VISUALLY REPRESENTING SOCIAL CHANGE – THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE STRUGGLE

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ABSTRACT

This research argues that the 1976 Soweto Uprisings as well as the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic elections held in 1994 impacted significantly on the South African social documentary photographer, and turned out to be major turning points within the South African social documentary photography genre. Based on this, this study sets out to firstly clarify the term social documentary photography as a particular type of visual communication within the documentary genre on an international level by briefly conducting a literature study on the emergence and subsequent use of the term social documentary photography. Secondly the study places in context the practice of social documentary photography in South Africa prior to the 1980s by reviewing possible societal, political and international factors of impact. This is achieved through a literature study as well as through the re-examining of open-ended interviews with South African social documentary photographers conducted as part of the author's doctoral study. Finally, by analysing and synthesising the possible factors of influence on the South African social documentary photographer complexities inherent in the term "struggle photography" can be directly linked to political change as South Africa moved towards a democratic society.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1980s and early 1990s was a period of great significance for South Africa. It was a period where the fight for democracy intensified and resulted in the election of the first national democratic government. Overthrowing the apartheid regime that preceded it came at a high price, one that many South Africans paid for with their lives. According to Hill and Harris (1989: 7) photography took on a particular significance in this period of South African history as it provided irrefutable documentation of popular resistance and state brutality. These images were instrumental in bringing the South African struggle to the international arena and serve as part of a collective memory crystallising events from the past for future generations. This research argues that the 1976 Soweto Uprisings as well as the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic elections held in 1994 impacted significantly on the South African documentary photographer and turned out to be major turning points within the genre.

South African documentary photography during the 1980s and early 1990s tends to be labelled "struggle photography", a generic term used both locally and internationally to describe documentary photography commenting on the effects of apartheid and the process towards democracy during this period. By applying this label there is a loss in perspective of the complexity of the field of South African social documentary photography, the diversity of experiences and approaches of its practitioners, the audiences for their work, as well as the changing dynamics of South Africa's political powerhouse. What then was the role that the South African documentary photographer chose to play? How have the social and political changes in South Africa over the past couple of decades shaped the documentary practice in South Africa?

This study therefore further sets out to unravel the complexities inherent in the term "struggle photography" by investigating and comparing the changing factors that affected the South African documentary photographer during this critical period in the development of documentary photography in South Africa as well as reviewing possible challenges facing the contemporary practitioner in a democratic environment.

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY VS PHOTOJOURNALISM

Categorising photography can be a difficult task and both Scott (1999: 14) and Rosenblum (1997: 341) caution against attempting to define its essential nature too narrowly. Many would question whether it has an essential nature at all. John Tagg talks about "photographies" rather than "photography" – "photography as such has no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work" (Tagg 1993: 63). Scott (1999: 14) advises "any writer who takes photography as their subject to avoid being too categorical about any aspect of it as it is a fluid, mobile, unstable medium which is diverse in its application". Rosenblum (1997: 341) emphasizes that "all photographs defy narrow categorisation especially works that have social change as their prime goal as the passage of time has been especially effectual in altering purpose, meaning and resonance".

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Early uses of the term "documentary" are often linked to the work of British filmmaker and theorist John Grierson who believed that documentary was "an anti-aesthetic movement" that "knew how to use aesthetics" (Marien 2002: 281). During the 1920s Grierson suggested that documentary should be given the power of poetry and prophesy, introducing a new fusion of art and observation. According to Marien (2002:281) it was during the 1930s that the term documentary photography came into wide usage referring directly to the social commentary work produced during the depression years:

> In a broad sense all non-fictional representation, in books or in images is documentary. But during the 1930s, when the word documentary came into wide usage, its meaning was more limited. Writers, filmmakers and photographers produced a blend of Modernistic style and realistic subject matter, aimed at educating the public about the experience of hardships or injustice.

The term "photojournalism" is commonly attributed to Cliff Edom (1907-1991), who taught at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism for 29 years. Edom established the first photojournalism workshop there in 1946. Photojournalism refers to the work done for picture magazines and newspapers, which came to the fore during the 1920s. The photojournalist tended to have a more autonomous and highly regarded role for photography than the news photographer. The main product of the newspaper is news and the news photographer wherever possible supplies images to accompany the daily and weekly stories, essentially documenting events of that particular day or week (Rosenblum 1997: 41). Chapnick's (1994: 8) description of photojournalism reflects the same basic theme used in descriptions of the social documentary photograph:

> Photojournalism is rooted in the consciousness and consciences of its practitioners. The torch of concern, a heritage of humanistic photography, has been passed from generation to generation, lightening the corners of darkness, exposing ignorance, and helping us to understand human behaviour. It bares the truth and sometimes it lies. It informs, educates and enlightens us about the present, and it illuminates the past. It records beauty and ugliness, poverty and opulence.

Although some may argue that the terms documentary photography and photojournalism represent two different approaches, there are many who have come to use the terms interchangeably. However it is not just about the interchangeability of the terms, but also the fluidity of the boundaries, in terms of the intended purpose of the work and how the images were regarded by the viewer, both in their original capacity, as well as from a historical point of view. The following statement highlights the contra-distinction between documentary photography and photojournalism:

> Visual workers will find their legitimation (sic) in the response their work generates in viewers, whatever name the work goes by. They will find the direction for what they do in the particular circumstances of its doing, in the combination of organizations, audiences, and peers that surround them as they do the work (Becker 1995: 13).

Both documentary photography and photojournalism play a role in the way that societies inform themselves about their own identities and values and those of other cultures and societies (Newbury 1999: 21). For the purpose of this study the term social documentary photography embraces two ideals: the depiction of a verifiable social fact and the evocation of empathy with the individuals concerned.

1980S DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the 1960s the triumph of humanism seen in the *Family of Man*[1] exhibition was short lived. Although a few photographers in Europe continued in the humanist tradition, most Americans took metaphoric documentary to a new level, one of the forerunners being Robert Frank in his book *The Americans*. In 1955 Robert Frank began the first of several road trips around the United States where he "made pictures that would unravel the certitude of documentary photography as practiced by the FSA photographers and the picture press" (Marien 2002: 343). Frank saw "a soul-damaged population, fluctuating between violence, ignorance and despair" where the depression era documentarians had "witnessed a troubled yet resilient America" (Marien 2002: 344). Frank's book *The Americans,* published in 1958, was a protest against numbing mass culture, materialism and social conformity.

This restlessness became more apparent as the photographer began to comment on the volatile socio-political situations in America, Africa and Europe. It was during the late 50s and early 60s that African-American photographers began to focus on the issues paramount within their own communities, such as racial discrimination, economic disparity, and civil rights (Guice 2003: 54). In the late 1950s some of the worst race-motivated riots in Britain were taking place. At the same time the coverage of the Civil Rights Movement in America highlighted the efforts of the African-American to gain equality (Parrish 2002: 367). This was almost simultaneous with the start of the South African black photographers' drive to document the inequalities within the apartheid state of South Africa, which filled the pages of *Drum* magazine, established by publisher James Bailey and editor Anthony Sampson in 1951. Even though *Drum* was white-owned and run, it was staffed largely by non-white writers and photographers addressing the problems created by poverty, unemployment, disease, crime, and a fanatic white-supremacist government, catering to the non-white, South African audience in a unique and exclusive manner. It can therefore be determined that British, American and South African photographers were all dealing with race-related issues at approximately the same time, but not necessarily relating to their audience in the same manner. What it did create was an international audience that was sympathetic to race related issues.

Due to growing worldwide concern for the actions of the apartheid government the state began to clamp down on publications drawing attention to the human rights violations of black South Africans. The alternative press was forced underground and in 1960 the ANC was banned (Johnson 1991: 27). The coverage of the 1976 Soweto Uprising lead to a resurgence of the alternative press and South African photographers

started supplying images to the growing number of publications and organisations within the resistance movement.

The left presses aimed to provide the ideological conditions within which oppressed people could identify themselves as "subjects" of particular communities and related anti-apartheid practices. While issues which bound these communities together were primarily negative in nature, by developing cultures of resistance they were able to articulate their struggle in positive rather than negative ways, and hence assist in the construction of alliances that could defeat apartheid. Communication within communities thus became crucial in focusing the direction of social change (Tomaselli 1991: 163).

At the same time the international press began to publish images of the resistance in South Africa and South African photographers found there was a demand for their images internationally, for example Peter Magubane (2003) photographed for *Time* magazine. The international audience, educated by the Vietnam media coverage, were becoming more concerned about international injustices (Ritchin 1998: 605).

As the viewing audience became more accustomed to photographic accounts of reported events, documentary photographers began to acknowledge and express a more subjective and aesthetic approach in their work (Rosenblum 1997: 566). Even though television may have rendered many picture magazines redundant, during the 70s and 80s the wire service and photo agency provided a platform for increased coverage of events worldwide within the documentary and photojournalistic tradition. Photography in Latin America, Africa and Asia came to be understood as a means to create a defiant or at least oppositional identity.

As different societal needs and problems arose, so the social document adapted itself to serve both the intention of the photographer and a role in society. During the late 1960s and early 1970s American and British governments were dealing with issues of racism and colonialism and once these issues were addressed, the general public had become more sympathetic to issues of racism in general. Therefore a racially sympathetic international audience and an increase in the demand for images due to an expansion in international press, supported collectives such as Afrapix during the 1980s. These factors may account for an international increase and continuation in interest in South Africa after the Soweto Uprisings rather than after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. Should the apartheid regime have relinquished power during the 1970s then the chances are that South African documentary photography would probably not have enjoyed the development and recognition that it did in the 1980s. But the fact that the conditions were conducive both locally and internationally to the advantage of the South African documentary photographer results in the understanding that it was indeed a multitude of circumstances that motivated the documentary photographer and ultimately led to the international recognition of South African documentary photography during the 1980s and 1990s.

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USING THE CAMERA AS A WEAPON AGAINST APARTHEID

The 1970s saw a move towards photographers committing themselves to the struggle. The first South African television station was only created in 1976 and was, of course, heavily censored. Photographers reacted with what they termed "morally honest propaganda" images showing what the government wanted to hide (Sanner 1999: 255). According to Tomaselli (1991: 163):

> After the mid-1970s the South African government faced a declining economy, coupled with resurgence in working class and popular resistance to its rule. The crisis of the 1980s saw greater government curtailment of the flow of information and moves toward the registration of journalists, newspapers and news agencies. This had as its aim the co-optation of the press into the States 'national communication policy' … during this decade the State believed that it was engaged in an internal war, and that it was justified in expecting the mainstream media to support its 'total strategy'. Those not voluntarily complying were – in terms of the government's 'us-them' binary opposition – seen as identifying with the so-called 'total onslaught'. Once this premise was accepted, a justification was evolved for, at best, 'nudging' the press into compliance, or at worst, for creating some sort of censorship mechanism.

The alternative press began to gain momentum following the revolt of June 1976 in Soweto and periodicals such as *Grassroots, New Era, Spark, Sound Stone* and above all *Staffrider*, illustrated their pages with the works of enthusiastic and militant photographers. There was a common desire to distribute images of resistance, and contribute to the development of politically engaged documentary photography (Sanner 1999: 255). According to Jackson (1993: 30), "since 1976, a landmark year in South African history, the press was shaped by the political, economic, social and cultural forces buffeting the society". During the late 1970s and early 1980s there was resurgence of resistance and due to an increase in both the urban African population as well as a growth in literacy, alternative publications began to mushroom (Johnson 1991: 30).

The first assembly of anti-apartheid South Africans working in the arts field took place in Gaborone, Botswana, in June 1982. It hosted the first collective exhibition to come from South Africa, bringing twenty photographers together for a first joint photographic statement (Weinberg 1989: 64). As a result of this Culture and Resistance Festival there emerged a collective awareness of a common identity and a common commitment to the same causes resulting in the creation of the Afrapix photographic agency.

Afrapix's objective was to expose the atrocities of the apartheid regime, as well as to foster and train a new generation of black photographers (Sanner 1999: 253). Afrapix was well known for their views and visual portrayal of the apartheid system and the resistance to it. In the words of the Afrapix founders: "Afrapix was created out of the desire to co-ordinate documentary photography and use it as an effective tool for social

change" (as quoted by Sanner 1999: 254). According to Santu Mofokeng (1999: 268), "I joined Afrapix in 1985. I had no work, no equipment and no resources. Afrapix gave me a home. It provided me with money to buy a camera and film in order to document Soweto and the rising discontent in the townships."

The 1980s was an extremely prolific period for documentary photography in South Africa and South African documentary photographers rose to the challenge. The laws of the apartheid government restricted international photographers from entering and working in South Africa, leaving the South African photographer with more opportunity to supply the international marketplace, who supported the cause of the fight against apartheid. Photographic collectives such as Afrapix encouraged photographers and provided established channels to the international marketplace and alternative South African publications. Expansion in the press internationally created a market for photojournalism and images documenting conflict. Many of the photographers felt the need to testify their involvement in the struggle against apartheid through images – "crusaders basically going out there on a mission" (Miller 2004).

The struggle against apartheid was a cause that most documentary photographers in South Africa could identify with: "I would be dying trying to liberate my country and myself" (Magubane 2003[2]). Those involved in the struggle against apartheid acknowledged photography as a means of exposing their cause to a sympathetic audience and supported rather than hampered the photographer. "The children that were toyi-toying at that funeral dragged me into the house and they saved my life" (Kumalo 2004). Most of the photographers commented that the type of subject matter in demand was easily available: "You did not have to think much, it was all happening in front of you" (Wulfsohn 2004);"You could go out into the street, use your camera to photograph anything and you could sell your pictures" (Tillim 2004).

There were also difficulties facing South African photographers during the 1980s. The South African press had been subject to control for most of its existence, but in July 1985 a partial state of emergency was declared and cameras were banned from emergency areas. Only officially accredited reporters were allowed to report in an unrest area after permission was granted. Photographer Louise Gubb (2004) gives an account of how the law directly impacted on the social documentary photographer:

> …they brought in a State of Emergency and photographers could be arrested and jailed. So it was very tricky working then, extremely tricky, because the police could come and surround a gathering and declare it retroactively, under the emergency powers, as illegal. So what you were doing there was illegal. They would take your film and if there was nothing on it they would not prosecute you   but if there was anything on it you would be prosecuted. So we started developing ways of getting rid of the film. We had little runners or gave it to the radio journalists, because they were after the picture people.

Alternative or independent publishing in South Africa originated because the government had complete control over state subsidised publishing in the country. By

1986 the South African government ignored international opinion and aimed at controlling the flow of information. It imposed tighter press restrictions and placed a wide-ranging prohibition on subversive statements. The police could regulate or stop any information relating to their conduct from being published. In 1987 a second state of emergency was declared and media regulations tightened even more:

> The emergency regulations and the numerous other laws concerning the press effectively placed vast parts of the society off limits for reporters. Freedom to obtain and publish information was severely curtailed even before the state of emergency was imposed… The powers granted to the ministers of law and order and home affairs under earlier legislation and under the emergency rules gave them virtually absolute power to pull the plug on any newspapers they wished to close temporarily or permanently. Government intolerance and hostility toward opposition papers, already widespread in the early 70s and early 80s, intensified as the decade unfolded (Jackson 1993: 7).

The government put increasing pressure on the media in an attempt to minimise the coverage of unrest in South Africa (Sanner 1999: 255). In many cases members of the South African Defence Force and police were known to take violent action against photographers; it was a period of continuous arrest, confiscation and harassment and even, at times, assault (Weinberg 1989: 68). Gubb (2004) and Raymond Preston (2004) give their experience with government officials during the 1980s:

> I was arrested many times in the 1980s. Under the state of emergency, they would often prevent us from completing our assignments and challenge more of us to either get those pictures out or destroy the film. In that particular way, one was prevented from doing one's work. The underwriting of the legislation was to stop you from covering the struggle; and

> … I was getting harassed by police, I was getting shot at, I was nearly beheaded by a police canister.

Another factor that social documentary photographers had to deal with was that the international marketplace had certain prerequisites for the type of image they were interested in:

> [T]here was a lot of pressure to sort of find those stereo-types that the world wanted like the white racist … boer or farmer or rich white person, poor black person, oppressed person and then the person's struggle ... the world had commodified almost, South African imagery (Weinberg 2004).

Many documentary photographers and photojournalists felt pressured into covering the struggle against apartheid at the expense of what they termed as their own personal work. They believed that they were "dealing with bigger issues" (Vallie 2004), "subsumed by the energies of the war sort of syndrome" (Weinberg 2004), "crusaders basically going out there on a mission" (Miller 2004).

Towards the late 1980s photographers emerged that were not only weary of the international image of South Africa, but in some cases they were in disagreement with the work that documentary photographers were producing when they began documenting the violence of the early 1990s. Photographer Motlhalefi Mahlabe (2004) defends his position at the time:

> South African photography, at that time, was defined by violence and that type of stuff. So if you look at people then and how they looked at us as a country, there was nothing else happening. People thought we never go to church, cultural activities taking place. They knew the pictures that the media fed the world with, so my choice was to look at ordinary life, people still going to church, people still enjoying life amidst all of these things and the creative process, more than anything.

In the late 1980s Santu Mofokeng left Afrapix: "I was unhappy with the propaganda images, which reduced life in the townships into one of perpetual struggle, because I felt this representation to be incomplete" (Mofokeng 1999: 269). He went to work at the African Studies Institute, in the oral history project at the University of the Witwatersrand. There his work involved documenting rural communities and marginal coloured communities threatened with resettlement. In addition to this he continued with his documentation of township life, which he began in 1982. This work came to the fore in a democratic South Africa when the international market began to ask for ordinary pictures of everyday life in townships. He says "suddenly my pictures of quotidian African life – of shebeens[3], street-soccer and home life, which had been considered unpublishable in the 1980s – now found commercial flavour" (Mofokeng 1999: 269).

THE EARLY 1990S STRUGGLE TO ESTABLISH POLITICAL SUPREMACY

In 1990 president FW de Klerk made a historic speech announcing that the ANC, SACP and PAC were to be unbanned and all political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, who had spent almost 30 years in prison defending his beliefs of democracy, equality and learning for all South Africans, were to be released. Negotiations from totalitarian rule to democracy began and with that came the fight for political supremacy. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2000: x) believed this violence was the work of a third force, somehow linked to the apartheid government and its security forces, which, in part, was verified during the Goldstone Commission. The fact remains that while, seemingly, the violence being perpetrated by the apartheid government on the black resistance movement declined, a new type of violence emerged; one that was not so clear-cut in determining who was right and who was wrong. Both black and white photographers were faced with seemingly senseless acts of violence. The authorities termed the violence as "faction fighting" or "black-on-black violence" in an attempt to tribalise as well as distance themselves from the conflict (Marinovich & Silva 2000: 227).

Some photographers became motivated by the conflict: "I truly believed people needed to see it" (Silva 2004), and "a need to show what was happening around me" (Marinovich n.d.). Other photographers who photographed violence became

disillusioned or fed up with violence, saying "I went there and I came back with pictures but I don't think I came back with myself" (Mahlabe 2004) and "it was probably stuff that I would not have done if the situation in South Africa was different" (Williams 2004).

The government became more tolerant of political activity and relaxed their policies against the foreign press as faction fighting and the exposure thereof advanced their viewpoint. Images of violent activities were sought after by an international as well as local audience and a new type of South African photographer emerged to document the violence; one that was supported by the local media and in direct competition with foreign photographers in foreign media. "In the 1990s, after Mandela's release, the foreign journalists started to come in. So the tourist gates were open as far as foreign journalists were concerned. Things were much more liberated and the ANC was unbanned. That was when the very violent conflict between the various parties began to establish political party supremacy" (Gubb 2004).

Four white photographers, Kevin Carter, Greg Marinovich, João Silva and Ken Oosterbroek, who covered South Africa's violent turn from apartheid to a new form of government, came to be called the Bang-Bang Club. A South African magazine coined the name in recognition of the photographers' consistent picture coverage of the bloody, deadly clashes in the nation's black townships. Marinovich and Silva (2000: xiii) state that there was no such club and that they were amongst dozens of photographers and journalists that covered the violence during that period. According to Chapnick (1994: 314), former president of Black Star Photo Agency:

> In the photojournalistic vernacular, 'bang-bang' is synonymous with action, producing photographs approximating the archetypal Robert Capa photograph showing the instant of impact when a bullet struck a Spanish Civil War soldier. Editors revel in 'bang-bang' pictures, and readers are fascinated by them.

Picture-making in townships like Soweto was risky. This was where partisans of Nelson Mandela's ANC party, which was newly legalised, and the Zulu-backed party called Inkatha, fought their bloody struggles for supremacy. The photographers travelled to the townships early in the morning, because trouble frequently exploded when people were on the streets heading for work. The hostels where the workers lived were flash points of sudden, unpredictable violence. The type of violence was no longer as clear-cut as it had been in the previous decade with the result that personal risk to the photographers increased. In some instances photographers were also faced with the disapproval of the black majority who were traditionally avid supporters of the documentary photographer. Photographers and reporters travelled together in groups, as a protective measure against the violence that could easily be turned against photographers when trouble broke out. Another form of violence, as the two fighting factions battled hand to hand with rocks, knives, spears, and small arms, was when police often used excessive firepower to stop the outbreaks, and photographers often ended up in the crossfire (Buell 2000: 202).

Besides the violence between political followers during the early 1990s photographers were documenting social, everyday life in an attempt to provide a more well-rounded view of black culture as well as the inequalities apparent in the country. For example Gideon Mendel was documenting Aids, Paul Weinberg worked on a two-year project in Kosi Bay, Santu Mofokeng was documenting everyday life in townships and Ruth Motau did a series on shebeens. Many of the Afrapix members felt that their work against the apartheid government came to an end when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the political parties were unbanned. During the early 90s Afrapix closed, along with many of the alternative publications that had been supporting the resistance movement. The photographers took "widely different directions" (Sanner 1999: 261). Some opened their own agencies while others either turned to working on long-term projects, or working for the international or local media.

The 1994 elections saw the first democratic government come into power and South Africa entered the post-apartheid era. The violence became radically reduced to small pockets of faction fighting in traditional Zulu strongholds. Social documentary photographers, who had been documenting the violence, were forced to reconsider their subject matter or to travel to other destinations to cover violent activity, which was still a topic highly sought after by the international community. There were mixed feelings amongst the social documentary photographers, "…throughout the 1980s, the more violent, the more dramatic the pictures, the better up until 1994, then it just died. There was no demand … It was just like a tap. There was just no more demand. You had to eek out stories… The moment Nelson was in power, the minute they got him in power, they unplugged the cable (Velasco 2004), while others felt released from what they felt was an obligation, "all I felt was great relief and then carried on doing what I really wanted to do. So it was not for me, a huge obstacle" (Williams 2004).

South Africans had begun the process of placing apartheid behind them and photographers were challenged with a new approach to social documentary work during the 1990s, "We are now in a transitional period, and we need to tell all the stories… there was so much to tell, but it needed some serious thinking on, how do I illustrate this avid story?" (Sibeko 2004). Although this approach may no longer have been aimed at promoting a particular cause the general approach taken by photographers was to present South Africa in a favourable light, promoting the political changes in the country.

After the 1994 elections the international audience sought a new type of image, one that portrayed the success of democracy, and the South African photographer had to adapt to a new approach of documenting for an international market place. Many documentary photographers had to adjust to a democratic society. At the same time there was a dramatic reduction in the interest and support of the international audience and media. The subject matter that brought many photographers international acclaim prior to 1994 was no longer available and these photographers had to find new ways of generating an income or follow similar types of situations in other parts of the world. "I may have stopped doing that kind of stuff in this country, but my work takes me to

other places. So I went to cover the genocide in Rwanda and then off to Afghanistan" (Silva 2004).

AFTER APARTHEID

Grundlingh (1999: 250) and Josephy (2002: 5) argue that after the 1994 elections photographers were freed from their collective political purpose and forced to redefine their individual photographic identities and aims:

> After the end of apartheid documentary photography underwent a crisis. The imperative to provide documentation of the ills of apartheid had disappeared and the function of expose seemed redundant in the context of transparency and reconciliation. The new constitution was hailed as being one of the most just and progressive in the world. It gave equal rights to all groups regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, age and religion. As the voice of the other could be heard, there was, apparently no longer a need to speak 'for' the silent majority. People could now represent themselves (Josephy 2002: 5).

Josephy (2002: 7) believes that during the 1990s, particularly since liberation in 1994, South African photographers have begun to challenge the discourse of documentary photography. Art photographers of the 1990s sometimes contain references to documentary, and contemporary documentary photographers rely more on art conventions than their predecessors. Aesthetic considerations began to gain more importance within the documentary image (Grundlingh 1999: 250).

According to Sanner (1999: 261) as South Africa heals its wounds from the past, "photographers are channeling their energy into the exploration of other realms of experience". He further believes that, as a pastime, photography has become more widespread and accessible to more of the population with street photographers making their appearance in many of South Africa's cities and photography, in general, being accepted as an art form in South Africa.

The coming of democracy in South Africa gave birth to a democratic environment which has been endlessly broadcast by the mainstream media and according to Langa (2004: 11) resulted in a new generation by the late 1990s, "for whom June16, apartheid and the struggle were as remote as the Bambatha Rebellion or the Anglo-Boer War meant to the rest of us". The photographers from this generation have their own voice and their own way of making sense of their situation within a democratic society but also within a world that is becoming more and more of a global village. What was a consuming subject, in the past, has become a faint memory to many and to those entering the genre, a symbol of the past.

CONCLUSION

This research has given clear indication that the broadly used term "struggle photography" has underlying complexities based in particular on the political turning points of the 1976 Soweto Uprisings as well as the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990.

The period heralded in by the 1976 Soweto Uprisings can be characterised by a conscious effort of the photographer to address the atrocities of the apartheid government. These photographers were widely supported by an international community who were sympathetic to the struggle against the apartheid government. This support was however conditional as most photographers interviewed who were practising during the 1980s make reference to prescriptions for images that would sell internationally. The community knew that they were being supported in the underground and international media and actively offered support and protection to photographers documenting the violent clashes between protestors and government officials. The government however actively sought to curb the flow of information on violence and political activity introducing laws to enforce their will on the press. These social documentary photographers believed that they were fighting for a good cause and had a good idea of who was in the wrong. When Nelson Mandela was released in 1990 many of them felt they had achieved their goals and chose to follow their own interpretation of apartheid's legacy as well as other issues effecting society.

The new type of violence that began to emerge just prior to Nelson Mandela's release in 1990 was characterised by clashes between political parties and also known as black-on-black violence or faction fighting. Photographers documenting the faction fighting were mainly made up of a younger generation. While still being supported by the international media, the local media became a new vehicle for reporting violence due to the apartheid government relaxing the media laws in South Africa as the new type of violence was actually in their best interest.

The social documentary photographer also gained international competition in the field due to the apartheid government's changed policies. These photographers no longer enjoyed the communities' support and help, most times travelling in groups, and often became victims of the violence between opposing forces as well as in the crossfire between peacekeeping forces and the violent clashes. There was no clear-cut idea of who was right and who was wrong, just outbursts of violence in a race for political supremacy. After the 1994 democratic elections these photographers were faced with an abrupt end to their subject matter and either had to re-invent themselves in a post-apartheid society or moved on to cover similar situations internationally.

Endnotes

[1] The exhibition was organised by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1955. The *Family of Man* consciously omitted conflicts and reduced the *conditio humana* around the globe to the elements of birth, life, love, joy, tragedy and death (Neubauer 1997: 167). It was seen as a message of hope and brotherhood; it marked the triumph of humanism. It was the most remarkable exhibition ever mounted, drawing some ten million visitors from 69 countries. But, as often happens, the climax also turned out to be the limit; and it is fair to say that the later reaction against *Family of Man* ushered in the period of truly contemporary photography (Osman 1987: 184).

[2] Peter Magubane, interviewed by Darren Newbury, Johannesburg, 2003. The author is grateful to Daren Newbury for sharing transcripts from his ongoing research on South African documentary photography.

[3] Unlicensed drinking houses in the township where people met socially.

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