the mechanisms by which racial identity is constructed an ever more urgent political, social and cultural concern, it has also made an understanding of local and regional racial constructs relevant to those who are sometimes continents away. Obviously this is no mean task, but, I think, if we care to look, that Americans *can* learn some interesting things from the specificities of South African art and the manner in

which it deals with the construction of racial identity, especially blackness. However, the story South African art tells is more complex than it might initially appear, and new South African art, which on the surface and from a distance might appear celebratory, is often quite critical and deals with questions of race in a remarkably nuanced manner.

Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko is one of a new generation of young South African artists whose admittedly glossy work has been sometimes misread by audiences outside her country. "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" (2004-present), her striking series of small-scale colorful photographs of smartly dressed young people, mostly taken in Johannesburg and its environs, has proved popular with foreign audiences. Her photography has appeared in several recent American exhibitions of African art, including 2008's "Flow" at the Studio Museum in Harlem and 2006's "Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography," in which *Cindy and Nkuli* (2004) **[FIG. 10]** featured prominently. Indeed, for "Snap Judgments," this particular photograph functioned as an icon of the exhibition, appearing in publicity and advertising material.

In photographs like this one and in other images from this series, Veleko employs the format of fashion photography, capturing an apparently stylish and sophisticated street culture awash in fashionable, creative people. Like almost all of Veleko's subjects in this series, Cindy and Nkuli wear eye-catching, brightly-colored clothing. Each of the urbanites depicted in "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" poses for Veleko's camera, choosing their garments and arranging their postures in order to best present their individuality. The photographs are also always curiously devoid of other people, making the women and men photographed stand out even more. Veleko's images do provide

some context for her subjects, revealing them to be within urban environments, but often the backgrounds she includes seem to be present for formal reasons. Bricks, ceramic tiles or graffiti covered walls provide contrast and visual interest which adds to the appeal of the portraits. All of the women and men photographed by Veleko for this series seem idiosyncratically cosmopolitan, fully globalized but with local and individual flair.

"Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" is a series that, at least initially, appears emblematic of the current era in South Africa, seemingly encapsulating the country's post-apartheid liberation. These photographs seem to articulate a South African identity that is vibrant, progressive, sophisticated and free. This is what South African critic Tracy Murinik claims in her introduction to Veleko's work on *Artthrob*, an online magazine about South African art written mostly by South African artists. Of Veleko, Murinik said, "Her signature "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" series of bold, funky street fashion portraits captured the New York public's imagination—affording them a glimpse of youth culture and fashion in South Africa, and providing a contemporary face to extend to Africa as a whole."[478] In New York, reviewer Mark Stevens registered a similar response to Veleko's work in an article from *New York Magazine* titled "What Does Africa Look Like." Stevens effused, "It was a shock—an awakening shock—to come upon the bursting contemporary colors worn by the fashion-struck people portrayed by Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko on the streets of Johannesburg," a shock that for Stevens displaced the "stark black-and-white image" that had previously defined for him a continent to which he had never traveled.[479] As I want to make clear, however, their photographer's own sense of the stories these photographs tell suggests another narrative,

[478] Tracey Murnik, "Artbio: Lolo Veleko," *Artthrob* (http://www.artthrob.co.za/07feb/artbio.html).
[479] Mark Stevens, "What Does Africa Look Like?," *New York Magazine*, 2 April 2006 (http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/16566/)

a narrative that is about crushing conformity and the hard road traveled by those who transgress social norms, a narrative that is in many respects the inverse of the one sketched out by Murnik and Stevens. Bold, funky and colorful they may be, but Veleko's photographs are not definitive, authentic images of contemporary South African sensibilities, nor are they intended to be. For Veleko, these are photographs *of* outsiders *by* an outsider, and, if they speak in any way about South Africa's new found freedom, they speak about its limits, about the boundaries that still constrain an individual's construction of his or her own identity.

Before returning to Veleko's understanding of her own work, I should point out that another reason these photographs have proven popular in Europe and North America is that they appear to fit neatly within a now-developing canon of African photography. On the surface, they look how African photography *ought* to look. On the surface, Veleko's photographs from this series bear an intriguing resemblance to portrait photographs taken mostly in the late 1940s and 1950s by Malian photographer Seydou Keïta and to photographs by other photographers who worked in a similar vein to Keïta **[FIG. 11A and 11B]**. Since appearing in 1996 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in "In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present," the work of Keïta and a handful of other African portrait photographers has become emblematic of the category of African photography, displayed in important art museums worldwide and bought and sold at prestigious commercial galleries. Veleko appears poised to join this group. Discussing Lolo Veleko's work in his *New York Times* review of "Snap Judgments," Holland Cotter certainly discerned common ground between her work and that of African photography's old masters: "Surely, for example, there is a line of descent from … Keïta

to the young South African artist Nontsikelelo Veleko … and her eye-tingling pictures of Johannesburg street fashion."[480] Since then the connection has been made even more explicit by a pairing of Veleko's and Keïta's photographs in a 2007 exhibition "Seydou Keïta and Lolo Veleko: Fashion," held at Danziger Projects gallery in New York. Though the idea of an unbroken line of descent from Keïta to Veleko is inaccurate and misleading, it is not hard to see how seductive this notion might be, providing as it does a clear, coherent, easy to understand narrative of African photography that simplifies for critics, collectors and viewers what is, in fact, a complex and heterogeneous field of images. Indeed, Veleko seemed to acknowledge as much when I asked her about this purported influence on her work. According to her, she was only exposed to Keïta's work after she had already completed many of the photographs in this series, and only then because people more familiar than her with the history of African photography, and with how that history has been constructed and displayed in exhibitions outside the African continent, showed her the older photographers' images.[481] In other words, she only became aware of Keïta's work because her work reminded others of his. (As an aside, I might note that in the course of our discussion she elaborated on this issue, remarking that it seemed a shame that landmark works in the history of photography in Africa were still little known within Africa, and that these works were seemingly better known by people like me than by people like her.)

Just because Veleko was unaware of Keïta's work when she began her own, rendering the notion of a 'line of descent' rather problematic, does that mean there is no connection whatsoever between the work of these two photographers? Well, yes and no.

---

[480] Holland Cotter, "Colorful and Clashing: Looking at Africa, Art Review: 'Snap Judgments,'" *New York Times*, 17 March 2006, 33.
[481] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.

In the work of both Keïta and Veleko, there is an element of creative self-fashioning, of people performing through costume, prop, gesture and pose their own modernity.[482] However, the disparate socio-historical contexts in which these bodies of images were created make both the mechanisms of performance and the character of modernity radically different. Keïta's photographs were made in the heady days leading up to Mali's independence, a moment of extreme optimism when the possibilities for self-fashioned vernacular modernisms appeared limitless. Veleko's work on the other hand unfolds at a new stage in the global integration of culture, in a period when the volume of cultural flows has massively increased. The awareness of Keïta and his subjects of the wider world, while crucial to the production of his images, is nonetheless limited in comparison to that of Veleko and her subjects, who are connected to global culture and information in an unprecedented manner through networks of instantaneous communication. In some ways the work of both photographers implicitly references cultural globalization, but we can only understand the differences between the Keïta and Veleko if we understand how the character and the speed of globalization have changed in the last several decades.

If Veleko's images reflect on and participate in instantaneous flows of culture around the globe, how is it that these photographs might still somehow be 'misinterpreted' by critics outside South Africa, incorrectly appearing to speak to South Africa's liberation or to reflect the influence of Keïta? I would argue that, while bits of cultural information flow freely around the globe, all too often these texts and images

---

[482] See Christopher Pinney, "Introduction," in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Michelle Lamunière, ed., *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001).

travel without the crucial context necessary to make them fully intelligible. Veleko alluded to this situation obliquely in her interview with me, saying, on the one hand, that her "work is not contained in South Africa—I can show it anywhere," but, in the next breath, expressing some concern that her work not be "misinterpreted."[483] I could not blame her for being concerned about this issue, as, to my chagrin, I realized as our interview progressed that I had been guilty of precisely this offence.

As one of those helping to organize "Snap Judgments," I wrote a short biographical essay that discussed Veleko and her work in the exhibition's catalogue.[484] In the event, it was difficult to communicate with Veleko while the exhibition was being mounted and the catalogue written, and most of what I was able to learn about her work came second-hand. Mercifully, nothing demonstrably incorrect made its way into the catalogue entry. However, I confess to misunderstanding these images' true social context at the time of writing that brief essay. At the time, I read these photographs through my own cultural filter. To me, these people looked sophisticated and attractive. To me, these people seemed like the beating heart, the creative lifeblood, of the new South Africa. No longer isolated from the outside world, these photographs seemed to suggest that South Africans were now open and receptive to international currents in visual art and fashion and were capable of both responding and contributing to global trends.

Still, despite being taken by the sunny, colorful sheen of Veleko's photographs, it should have occurred to me as I continued to follow her work on these images that there are still very few places in this world where a man in a handmade skirt or in a pink and

---

[483] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.
[484] Kevin Mulhearn, "Nontsikelelo 'Lolo' Veleko," in *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (New York: International Center of Photography, 2006), 372-3.

orange floral jumpsuit would not raise eyebrows. These are some of the outfits worn by Veleko's friend Sibu in photographs from the series **[FIG. 12A and 12B]**. Sibu, a Soweto-based fashion designed whose work Veleko greatly respects, is photographed in clothing of his own design. According to the photographer, this is simply how Sibu dresses, and these are the kinds of outfits he normally wears.[485] Although there are probably very few places in the world where a black man like Sibu would not confront the limits of normative black masculinity by wearing that dress or jumpsuit, I nevertheless foolishly supposed clothes of the sort worn by Sibu and the other subjects of Veleko's work were typical in South Africa.

When I met her, Veleko was able to quickly disabuse me of my naiveté. The people in her photographs, who I had perceived as cultural tastemakers and insiders, in fact felt like outsiders, as did she. Growing up in Cape Town, Veleko was often made to feel outside the boundaries of blackness, an experience which intensified once she moved to Johannesburg as a young adult. According to her, she has "been called too thin to be a black girl; not black enough; I roll my words; asked where did I go to school?"[486] For reasons of appearance and affect, Veleko seemed to not fit within the normative culture. Though she has long lived with such attitudes, they still mystify her on some level. As she puts it, "I don't know where those things come from, but it was all black people saying this to me - the black people that I grew up with, my teachers at school too."[487] Eventually she did learn some long suppressed family lore—that she may have had a white great-grandfather—but did not feel as if this fully accounted for her experience or

[485] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.
[486] Lolo Veleko, "Artists Statement," in Tracey Murnik, "Artbio: Lolo Veleko," *Artthrob* (http://www.artthrob.co.za/07feb/artbio.html).
[487] Ibid.

for how others seemed to respond to her.[488] Investigating why it was that she should be made to feel insufficiently black, she created an early series of portraits titled *www.notblackenough.lolo* (2002). The series included both gender-bending and racially-ambiguous portraits of two of Veleko's friends and self-portraits of the artist in a graffiti-inspired installation that included scrawled text by the artist and materials for viewer's to use to add their own written contributions. Though the work was dependent on Veleko's photographs, it was important to her that it be displayed with an opportunity for viewers to interact with the art and supply their own theories of what is and is not black enough. In retrospect this series comes across as a bit heavy-handed, but the thematic it articulates is critical to understanding the more subtle one displayed in "Beauty" series. As Veleko says,

> I named my project *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* because other people, when they saw those people dressed up like that, would ask: 'How can you dress up in yellow pants and a lime green jersey with stripes?' And I thought the way I see beauty and the way I perceive beauty might be different to someone else next to me ... So the project is called [that] because for me they are beautiful. I was excited [by them]. I didn't care what anyone else was saying ... It was all about drawing attention around issues of beauty.[489]

She concludes by noting that one of the reasons she feels affinity for the outlandishly dressed people she depicts in this series is that she "used to be one of them."[490]

One can discern from all this that Veleko and her sitters in the "Beauty" series present a problem to others not so much because she and they are not African in a (traditional) cultural sense or black in a racial sense, but because she and they do not 'dress black,' or 'talk black,' or 'act black.' In the end, Veleko's confrontation with the

[488] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.
[489] Veleko, "Artists Statement."
[490] Ibid.

boundaries of a socially 'acceptable' black identity in her own life and in her work is not actually about having a racially mixed ancestry (which she might) or about not understanding the arcana of the traditional culture of one or more of South Africa's indigenous groups (which, ironically, she does).[491] Instead, it is about imperfectly displaying cultural markers of blackness which are rooted in verbal affectation or accent, taste in clothing, or general mannerism—markers which are grounded in and articulated through modern urban mass culture rather than so-called traditional culture.

In this way, Veleko's experience seems to mirror the situation described by Nadine Dolby in her 2001 book *Constructing Race: Youth Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa*, an ethnographic study conducted in 1996 at a formerly all white, now multiracial school in Durban. Several of the students Dolby discusses have experiences that seem analogous to Veleko's. One non-white girl tells Dolby,

> Often when I walk on the road in my area, because they all know I go to a white school, one guy turned around and said to me, look how high she holds her nose up in the air. She's actually blocking the sun. She thinks she's white.[492]

Others' perceptions of this girl's whiteness are not rooted in skin color but rather in how they view her clothing, for example. As Dolby says of this same student, "the same clothes that function to mark 'white' in one particular site (the Indian area where she lives) simultaneously mark her as 'black' in another [her school]."[493] The girl's racial identity shifts as she moves from one geographic space to another but remains visible through external signifiers like clothing.

---

[491] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.
[492] Nadine E. Dolby, *Constructing Race: Youth Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 101.
[493] Ibid., 102.

Dolby's study focuses on the intersection of race and popular culture as "a key site for the formation of identities."[494] For the students discussed by Dolby, part of a generation coming of age in South Africa in the 1990s, "a generation whose past, present and future are neither completely defined by apartheid, nor completely free of it," an individual's racial identity no longer evolves in legally-enforced isolation from other identity formations.[495] Instead, identity must be created through dialogue and debate. As Dolby puts it,

> 'Race' after apartheid is not simply a matter of discarding or embracing already formed racial positions, but of renegotiating it in a new context. Race, its significance as a ground for politics and a category for the organization of daily life, has been transformed.[496]

For the young South Africans studied by Dolby, and, it seems to me, for Veleko and her subjects, popular culture becomes a way to articulate creatively define racial identity. As Dolby notes, in contemporary South Africa, "Race is defined and determined through attachments to particular aspects of popular culture, and identities, both in connection and in conflict, are played out on this terrain."[497]

In Veleko's work from "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder," the presence of popular culture is evident primarily through fashion. As Veleko says,

> I look at fashion and how it constructs identity, because fashion really plays with identity a whole lot ... But now when it comes to one's own true identity in South Africa it becomes problematic, especially when it comes to mixed relationships and mixed background. And I didn't want to deal with it from that point of view ... it was safe to deal with [identity] from a fashion point of view because nobody actually thinks that they're doing this. But actually we're all doing it! It's really fun. And that's how I always look at fashion. It's like play. My clothes aren't me. And people

---

[494] Ibid., 14.
[495] Ibid., 7.
[496] Ibid., 8.
[497] Ibid., 15.

> who really know me, know me. But people who think they know me, know my style.[498]

She describes clothes as a safe space for identity exploration because they do not *really* define her or anyone else, at least not in the same way that the race of one's parents might define the offspring of a racially 'mixed' relationship, for example. Clothes mask rather than reveal the 'true' self, she argues. But, of course one has to inquire whether this true self really exists in the manner in which she conceives it. Perhaps clothing is much more explosive as a signifier than she seems to believe. Rather than evading more difficult issues around race by focusing on fashion, she is pinpointing a key fulcrum around which race is configured in contemporary culture.

Indeed, one of the striking things about her discussion of this work is the tension between the wished-for free space of play described the preceding quote and the outsider status held by many of subjects. In part, she began making these photographs out of a sense of frustration with the grim drabness of Johannesburg, to which she had moved not long before embarking on the project.[499] Embattled by crime, she felt its residents had become defensive in their personal styles, trying to disappear into rather than stand out from the crowd. Instinctively, she began photographing others she saw on the street who seemed fearless in their personal style, beginning a series she has continued both in Johannesburg and in other places to which she has traveled. According to Veleko, the subjects of these portraits run a risk for their idiosyncratic choice in fashion. This risk may not be as great as the one borne by the subjects of Zanele Muholi's photographs, but it is real. And, while the stylish men and women in Veleko's photographs are not as far

[498] Veleko, "Artists Statement."
[499] Lolo Veleko, interview with the author, 29 June 2007.

out on the margins of society as the prisoners depicted by Mikhael Subotzky, neither are in the mainstream.

Rather than revealing the present era as one characterized by the possibility for unbridled creativity, the photographs from "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" are meant, in fact, to show how little space is available for certain kinds of nonconformity. In these images, Veleko endeavors to recognize and question the construction of identity in a radically-altered society. The subjects of Veleko's portraits are exceptional not in mechanisms by which they construct their public profile—mixing and matching, creatively combining, looking good and feeling good—but in the extremes to which their experiments take them. These stylishly attired youths confront stereotypes about how the young, black and urban ought to look. However, Veleko suggests, in contemporary South Africa, a certain amount of individuality is allowed but not too much. Whatever one does, the key is not to stand out from the crowd. One is free to do as one pleases, as long as this is not too much.

The end of apartheid promised liberation and freedom. A new era seemed to offer the possibility of many things: social justice and an end to punitive incarceration, the right of non-heterosexual South Africans to live as they wished without threat from a homophobic state, unbridled creativity and space for personal reinvention. Each of the photographers discussed in this chapter confronts the limits of that promise. They seek to document the gap between expectation and reality in contemporary South Africa. By investigating this vital issue, these photographers are continuing to pursue photography as a social mission and continuing a remarkable legacy of photographic excellence several decades in the making.

Conclusion

As I noted in my introduction, I have consciously chosen to write this dissertation from the perspective of my own subject position: white, male, heterosexual, and, especially, a citizen of the United States. I am an outsider to the history I have endeavored to tell. No doubt, my relationship to the material addressed by this study has led to some unorthodox choices. For example, I wrote about the relationship between photography and whiteness and critical white studies because of my own concern over these questions, my own investment in deconstructing whiteness in the United States. Before writing a word of this dissertation, before discussing it with any of the artists about whom I have written here, I thought about this issue. What did it mean for me to write about South Africa as an American? What are the stakes of this decision? Is there anything to be gained from this exercise?

In trying to work out a satisfying answer to these questions, I came across an obscure incident, a moment when the history of photography in South Africa, that country's political struggles, and progressive political activism in the United States intertwined in remarkable fashion. In October 1970, Ken Williams, an African American photographer and employee of the Polaroid corporation in the United States, founded with his wife and several friends the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement (PRWM), dedicated to forcing Polaroid into divesting from South Africa.[500] Williams had discovered in the course of his work a sample identification badge intended for the South African Department of Mines. Looking into the matter further, he discovered that

[500] This incident is discussed in Eric J. Morgan, "The World is Watching: Polaroid and South Africa," *Enterprise & Society* 7, no. 3 (September 2006): 520-49. Archival material from the PRWM is archived online as part of the African Activist Archives. The available material includes nine items, comprising pamphlets and leaflets, and a button and poster used to propagandize the group's goals (africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement).

Polaroid was selling its I.D.-2 system to various companies in South Africa. Williams suspected that the system, designed to create identification cards nearly instantaneously, was being sold not only to various companies in South Africa but also to the apartheid government to use to take passbook photographs of the oppressed majority. Though Polaroid denied direct or indirect sales to the apartheid regime, in fact their local distributor, Frank and Hirsch, was selling the system to agencies of the South African government.[501] Williams and his wife, who also worked for Polaroid, organized the PRWM to pressure the corporation and force it to withdraw from South Africa.

The issues involved in the PRWM's dispute with Polaroid are complex. A liberal technocrat, Polaroid co-founder Edwin H. Land was surprised by accusations that Polaroid was supporting discrimination and racism in South Africa, especially since, in the United States, the company was well-known for its progressive record on racial issues and was a pioneer of affirmative action.[502] As a consequence of this, the PRWM garnered little support from the company's African American workers when Williams pushed for walkouts and boycotts. Though the protest rallies organized by the PRWM were largely attended by leftist community members rather than Polaroid employees, the group staged its events to cause maximum embarrassment to the company. One promotional leaflet, which, interestingly, features photographs repurposed from Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage*, is emblazoned with the slogan, "POLAROID COLORPACK III …… IMPRISONS A BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN EVERY 60 SECONDS," and it asks its readers to, "Call for an international boycott of all POLAROID products" **[FIG.**

[501] Ibid., 526.
[502] Ibid., 529.

1A and 1B].[503] Rather than agree to the protestors demands for disengagement, Polaroid elected to "take steps to improve wages and working conditions for black employees at both Frank and Hirsch and in the larger community," announcing these new policies in a widely distributed newspaper advertisement that appeared on January 12, 1971.[504] Describing its new policies as "An Experiment in South Africa," Polaroid also committed significant financial support for black education in South Africa. As Eric Morgan puts it, "Polaroid quickly became the leader of a progressive movement to help bring liberation to black South Africans, which was an unprecedented action for the early 1970s, especially from a major American corporation."[505] Choosing to try to reform the apartheid system from within, Polaroid elected to remain involved in South Africa, at least initially. Polaroid's controversial 'experiment' was watched closely by government and business interests in the United States, but it was doomed to failure. Though it was well-meaning and able to achieve some tangible results (black South African Polaroid workers did begin to receive higher pay), the 'experiment' in constructive engagement faltered, a result of both continued pressure from the PRWM and other affiliated groups and the difficulty Polaroid had in creating real reform in apartheid South Africa. In 1977, Polaroid gave up, becoming the first major American corporation to announce its withdrawal from South Africa.[506]

For Eric Morgan, this incident set an important precedent for debates that would last into the 1980s over the proper way for American corporations to do business in South Africa. Reformist initiatives like Polaroid's were undertaken only to be abandoned in the

[503] Polaroid Revolutionary Worker's Movement, untitled leaflet, c. 1970.
[504] Morgan, 535.
[505] Ibid., 536.
[506] Ibid., 545.

face of pressure from activists and the failure of these initiatives to achieve the desired results. Calls for full divestment and economic sanctions would become louder in Europe and North America as these strategies came to be seen as an effective form of resistance to the apartheid regime. As Morgan notes, "Polaroid's most lasting legacy may not have been the launching of its experiment in 1971, but instead the experiment's collapse in 1977 and the company's complete abandonment of South Africa."[507]

As I considered the problem of how I could and why I would write about South African photography as an American, this obscure incident caught my attention. It was an outburst of activism in the United States connected to South Africa's political struggles which was specifically invested in photography. For Williams and the others involved in the PRWM, the struggles for civil rights in the United States and in South Africa were linked, and photography was the tie that bound the two. Though it is by no means in the PRWM's tradition of direct activism, this dissertation tries to link the politics and culture of South Africa with that of the United States through photography, or, at least, through a consideration of certain aspects of the history of South African photography. To me, the PRWM represents a compelling call for direct political action by Americans around photography in South Africa. I hope this dissertation has made an equally compelling case for art historical attention to photography in South Africa by academics in the United States.

While direct comparisons between the visual cultures of the United States and South Africa appear infrequently in this dissertation, I did not write one page without thoughts about race, class and gender in America in the back of my mind. These thoughts rarely found their way onto the page because I was determined to let the

[507] Ibid., 547.

material addressed here remain deeply entrenched in the art historical circumstances of South Africa. Perhaps a day will come when South African photography and culture are so familiar to art historians in the United States that constant, direct comparisons will not run the risk of overwhelming the individuality and specificity of South African cultural production. In my future research on this material, I do hope to explore these connections further and in a manner that respects the integrity of South African photography. Given this, it would be appropriate to end this work with a final review of why I believe the photographers discussed here have made significant contributions to South African art and to the growth of a South African democratic culture.

In a speech delivered at the opening of the Cultural Development Congress in Johannesburg in April of 1993, Nelson Mandela said,

> During the worst years of repression, when all avenues of legitimate protest were closed by emergency legislation, it was the arts that articulated the plight and the democratic aspirations of our people. This affirmation was demonstrated through drama, dance, literature, song, film, paintings and sculpture that defined the silence that apartheid sought to impose. The secret of apartheid was revealed universally, and severely condemned by the world at large.[508]

Photography played a critical role in fighting to create and continuing to build a truly democratic South African culture in the manner outlined by Mandela. It affirmed within South Africa a democratic culture against the silence of the apartheid regime. And, it brought to the attention of the world the oppression this regime unleashed on the majority of the country's population. Since apartheid's end, the medium has continued to fulfill these roles.

---

[508] Nelson Mandela, "The Efficacy of Culture," in *Nelson Mandela: In His Own Words*, ed. Kader Asmal, David Chidester, Wilmot James (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2003), 288-90.

In South Africa, photography has been used to document the circumstances of South African life, including Ernest Cole's consideration of the tangible impact of racial inequality and repression on the lives of adolescents and political dissidents or Mikhael Subotzky's investigation of incarceration. Others have used the medium to interrogate more abstract social structures like whiteness or creolization, as the work of David Goldblatt and Berni Searle demonstrates. Photography has been employed strategically to question and unsettle the politics of representation, uncovering lost histories, as Santu Mofokeng works to do with his *Black Album*, or countering stereotypes, as Zanele Muholi endeavors to do with her photographs of lesbian and transgender South Africans. The photography discussed in this dissertation was taken both to counter non-democratic forces in South Africa and to uncover and insert into the public discourse the visual material necessary to the construction of a continuing culture of democracy.

These photographs were chosen with an eye towards presenting a survey of recent South African photography that may not be comprehensive or complete but is, at the very least, representative. In other words, this dissertation includes a diverse selection of photographers who together demonstrate both a representative range of subject positions in South African society and an array of typical stylistic and genre choices in South African photography. Taken as a whole, the photographers presented here offer not a fully developed picture of South African photography but rather a mosaic, one whose distinct elements I have chosen deliberately not to synthesize. By allowing elements within the corpus of South African photography to remain distinct and incorporating into the organizational structure of this dissertation sometimes jarring juxtapositions of these elements, I have presented an account of South Africa photography that acknowledges

the diversity of the category. Within this diverse category, however, common features remain apparent, features which tie together the work discussed here.

Of these, the most notable to me is the fact that the photographers addressed here do not only work towards progressive social change through their photographs; they also model democratic citizenship in their lives and careers. Many are teachers, viewing education generally and photographic education specifically as curatives for a deeply divided society. Most notable in this regard is David Goldblatt, founder of the remarkable Market Photography Workshop. However many of the other photographers discussed here have also taught either at the Workshop, at one of South Africa's universities, or as part of other initiatives. At one time or another, Santu Mofokeng, Peter McKenzie, Jo Ractliffe, Hentie van der Merwe, Berni Searle and Mikhael Subotzky have all taught, passing on knowledge and mentoring other photographers. The photographers discussed in this study also articulate their citizenship though activism. The apartheid-era photographic activism typified by Ernest Cole and Peter McKenzie has been continued in the present by Zanele Muholi. All of the photographers I discuss who worked during apartheid committed themselves to antiracism in their lives and in their work. Similarly, those working since the end of the apartheid regime have committed themselves to ensuring the county lives up to its own ideals.

In twenty-first century South Africa, the traumatic legacy of institutional racism is still etched into the landscape**.** It is visible in cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town through the walls topped with barbed wire and the menacing security fences that surround (still often white-owned) middle- and upper-class houses, perceptible in the substandard housing that comprises much of the housing stock of the non-white

townships, obvious by the very fact that townships still exist. In contemporary South African photography, the geography and architecture of South Africa, the structure of its space, continues to be influenced by the apartheid era. In the nearly two decades that have passed since the end of apartheid, it is sad but not surprising that the social ills associated with this system have not disappeared. But it is also a hopeful sign that the end of apartheid has not dissipated the energy and passion of South Africa's photographers. Their continued commitment to social engagement in their photography and in their lives is grounds for hope in a country where hope has been sometimes a commodity in too short supply.

Bibliography

Adhikari, Mohammed. *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005.

Alberts, Paul. *South Africa through the Lens: Social Documentary Photography*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983.

Alexander, M. Jacqui. "Redrafting Morality: The Postcolonial State and the Sexual Offences Bill of Trinidad and Tobago." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torre, 133-152. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Allara, Pamela, Marilyn Martin, and Zola Mtshiza. *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa*. Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 2003.

Allen, Theodore, W. *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One; Racial Oppression and Social Control*. New York and London: Verso, 1994.

Alloula, Malek. *The Colonial Harem*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Ames, Glenn J. *The Globe Encompassed: The Age of European Discovery, 1500-1700*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.

Anderson, Clare, and David Arnold. "Envisioning the Colonial Prison," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, 304-331. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Arnold, Marion I. *Women and Art in South Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Arnold, Marion I., and Brenda Schmahmann. *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa, 1910-1994*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2005.

Atkinson, Brenda, and Candice Breitz, eds. *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*. Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press, 1999.

Badsha, Omar, ed. *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986.

Balderston, Daniel. "Creole." In *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana López, 421. London: Routledge, 2000.

Barney, Tina. *Friends and Relations*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Bartelik, Marek. “Mikhael Subotzky.” *Artforum International* 46, no. 6 (February 2008): 307-308.

Batchen, Geoffrey. “Desiring Production.” In *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001.

Bedford, Emma, ed. *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art, 1994-2004*. Cape Town: Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 2004.

Bedford, Emma, and Perryer, Sophie, eds. *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa*. Cape Town, South Africa: Bell-Roberts Publishers in association with Struik Publishers, 2004.

Behrend, Heike. “’Feeling Global’: The Likoni Ferry Photographs of Mombasa, Kenya.” *African Arts* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 70-77.

Behrend, Heike. “Fragmented Visions: Photo Collages by Two Ugandan Photographers.” *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 301–20.

Behrend, Heike. “Imagined Journeys: The Likoni Ferry Photographers of Mombasa, Kenya.” In *Photography’s Other Histories*, eds. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, 221-39. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Behrend, Heike. “Photo Magic: Photographs in Practices of Healing and Harming in East Africa.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2003): 129-45.

Behrend, Heike and Jean- François Werner. “Photographies and Modernities in Africa.” *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 241.

Bell, Clare, ed. *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996.

Bensusan, A. D. *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa*. Cape Town: Howard Timmims, 1966.

Berger, Iris. *South Africa in World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Berger, Maurice. *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999.

Berger, Maurice, ed. *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979-2000*. Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture (UMBC), 2002.

Berger, Maurice. *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art*, 45. Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture (UMBC), 2004.

Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. *Eloge de la Créolité/In Praise of Creolness*. Bilingual edition. Translated by M.B. Taleb-Khyar. Paris: Gallimard, 1993.

Bernault, Florence. "The Shadow of Rule: Colonial Power and Modern Punishment in Africa." In *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 55-94. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Bester, Rory, and Barbara Buntman. "Bushman(ia) and Photographic Intervention." *African Arts* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 50-59, 93.

Bester, Rory. "Raiding the Archive." *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 6-7 (Summer-Fall 1997): 64.

Bhabha, Homi K. "The Third Space." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, 207-21. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Bigham, Elizabeth. "Issues of Authorship in the Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta." *African Arts* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 56–67.

Bilal, Wafaa. *Shooting an Iraqi: Art Life and Resistance under the Gun*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2008.

Bilbija, Ksenija, Jo Ellen Fair, Cynthia E. Milton, and Leigh A. Payne, eds. *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Bird, Jon. "'Infvitabile Fatum:' Leon Golub's History Painting." *Oxford Art Journal* 20, no. 1 (1997): 81-94.

Blier, Suzanne Preston. "Africa, Art, and History: An Introduction." In *A History of Art in Africa*, ed. Monica Blackmun Visonà and others, 14-23. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001.

Blier, Suzanne Preston. "Nine Contradictions in the New Golden Age of African Art." *African Arts*, 35, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 1, 4, 6.

Bonami, Francesco, Maria Luisa Frisa, and Stefano Tonchi, eds. *Uniform: Order and Disorder*. Milan: Charta, 2000.

Boonzaier, Emile, et al. *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1996.

Botha, Lien, ed. *Bloedlyn*. Published by the editor, 1999.

Brander, Birgit, et al., eds. *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Brathwaite, Edward Kamua. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Britton, Celia. *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Brodie, David, Churchill Madikida, and Laurie Ann Farrell. *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art*. New York: Museum for African Art, 2004.

Brodie, David and Brenton Maart. *New Strategies*. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2002.

Brown, Carol. "Review: FNB Vita Art Prize Exhibition, 2001." *African Arts* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 83-4.

Brutus, Dennis. *Letters to Martha, and Other Poems from a South African Prison*. London: Heinemann Educational, 1968.

Buckley, Liam. "Self and Accessory in Gambian Studio Photography." *Visual Anthropology Review* 16, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 2000–2001): 71–91.

Bull, Marjorie, and Joseph Denfield. *Secure the shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from Its Beginnings to the End of 1870*. Cape Town, T. McNally, 1970.

Buntman, Fran. "Imprisonment in Apartheid South Africa I: Personal Histories." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, no. 3 (September 2005): 663-6.

Camhi, Leslie. "A Cacophonous Affair – From the austerely documentary to the resolutely fabulist." *The Village Voice*, 17 March, 2006.

Campschreur, Willem, and Jost Divendal, eds. *Culture in Another South Africa*. London: Olive Branch Press, 1989.

Carling, Jorgen. "Unauthorized Migration from Africa to Spain." *International Migration* 45, no. 4. (October 2007): 3-37.

Césaire, Aimé. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

Chipkin, Ivor. *Do South Africans Exist?: Nationalism, Democracy, and the Identity of 'The People.'* Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2007.

Cohen, Robin. “Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power.” *Globalizations* 4, no. 3 (September 2007): 369-384.

Cole, Ernest, with Thomas Flaherty. *House of Bondage*. With an introduction by Joseph Lelyveld. New York: Random House, 1967.

“Coloured and Trapped,” *The Economist* vol. 339, no. 7961 (4 April 1996): 36.

Constitution Hill Foundation. *Number Four: The Making of Constitution Hill*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Coombes, Annie E. *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Cornelissen, Scarlett. “Producing and Imaging ‘Place’ and ‘People:’ The Political Economy of South African International Tourist Representation.” *Review of International Political Economy* 12, no. 4 (October 2005): 674-699.

Crager, Jack. “Mikhael Subotzky.” *American Photo* 18, no. 6 (November-December 2007): 66-67.

Crapanzano, Vincent. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. New York: Random House, 1985.

Cronin, Jeremy. *Inside*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984.

Croucher, Sheila. “South Africa’s Democratisation and the Politics of Gay Liberation.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, no. 2 (June 2002), 315-30.

Daly, M. W., and L. E. Forbes. *The Sudan: Photographs from the Sudan and Archive, Durham University Library*. Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994.

Dash, J. Michael. “Créolité.” In *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, ed. Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana López, 422. London: Routledge, 2000.

de Klerk, W. A. *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom*. New York: Penguin, 1975.

de Kok, Ingrid. “Bring the Statues Back.” In *Seasonal Fires: New and Selected Poems*, 142. New York: Seven Stories, 2006.

de Vries, Jan and A. M. van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Deacon, Harriet, ed. *The Island: A History of Robben Island, 1488-1990*. Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1996.

Deacon, Harriet. "Intangible Heritage in Conservation Management Planning: The Case of Robben Island." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 2004): 309–319.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic, eds. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

Deliss, Clémentine, et al., eds. *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*. Paris: Flammarion, 1995.

Dhlomo, Bongi. "Zwelethu Mthethwa Talks About His Photographs." In *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, Frank Herreman, ed., 66-75. New York: Museum for African Art, 1999.

Diawara, Manthia. *In Search of Africa*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Dikötter, Frank, and Ian Brown, eds. *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Dolby, Nadine E. *Constructing Race: Youth Identity and Popular Culture in South Africa*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Durand-Evrard, Françoise and Lucienne Martini. *Archives d'Algérie: 1830-1960*. Paris: Hazan, 2003.

Duster, Troy. "The 'Morphing Properties of Whiteness." In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., eds., 113-37. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Dyer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Edwards, Elizabeth et al. "Anthropology and Colonial Endeavour." *History of Photography* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1-80.

Eyéné, Marie-Christine. "The Human Face of History." *Art South Africa* 6, no. 3 (autumn 2008): 58-63.

Enwezor, Okwui, and Colin Richards, eds. *Trade routes: 2nd Johannesburg Biennale*. Johannesburg: Thorold's Africana Books, 1997.

Enwezor, Okwui, ed. *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994*. Munich: Prestel, 2001.

Enwezor, Okwui. “Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation.” In *Rac-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, ed. Kymberly N. Pinder, 371-90. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Enwezor, Okwui, et al., eds. *Créolité and Creolization: Documeta 11, Platform 3*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003.

Enwezor, Okwui. “The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition.” *Research in African Literatures* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 57–82.

Enwezor, Okwui, ed. *Snap Judgments: New Positions in African Photography*. New York: ICP/Stiedl, 2006.

Enwezor, Okwui and Chika Okeke-Agulu. *Contemporary African Art since 1980* Bologna: Damiani, 2009.

Enwezor, Okwui, and Octavio Zaya. “Colonial Imaginary, Tropes of Disruption: History, Culture, and Representation in the works of African Photographers.” In *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, ed. Clare Bell, 17-47. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996.

Eyéne, Marie-Christine. “The Human Face of History.” *Art South Africa* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 58-63.

Fall, N’Goné, and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds. *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*. Paris: Revue Noire, 1999.

Fall, N’Goné, and Jean Loup Pivin, eds. *An Anthology of African Art in the Twentieth Century*. English language edition. New York, Distributed Art Publishers; Paris, Revue Noire Éditions, 2002.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Farrell, Laurie Ann, ed. *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*. New York: Museum for African Art; Ghent: Snoeck, 2003.

February, Vernon A. *Mind Your Colour: The ‘Coloured’ Stereotype in South African Literature*. London: Keegan Paul International, 1981.

Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food*. (New York: The Free Press, 2002.

Fine, Derrick and Julia Nicol. “The Lavender Lobby: Working for Lesbian and Gay Rights within the Liberation Movement.” In *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, 269-77. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Finnegan, William. *Dateline Soweto: Travels with Black South African Reporters*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

Finnegan, William. "The Silent Majority of Cape Town." *Granta* 48 (Summer 1994), 240-49.

Firstenberg, Lauri. "Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture." In *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, Okwui Enwezor, ed., 175-9. Munich Prestel, 2001.

Firstenberg, Lauri. "Representing the Body Archivally in South African Photography." *Art Journal* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 59–67.

Fitzgerald, Shannon, ed. *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*. St. Louis: Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2003.

Frankenberg, Ruth. "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness." In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., eds., 72-96. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Frissell, Toni and Sidney Frissel Stafford. *Photographs, 1933-1967*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

Fugard, Athol, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. *Statements*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986.

Fusco, Coco, and Brian Wallis, eds. *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2003.

Gaba, Meschac. *Meschac Gaba*. New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2005.

Gaba, Meschac. *Meschac Gaba: Tresses and Other Recent Projects*. Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2007.

Gabous, Abdelkrim. *La Tunisie des Photographes: 1875-1910*. Tunis: Editions CERES, 1994.

Garlake, Peter S.. *Early Art and Architecture in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Gaule, Sally. "Poor, White, South African: Artistic Photography in South Africa." *Afterimage* 24, no. 4 (January-February 1997): 21.

Geary, Christraud. *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902-1915*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988.

Geary, Christraud M. *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885–1960*. Exh. cat. Washington, DC: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2003.

Gevisser, Mark and Edwin Cameron. "Defiant Desire." In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edward Cameron, eds., 3-13. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Gevisser, Mark. "A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to the 1990s." In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edward Cameron, eds., 14-86. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Giliomee, Hermann. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.

Glaser, Clive. *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-76*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann, 2000.

Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Translated by J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989.

Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Godby, Michael. "After Apartheid: 10 South African Documentary Photographers." *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 36-41, 94.

Godby, Michael. "Art and Politics in a Changing South Africa: Bongi Dhlomo in Conversation with Michael Godby." *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 62-67, 96.

Godby, Michael. *Graven Images: An Exhibition of Photographs of Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, Swellendam, c. 1860—2000*. Stellenbosch: Sasol Art Museum, 2005.

Godby, Michael. "Mikhael Subotzky: Inside South Africa's Prisons." *Aperture*, no. 188 (Fall 2007): 32-39.

Goldblatt, David. *Some Afrikaners Photographed*. Johannesburg: Murray Crawford, 1975.

Goldblatt, David. *In Boksburg*. Cape Town: The Gallery Press, 1982.

Goldblatt, David. *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then*. Cape Town/ New York: Oxford University Press/ Monacelli Press, 1998.

Goldblatt, David. *David Goldblatt: Fifty-One Years*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani, 2001.

Goldblatt, David. *David Goldblatt: Intersections*: Munich: Prestel, 2005.

Goldblatt, David. *Some Afrikaners Revisited*. Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007.

Goldblatt, David, with essays by Ulrich Loock and Ivor Powell. *David Goldblatt: Intersections Intersected*. Porto: Fundacao Serralves, 2008.

Golden, Thema. "What's White…?". In *1993 Biennial Exhibition,* Elisabeth Sussman, et al., ed., 26-35. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993.

Golinski, Hans-Günter, and Sepp Hiekisch-Picard. *New Identities: Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Südafrika*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2004.

Graham-Stewart, Micahel and Michael Stevenson. *Surviving the Lens: Photographic Studies of South and East African People, 1870-1920.* Simon's Town: Fernwood Press, 2001.

Grantham, Tosha. *Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa, 1950 to the Present*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Gresle, Yvette. "Performances of Masculinity." *Art South Africa* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 42-7.

Grundberg, Andy. "Sweet Illusion: Vik Muniz's *Sigmund, 1997*." *Artforum* 36, no. 1 (September 1997): 102-5.

Grundlingh, Geoffrey, ed. *100XC, Photography in South Africa: The Cape Town Month of Photography*. Cape Town: South African Centre for Photography/University of Cape Town, 1999.

Grundlingh, Geoffrey. *The Cape Town Month of Photography, 2002*. Gardens, Cape Town: South African Centre for Photography/University of Cape Town, 2002.

Grundlingh, Kathleen. *Photosynthesis: Contemporary South African Photography*. Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1997.

Grundlingh, Kathy. "The Development of Photography in South Africa." In *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*. N'Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds., 243-50. Paris: Revue Noire, 1999.

Grundlingh, Kathy, ed. *Lines of Sight: Perspectives on South African Photography*. Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2001.

Guattari, Felix. *Soft Subversions.* New York: Semiotext[e], 1996.

Hall, Stuart. "Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity in the context of Globalization." In *Créolité and Creolization: Documeta 11, Platform 3*, Okwui Enwezor, and others, eds., 185-198. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2003.

Hall, Stuart, and Mark Sealy. *Different: A Historical Context: Contemporary Photographers and Black Identity*. London: Phaidon, 2001.

Hallett, George, ed. With an introduction by Mandla Langa. *Moving in Time: Images of Life in a Democratic South Africa*. Sandton, South Africa: KMM Review/University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2004.

Hallett, George, and Peter McKenzie. *District Six Revisited*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2007.

Haney, Erin, and Erika Nimis. "Review: Snap Judgments." *African Arts* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 92-3.

Harris, Cheryl I.. "Whitness as Property." In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, et al. New York: The New Press, 1995.

Hassan, Salah M., and Olu Oguibe, eds. *Authentic/Ex-centric: Conceptualism in Contemporary African Art*. Ithaca, NY: Forum for African Arts, Prince Claus Fund Library, 2001.

Hatoum, Mona. *Domestic Disturbance*. North Adams: MASS MoCA, 2001.

Heaney, Seamus. "The Language of Exile." In *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. Robert D. Hamner, 304-9. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1993.

Hébrard, Jean-Louis and Marie-Claude Hébrard. *L'Algérie Autrefois*. Le Coteau : Horvath, 1990.

Herbst, Michael. "Review: Second Johannesburg Biennale, Alternating Currents." *African Arts* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 74-76, 96.

Herbst, Michael. "Review: The Permanent Exhibits at Museumafrica." *African Arts* 29, no. 1. (Winter 1996): 66-70.

Herreman, Frank, and Mark D'Amato. *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa*. New York: Museum for African Art, 1999.

Hersant, Guy. “In the Time of Sékou Touré.” In *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, N’Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds., 202-5. Paris : Revue Noire, 1999.

Herskovits, Melville J. “A Note on ‘Woman Marriage’ in Dahomey.” In *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con, A Reader*, ed. Andrew Sullivan, 32-5. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

Hill, Mike, ed. *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Hill, Shannen. Review of “Thirty Minutes.” *African Arts* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 76-7.

Holm, John A. *Pidgins and Creoles*. Vol. 1, *Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Holm, John A. *Pidgins and Creoles*. Vol. 2, *Reference Survey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Holmes, Rachel. “’White Rapists Made Coloureds (and Homosexuals)’: the Winnie Mandela Trial and the Politics of Race and Sexuality.” In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., 284-94. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Horn, Andrew. “Festival of South African Arts.” *African Arts* 16, no. 2 (February 1983): 78-79.

Houlberg, Marilyn Hammersley. “Ibeji Images of the Yoruba.” *African Arts* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 20–27, 91–92.

Houlberg, Marilyn Hammersley. “Feed Your Eyes: Nigerian and Haitian Studio Photographs.” *Photographic INsight* (Winter–Spring 1988): 3–8.

Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991.

Human Rights Watch. *Prison Conditions in South Africa*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Ignatiev, Noel and John Garvey, eds. *Race Traitor*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

International Defence and Aid Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid. *Children under Apartheid: In Photographs and Text*. London: IDAF, 1980.

International Defence and Aid Fund, in cooperation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid. *Women under Apartheid: In Photographs and Text*. London: IDAF, 1981.

Iverné, Claude. "Soudan/Sudan: Documents Spontanés, 1935-2002/Spontaneous Documents, 1935-2002." In *Un Autre Monde: Vies Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2005,* Simon Njami, ed., 140-55. Paris : Éditions Éric Koehler, 2005.

Jamal, Ashraf. *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press; Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005.

Jantjes, Gavin. *A Fruitful Incoherence: Dialogues with Artists on Internationalism*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998.

Jenkins, Paul and Christraud Geary. "Photographs from Africa in the Basel Mission Archive." *African Arts* 18, no. 4 (August 1985): 56-63, 100.

Johnson, Hugh. *Vintage: The Story of Wine.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Karmazyn, Jean-Claude. *Le Maroc en Cartes Postales: 1900-1920*. Cahors: Publi-fusion, 1994.

Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield, ed. "Museums and Contemporary African Art: Some Questions for Curators." *African Arts* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2002: 9, 87-90.

Kathrada, Ahmed, edited by Robert D. Vassen. *Letters from Robben Island: A Selection of Ahmed Kathrada's Prison Correspondence, 1964–1989*. Cape Town, Mayibuye Books in association with the Robben Island Museum and East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1999.

Kedourie, Eli, ed. *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*. London: Frank Cass, 1971.

Keegan, Timothy J. *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*. Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1996.

Keïta, Seydou, interview with Michelle Lamunière. In *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé,* Michelle Lamunière, ed., 48. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Picador, 2007.

Kleinbooi, Hein. “Identity Crossfire: On Being a Black Gay Student Activist,” In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., 264-8. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Klopper, Sandra. “Sacred Fragments: Looking Back at the Art of Paul Stopforth.” *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 68-73, 96.

Kraidy, Marwan M. *Hybridity, Or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Philadelphia: Temple, 2005.

Krog, Antjie. “The Wet Bag and Other Phantoms.” In *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New Wouth Africa*, 89-99. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.

Krondl, Michael. *The Taste of Conquest: The Rise and Fall of the Three Great Cities of Spice*. New York: Ballentine Books, 2007.

Krouse, Matthew. “The Arista Sisters, September 1984: A Personal Account of Army Drag.” In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., 209-18. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Lamunière, Michelle. *You Look Beautiful Like That: The Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Larone, André. *La Libye à Travers les Cartes Postales: 1900-1940*. Paris: Paris-Méditerranée, 1997.

Law-Viljoen, Bronwyn. *Light on a Hill: Building the Constitutional Court of South Africa*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2006.

Lehnert, Rudolf and Ernst Landrock. *L’Orient d’un Photographe*. Lausanne: Favre, 1987.

Littlefield Kasfir, Sidney. *Contemporary African Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1999.

Lundström, Jan-Erik, and Katarina Pierre. *Demokratins Bilder: Fotografi och Bildkonst efter Apartheid/Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art after Apartheid*. Umeå: BildMuseet, 1998.

Maart, Brenton, and T.J. Lemon, eds. *Sharp: The Market Photography Workshop*. Johannesburg: Market Photography Workshop, 2002.

Magnin, André and Malick Sidibé. *Malick Sidibé*. Zurich: Scalo, 1998.

Mahoney, "The Social Construction of Whiteness." In *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, Delgado and Stefancic, eds., 330-33. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

Makhudu, K.D.P. "An Introduction to Flaaitaal (or Tsostitaal)." In *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed., 398-406. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.

Marschall, Sabine. "Strategies of Accommodation: Toward an Inclusive Canon of South African Art." *Art Journal* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 50-59.

Marschall, Sabine. "Sites of Identity and Resistance: Urban Community Murals and Rural Wall Decoration in South Africa." *African Arts* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 40-53, 91.

Martin, Denis-Constant. *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999.

Mathabane, Mark. *Kaffir Boy in America: An Encounter with Apartheid*. New York: Scribner's, 1989.

Matt, Gerald, and Thomas Miessgang. *Black, Brown, White: Fotografie aus Südafrika/Photography from South Africa*. Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst; Wien: Kunsthalle Wien, 2006.

Matt, Gerald and Thomas Miessgang. *Flash Afrique! Photography from West Africa*. Gottingen: Steidl, 2001.

Mauer, Marc. *Race to Incarcerate*, second edition. New York: The New Press, 2006.

Mazrui, Ali A., ed. *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, unabridged ed. *General History of Africa*. Paris: UNESCO, 1999.

Mazrui, Ali A. "Seek Ye First the Political Kingdom." In *Africa since 1935*, vol. 8, unabridged ed., ed. Ali A. Mazrui, 105-26. *General History of Africa*. Paris: UNESCO, 1999.

McCarthy, David. "Fantasy and Force: A Brief Consideration of Artists and War in the American Century." *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 93-100.

Melis, Wim. *Nazar: Photographs from the Arab World*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 2004.

Mendel, Gideon. *A Broken Landscape: HIV & AIDS in Africa*. Barcelona: Editorial Blume in association with ActionAid, 2002.

Mesthrie, Rajend, ed. *Language in South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Miessgang, Thomas, and Barbara Schröder, eds. *¡Flash Afrique! Photography from West Africa*. Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2001.

Miles, Elza. *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre*. New York, Ampersand Foundation, 2004.

Miller, Jerome G. *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Miller, Kimberly Anne. "Trauma, Testimony, and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak." *African Arts* 38, no. 3 (2005): 40-51, 93-94.

Mintz, Sidney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Mofokeng, Santu. *Santu Mofokeng TAXI-004*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2001.

Monti, Nicolas, ed. *Africa Then: Photographs, 1840–1918*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Moodie, T. Dunbar. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Morris, Norval, and David J. Rothman, eds. *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Moss, Sarah and Alexander Badenoch. *Chocolate: A Global History*. London: Reaktion, 2009.

Mthethwa, Zwelethu, with texts by Octavio Zaya, Michael Godby, and Teresa Macri. *Zwelethu Mthethwa*. Turin: Marco Noire Editore, 1999.

Muholi, Zanele. *Only Half the Picture*. Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006.

Murdoch, H. Adlai. *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.

Muniz, Vik. *Reflex: A Vik Muniz Primer*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005.

Murinik, Tracy. "The Gospel of Tracey Rose." *Art South Africa* 2, no. 4 (winter 2004): 30-36.

Murinik, Tracey. “Hentie van der Merwe.” In *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa*, ed. Sophie Perryer, 386-389. Cape Town: Bell-Roberts, 2004.

Murray, Sarah. “Language Issues in South African Education: An Overview.” In *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed., 434-49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Mutloatse, Mothobi, and Jacqui Masiza, eds. *Tauza: Bob Gosani’s People*. Johannesburg: Struik, 2005.

Muysken, Pieter, and Norval Smith. “The Study of Pidgin and Creole Languages.” In *Pidgins and Creoles*, Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, Norval Smith, eds., 3-14. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1994.

Neier, Aryeh. “Confining Dissent: The Political Prison.” In *Oxford History of the Prison*, eds., Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, 350-80. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Neto, Ernesto. *Ernesto Neto: From Sebastian to Olivia*. Berlin: Holzwarth Publications, 2008.

Nettleton, Anitra. “Home is Where the Art Is.” *African Arts* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 26-39, 93.

Nettleton, Anitra. “Family Stories of South Africa: Nine Family Histories.” *African Arts* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 80-81.

Newbury, Darren. *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009.

Nixon, Nicholas with Peter Galassi. *The Brown Sisters: Thirty-three Years*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007.

Nixon, Rob. *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Njami, Simon. *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005.

Njami, Simon, ed. *Mémoires Intimes d’un Nouveau Millénaire: IVes Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2001*. Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2001.

Njami, Simon, ed. *Rites Sacrés / Rites Profanes: Ves Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2003*. Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2003.

Njami, Simon, ed. *Un Autre Monde: VIes Recontres de la Photographie Africaine, Bamako 2005*. Paris: Éditions Éric Koehler, 2005.

Nkosi, Themba. *The Time of Comrades*. Johannesburg : Skotaville, 1987.

Nkrumah, Kwame. *Revolutionary Path*. New York: International Publishers, 1973.

Nortie, Piet. *32 Battalion*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004.

Nuttall, Sarah, ed. *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Nuttall, Sarah, and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds. *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Nuttall, Sarah, and Carli Coetzee, eds. *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Nxumalo, Henry. "Mr. Drum Goes to Jail." In *Ourselves in Southern Africa: An Anthology of Southern African Writing*, ed. Robin Malan, 171-76. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwunodu. "Exhibiting Africa: Curatorial Attitudes and the Politics of Representation in 'Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa.'" *African Arts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 10-12, 83-84.

Oguibe, Olu. "Review: Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art." *African Arts* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 16-18, 20-22.

Oguibe, Olu. "Photography and the Substance of the Image." In *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present*, Clare Bell, ed., 231-49. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996.

Oguibe, Olu, and Okwui Enwezor, eds. *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Oliphant, Andries Walter, ed. *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine, 1978-1988*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988.

Ortega, Mariana. "Exiled Space, In-between Space: Existential Spatiality in Ana Mendieta's Siluetas Series." *Philosophy and Geography* 7, no. 1 (February 2004), 25-41.

Patterson, Shelia. *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A Study of the Status of the Cape Coloured People within the Social Structure of the Union of South Africa*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1952.

Peffer, John. “Shadows: A Short History of Photography in South Africa.” In *Art and End of Apartheid*, 241-80. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Peffer-Engels, John. “Review: In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present.” *African Arts* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 73-75.

Perchuk, Andrew and Helaine Posner. *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.

Perryer, Sophie, ed. *10 Years, 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa*. Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishers in association with Struik Publishers, 2004.

Perryer, Sophie, ed. *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art*. New York: Museum for African Art, 2004.

Perryer, Sophie, ed. *Berni Searle: About to Forget*. Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2005.

Pew Center on the States. *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*. Philadelphia and Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008.

Pfaff, Françoise. “Eroticism and Sub-Saharan African Films.” In *African Experiences of Cinema*, ed. Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham, 252-61. London: British Film Institute, 1996.

Phillips, Sandra S., Mark Haworth-Booth, and Carol Squiers, eds. *Police Pictures: The Photograph as Evidence*. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1997.

Phillips, Tom, ed. *Africa: The Art of a Continent*. Munich: Prestel, 1996.

Picton, John. “Review: Desperately Seeking Africa, New York, 1991.” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 2 (1992): 104-112.

Pieterse, Jan. *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

Pinder, Kymberly N. *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Pinney, Christopher. “Introduction.” In *Photography’s Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, 1-14. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Pinney, Christopher. “Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Postcolonialism, and Vernacular Modernism.” In *Photography’s Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, 202-20. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Powell, Ivor. “Mikhael Subotzky.” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 22-23 (Spring-Summer 2008): 114-121.

Pujol, Ernesto. “Notes on Obsessive Whiteness.” *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 98-100.

Prochaska, David. “Fantasia of the Photothèque: French Postcard Views of Senegal.” *African Arts* 24, no. 4 (October 1991): 40-47, 98.

Ractliffe, Jo, Terry Kurgan, eds. *Johannesburg Circa Now: Photography and the City*. Johannesburg: 2005.

Reindl, Uta M. “One to Seven: Galerie Gabriele Rivet, Köln,” *Kunstforum International* 157 (November-December 2001): 342-3.

Reinecke, John E., ed., in collaboration with David DeCamp, Ian F. Hancock, Stanley M. Tsuzaki, Rachard E. Wood. *A Bibliography of Pidgin and Creole Languages, Oceanic Linguistics* (Special Publications, No. 14). Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1975.

Retief, Glen. “Keeping Sodom out of the Laager: State Repression of Homosexuality in Apartheid South Africa.” In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., 99-113. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Rips, Michael. “Who Owns Seydou Keïta?” *New York Times*, 22 January 2006, 32.

Risen, James, David Johnston, and Neil A. Lewis. “Harsh C.I.A. Methods Cited in Top Qaeda Interrogations.” *New York Times*, 13 May 2004.

Roberge, Paul T. “Afrikaans: Considering Origins.” In *Language in South Africa*, Rajend Mesthrie, ed., 79-103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Roberts, Allen F. “Break the Silence: Art and HIV/AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal.” *African Arts* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 36-49, 93-4.

Rose, Tracey, Kellie Jones, and Emma Bedford. *Tracey Rose: Fresh*. Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2003.

Ross, Robert. *A Concise History of South Africa*, second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Rosenberg, Karen. “Art Review: Splitting a Gallery in Half to Focus on Social Strife.” *New York Times*, 12 September 2008, E33.

Sachs, Albie. “The Instruments of Domination in South Africa.” In *Change in Contemporary South Africa*, Leonard Thompson and Jeffrey Butler, eds., 223-49. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Sachs, Albie. *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*. London: Harvill Press, 1966.

Saint Léon, Pascal Martin and Jean Loup Piven. “The Official Agencies.” In *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*. N’Goné Fall and Pascal Martin Saint Léon, eds., 196-201, 208-19. Paris: Revue Noire, 1999.

Sampson, Anthony. *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

Sanner, Pierre-Laurant. “Comrades and Cameras.” In *Anthology of African Photography*, Pascal Martin Saint Leon and N’Gone Fall, eds., 253-61. Paris: Revue Noire, 1999.

Schama, Simon. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Schick, I. T., ed. *Battledress: The Uniforms of the World’s Greatest Armies, 1700 to the Present*. London: Peerage Books, 1983.

Schmahmann, Brenda. *Through the Looking Glass: Representations of Self by South African Women Artists*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2004.

Schwendener, Martha. “This Year’s Models: Searching for Fresh Approaches in Photography” *New York Times*, 26 November 2007, E5.

Searle, Berni. *Berni Searle*. Cape Town: Bell Roberts, 2003.

Searle, Berni. *Berni Searle: Vapour*. Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2004.

Searle, Berni. *Berni Searle: Approach*. Cape Town: Michael Stevenson, 2006.

Sebba, Mark. *Contact Languages: Pidgins and Creoles*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997.

Seidman, Judy. *Red on Black: The Story of the South African Poster Movement*. Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2007.

Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive.” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 62-64.

Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006.

Senior, Hereward. *Constabulary: The Rise of Police Institutions in Britain, the Commonwealth, and United States*. Toronto: Dundburn Press, 1997.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. *The Foundations of "Africanité" or "Négritude" and "Arabité."* Paris: Présence africaine, 1971.

Shaw, Mark. *Crime and Policing in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Transforming under Fire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Sidibé, Malick et al. *Malick Sidibé: Photographs*. Gottingen: Steidl, 2004.

Smith, Barbara. "The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torre, 101-129. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

South African Museum of Military History. *South African National Museum of Military History*, revised. Johannesburg: South African Museum of Military History, 1983.

Spears, Dorothy. "Ernesto Neto: Park Avenue Armory" (review), *Art in America* 97, no. 8 (September 2009): 143.

Sprague, Stephen F. "How I See the Yoruba See Themselves." Studies in the *Anthropology of Visual Communication* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 9–28.

Sprague, Stephen F. "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves." *African Arts*, 12, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 52-59, 107.

Sprague, Stephen F. "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves." In *Photography's Other Histories*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, 240-60. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

"Social Documentary Photography: South Africa through the Lens." *Staffrider* (1983).

Stapleton, Timothy J. *Military History of South Africa*. Santa Monica: Praeger, 2010.

Steiner, Christopher B. "Discovering African Art...Again?" *African Arts* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1996): 1-8, 93.

Storr, Robert. "Bamako: full Dress Parade." *Parkett*, no. 49 (1997): 24-34.

Subiros, Pep, Ciraj Rasool, and Maurits Van Bever Donker, eds. *Apartheid: The South African Mirror*. Barcelona: ACTAR, Centre De Cultura Contemporania De Barcelona, 2007.

Subotzky, Mikhael. *Die Vier Hoeke* (manuscript). Unpublished, 2004.

Subotzky, Mikhael. *Beaufort West*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2008.

Subotzky, Mikhael. *Mikhael Subotzky: Beaufort West*. Cape Town: Goodman Gallery Cape, 2007.

Sullivan, Andrew. *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con, A Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

Tawadros, Gilane and Sarah Cambpell, eds. *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*. London: Institute of International Visual Art in collaboration with the Forum for African Arts and Prince Claus Fund, 2003.

Terblanche, Stephan, and Geraldine Mackenzie. "Mandatory Sentences in South Africa: Lessons for Australia?" *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 41, no. 3 (December 2008): 402-20.

Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*, third edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Thompson, Leonard. *Politics in the Republic of South Africa*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966.

Thompson, Leonard. *The Political Mythology of Apartheid*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Till, Christopher, ed. *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, 28 February—30 April 1995*. Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, 1995.

Tillman Hill, Iris and Alex Harris. *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1989.

Timberg, Craig. "African Coup Plot Leaves Kin Bereft: 65 Jailed for Role Were Poor Ex-Soldiers." *Washington Post*, September 25, 2004, A13.

Toms, Ivan. "Ivan Toms Is a Fairy?: The South African Defence Force, the End Conscription Campaign, and Me." In *Defiant Desire*, Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, eds., 258-63. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Tonry, Michael. *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Trevor, Tom et al., eds. *Port City: On Mobility and Exchange*. Bristol: Arnolfini, 2007.

Tripolitis, Antonía, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*. Grand Rapids/ Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002.

van der Merwe, Hentie. "The Difference between Colonisation and Desire." In *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*, Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, eds., 283-6. Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill, 1999.

van der Merwe, Hentie, with an essay by Rory Bester. *Trappings*. Johannesburg: Goodman Gallery, 2000.

van der Watt, Liese. "Tracing Berni Searle." *African Arts* vol. 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 74-9.

Van Heyningen, Elizabeth. "Costly Mythologies: The Concentration Camps of the South African War in Afrikaner Historiography." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 495-513.

Van Wyk, Gary, and Sophia Ainslee. *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa*. Boston: South Africa Development Fund, 2004.

Vetrocq, Marcia E. "Venice Biennale: 'Every Idea But One.'" *Art in America* 91, no. 9 (September 2003): 76-87, 136-7.

Vogel, Susan. *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*. New York: Center for African Art, 1991.

Vries, Jan De, and A. M. van der Woude. *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Walcott, Derek. *Selected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Wallace, Lee. "Discovering Homosexuality: Cross-Cultural Comparison and the History of Sexuality." In *Gay Life and Culture: A World History*, ed. Robert Aldrich, 249-70. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006.

Waselchuk, Lori. *Is Everybody Comfortable?: A Market Photo Workshop Exhibition*. Johannesburg: The Market Photo Workshop, 2004.

Weinberg, Paul. "Apartheid—A Vigilant Witness: A Reflection on Photography." In *Culture in Another South Africa*, ed. Willem Campschreur and Jost Divendal, 60-70. London: Olive Branch Press, 1989.

Wendl, Tobias, and Heike Behrend, eds. *Snap Me One! Studiofotografen in Afrika*. Exh. cat. Munich: Prestel, 1998.

Werner, Jean- François. “Photography and Individualization in Contemporary Africa: An Ivoirian Case-Study.” *Visual Anthropology* 14 (2001): 251-68.

Wertheim, Albert. *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa to the World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Williamson, Sue. *Resistance Art in South Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Williamson, Sue. *Sue Williamson: Selected Work*. Cape Town: double Storey, 2003.

Williamson, Sue. *South African Art Now* New York: Collins Design, 2009.

Williamson, Sue, and Ashraf Jamal. *Art in South Africa: The Future Present*. Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1996.

Wilson, Fred. *Mining the Museum: An Installation*. New York: New Press, 1994.

Zabunyan, Elvan. *Black Is a Color: A History of African American Art*. Paris: Dis Voir, 2005.