

STAFFRIDER MAGAZINE

PRESENTS

**SOUTH AFRICA
THROUGH THE LENS**
SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY



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SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH THE LENS

SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

RAVAN PRESS



JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH THE LENS

'The camera doesn't lie.' This is a myth about photography that, in South Africa in the '80s, we won't swallow without questioning.

In our country the camera lies all the time — on our TV screens, in our newspapers, and on the billboards that proliferate in our townships.

Photography can't be divorced from the political, social, and economic issues that surround us daily. As photographers we are inextricably caught up in those processes — we are not objective instruments but *play a part* in the way we choose to make our statements.

The photographers in this collection do not look at our country through the lens of the rulers. They show a South Africa in conflict, in suffering, in happiness and in resistance. They examine the present and beckon the viewer to an alternative future.

There are 19 contributors in all, some of whom are well known photographers: David Goldblatt, Omar Badsha, Paul Alberts. Others are people who have been plugging away for years for community newspapers, or in and around various townships. For many it is a rare occasion for exposure.

The photographs span the universal concepts upon which the social documentary genre exists. Themes like sadness, dignity, strength, privilege and power: these prevail.

But the images go beyond this. They locate these themes in a divided, struggling South Africa. These South African photographers project a vision of the realities which they confront.

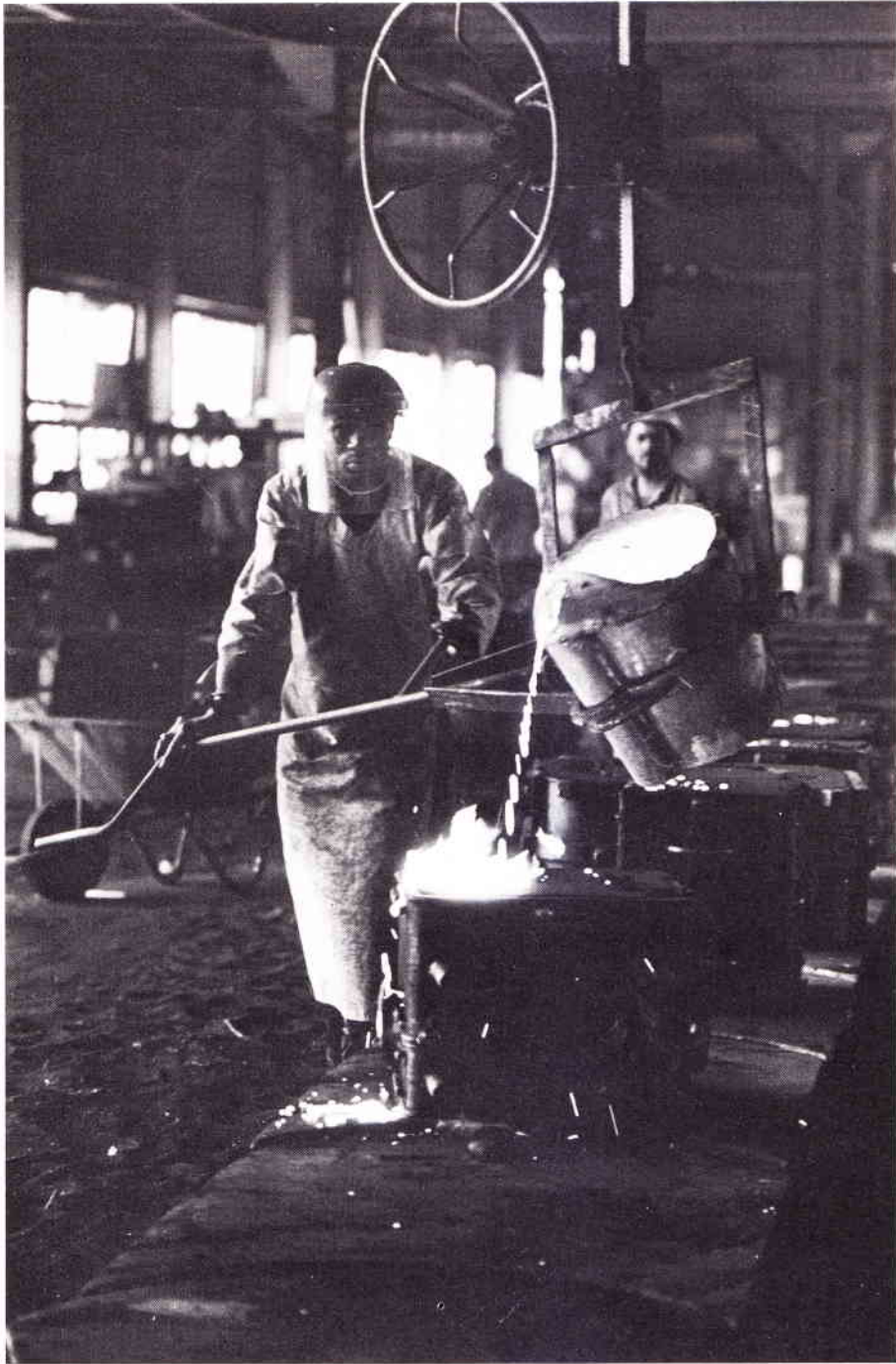
The co-ordinators of this collection hoped that by seeing how other photographers work, and sharing ideas, we would achieve something valuable. We ended by recognising that collective efforts can say more than individual statements.

That is essentially what this book is about.



Peter McKenzie

Central Johannesburg, 1983



Lesley Lawson



Lesley Lawson



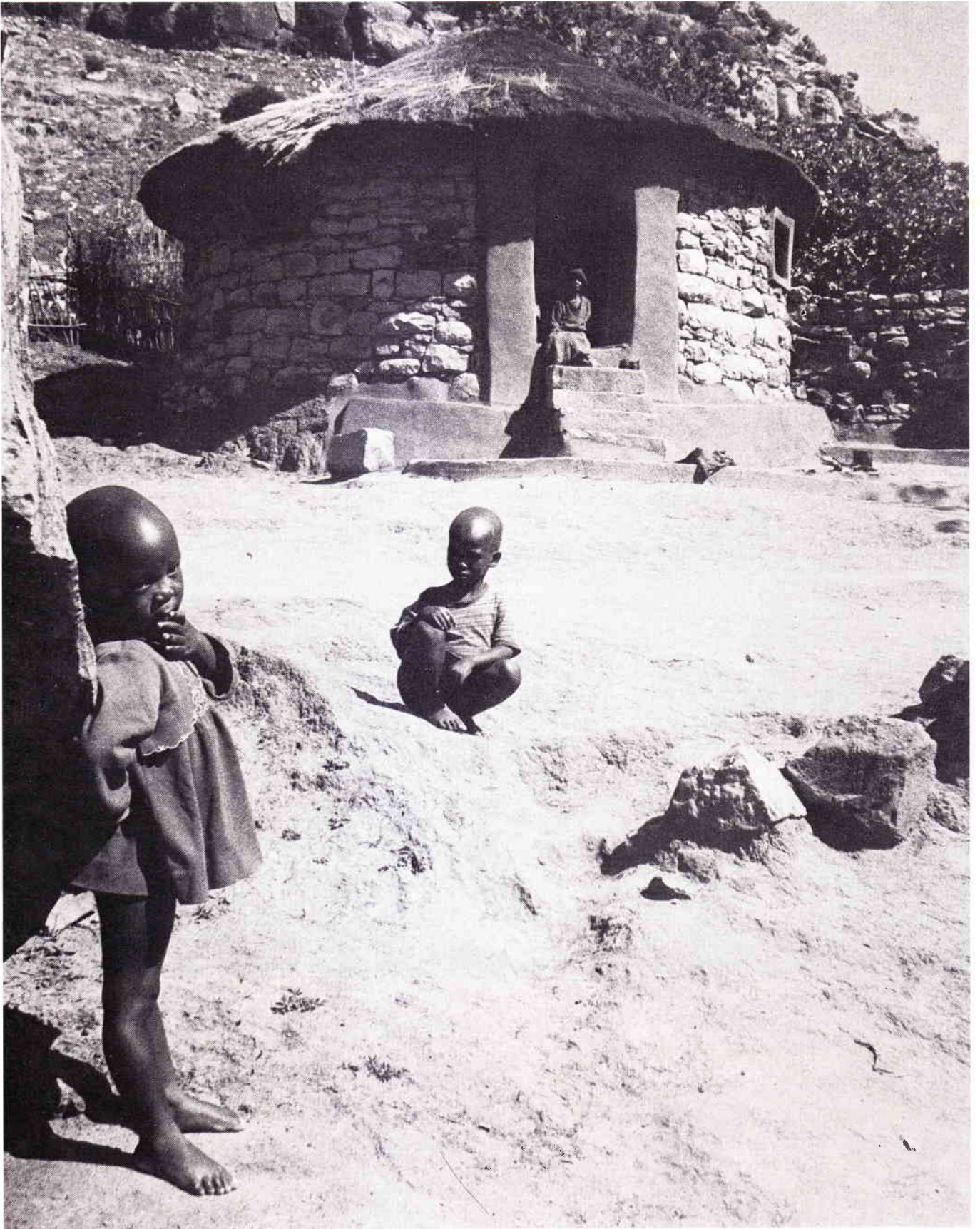
Peter Setuke



Peter Setuke



Joe Alfars



Joe Alfors



Paul Alberts



Paul Robeson



Omar Badsha

Removals, St Wendolins, 1981.



Omar Badsha

Migrant worker with wife.



Bidy Partridge

Sports Day.



Biddy Partridge

Reiger Park.



Jon Wolverstone



Morris Zwi



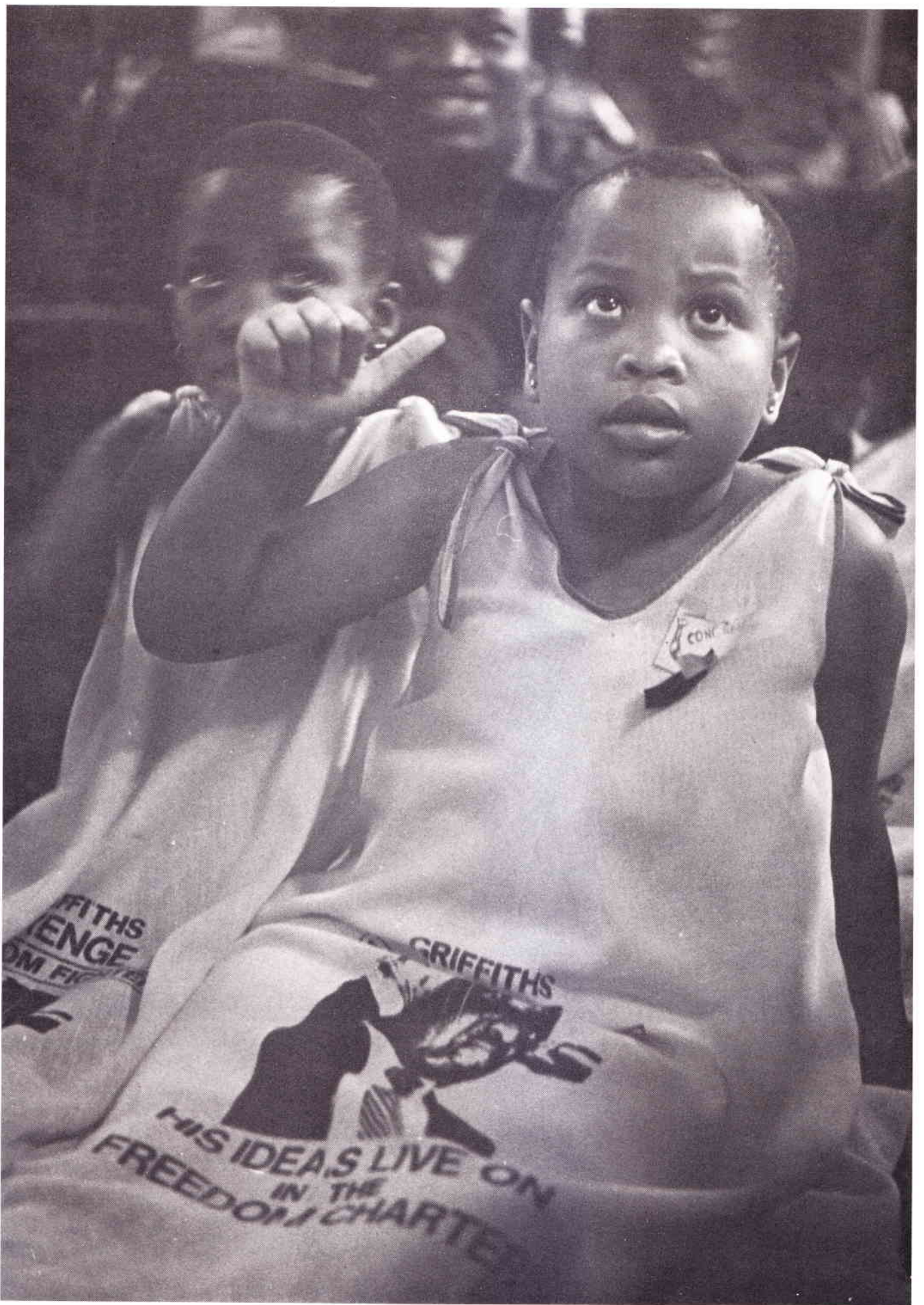
Ivan Gieson

Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika, protest meeting 1982



Ivan Gieson

Kangwane protest meeting, Johannesburg 1982

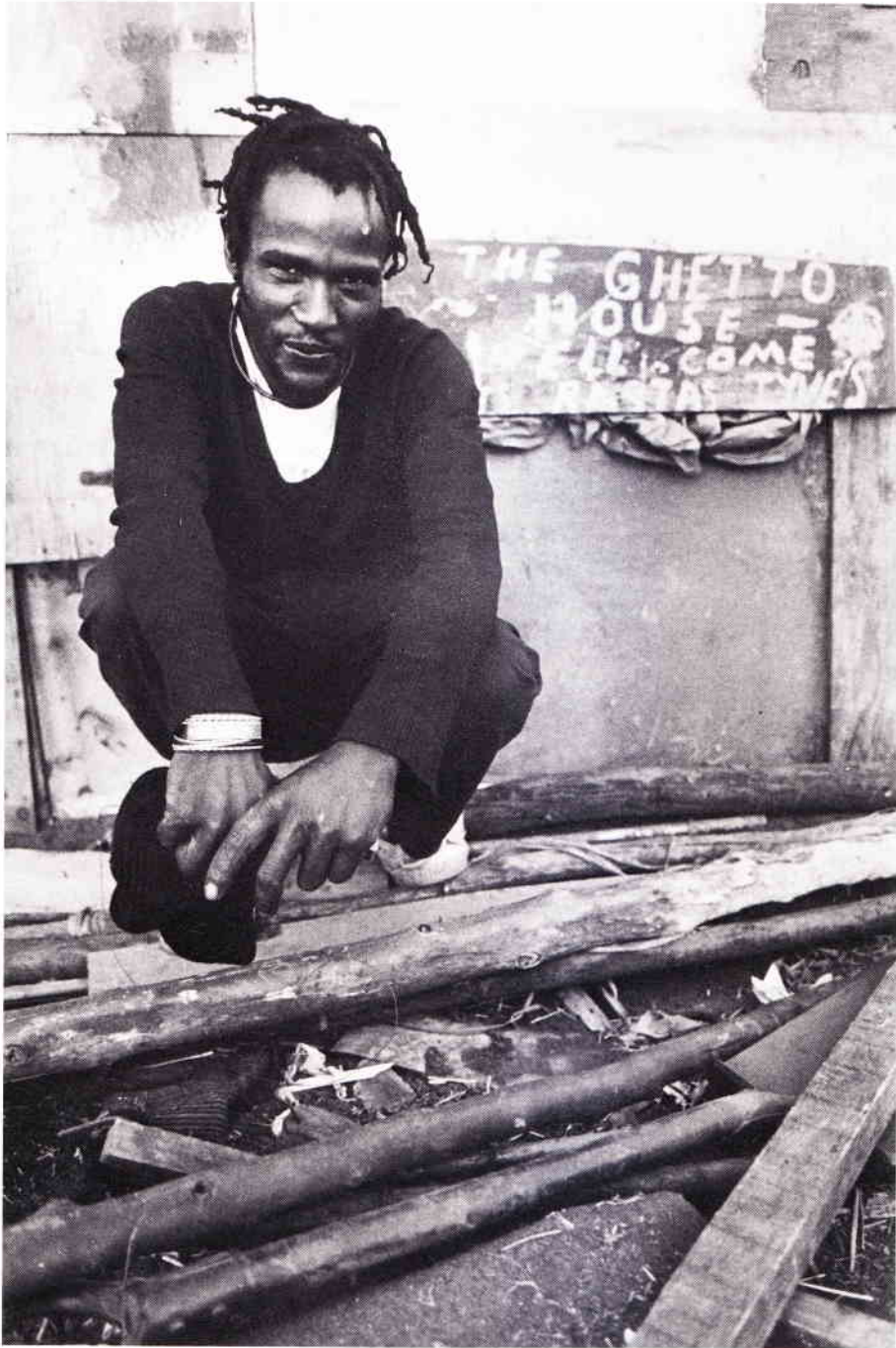


Jeeva Rajgopaul



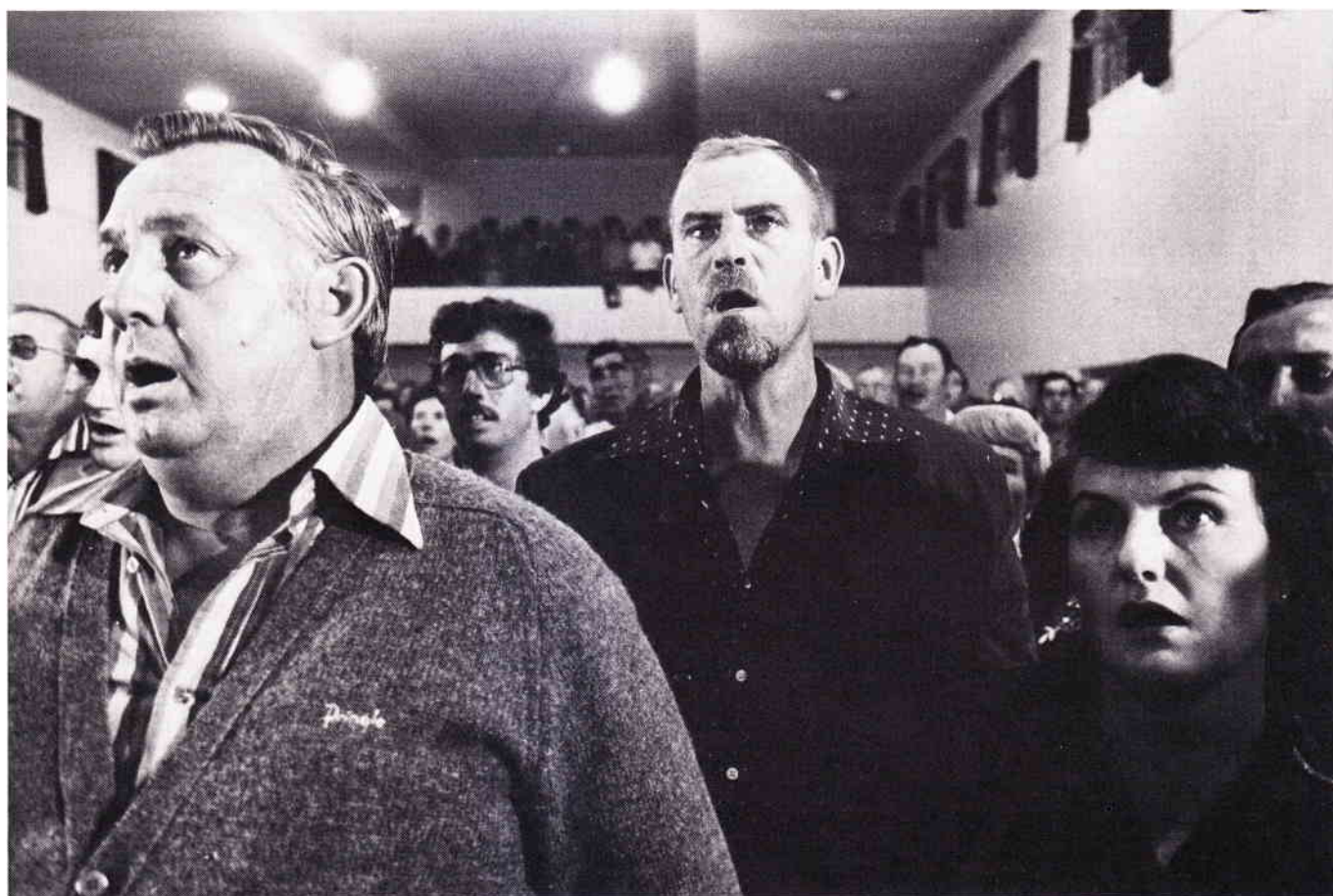
Paul Weinberg

Rand Show 1981



Paul Weinberg

Leader of the Kliptown squatter community



Paul Weinberg

Treurnicht address to Nylstroom public, 1982.



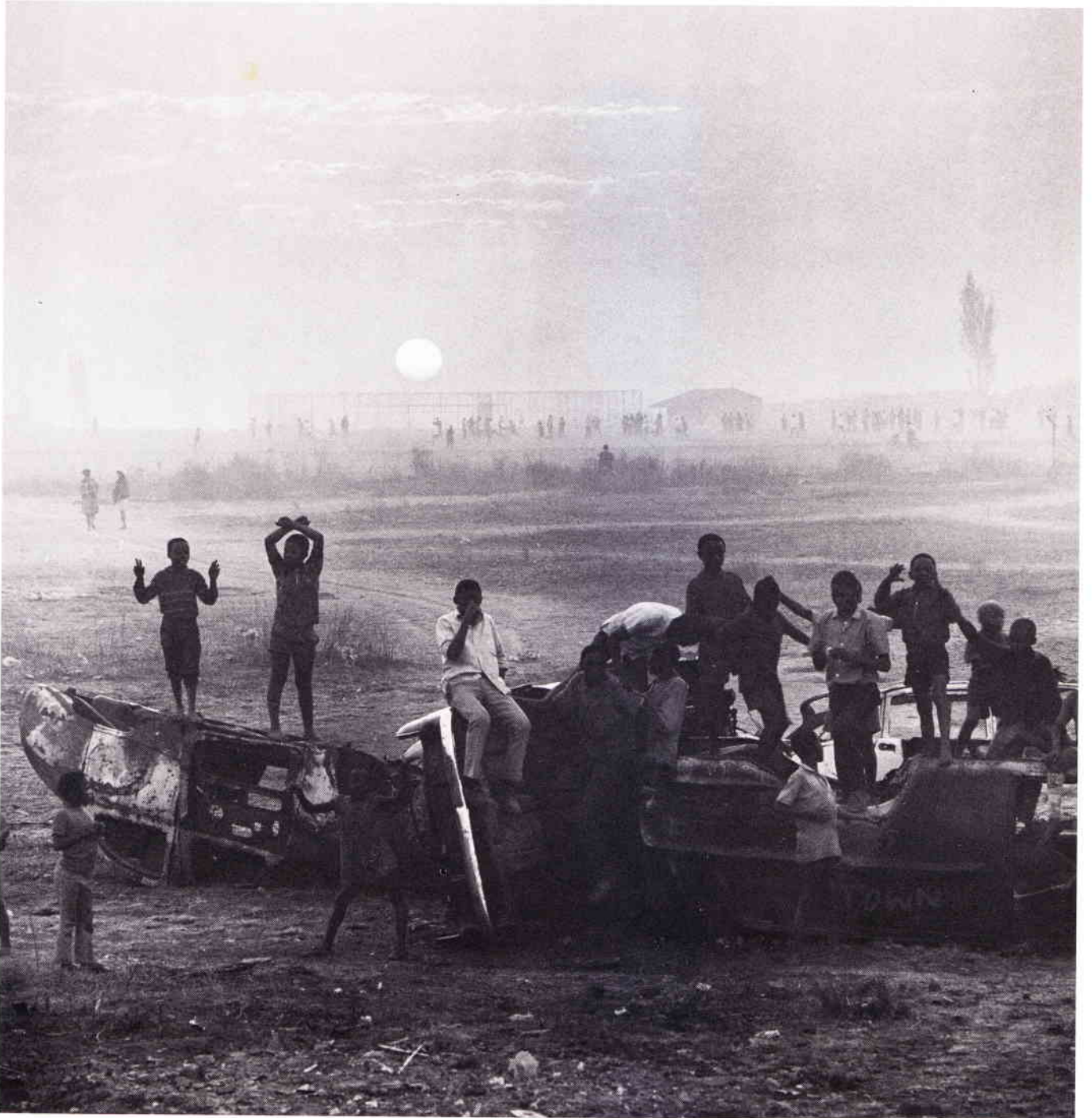
Karl Sansom

District Six.



David Goldblatt

Boksburg – military funeral of two national servicemen killed in action against SWAPO forces on the Namibia/Angola border 18.6.1980.



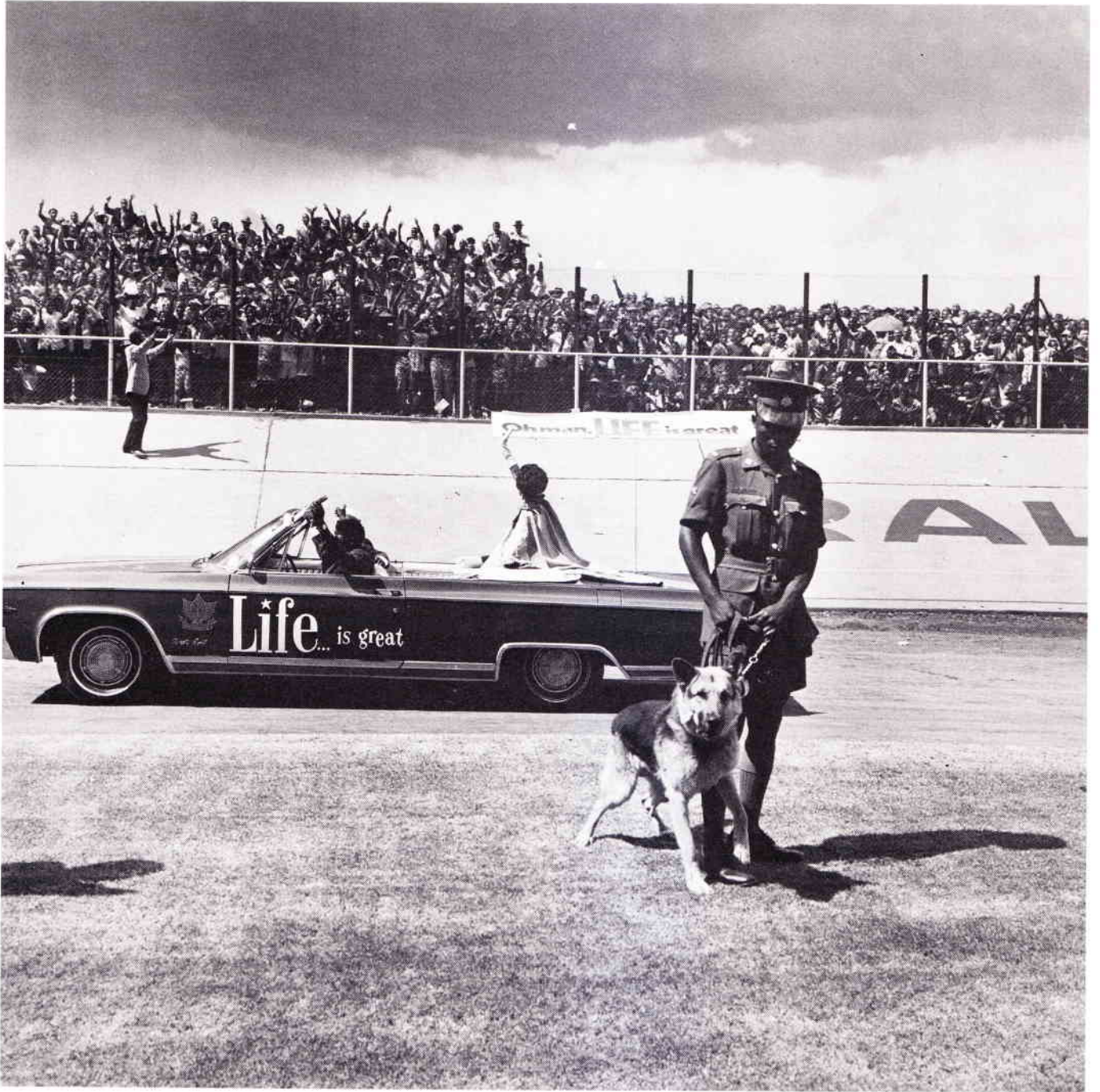
David Goldblatt

The playing fields of Tladi, Soweto 8/7/72.



David Goldblatt

A trading store, Transkei 1975



David Goldblatt

Cup Final, Orlando Stadium, Soweto, November 1972.



Wendy Schwegmann

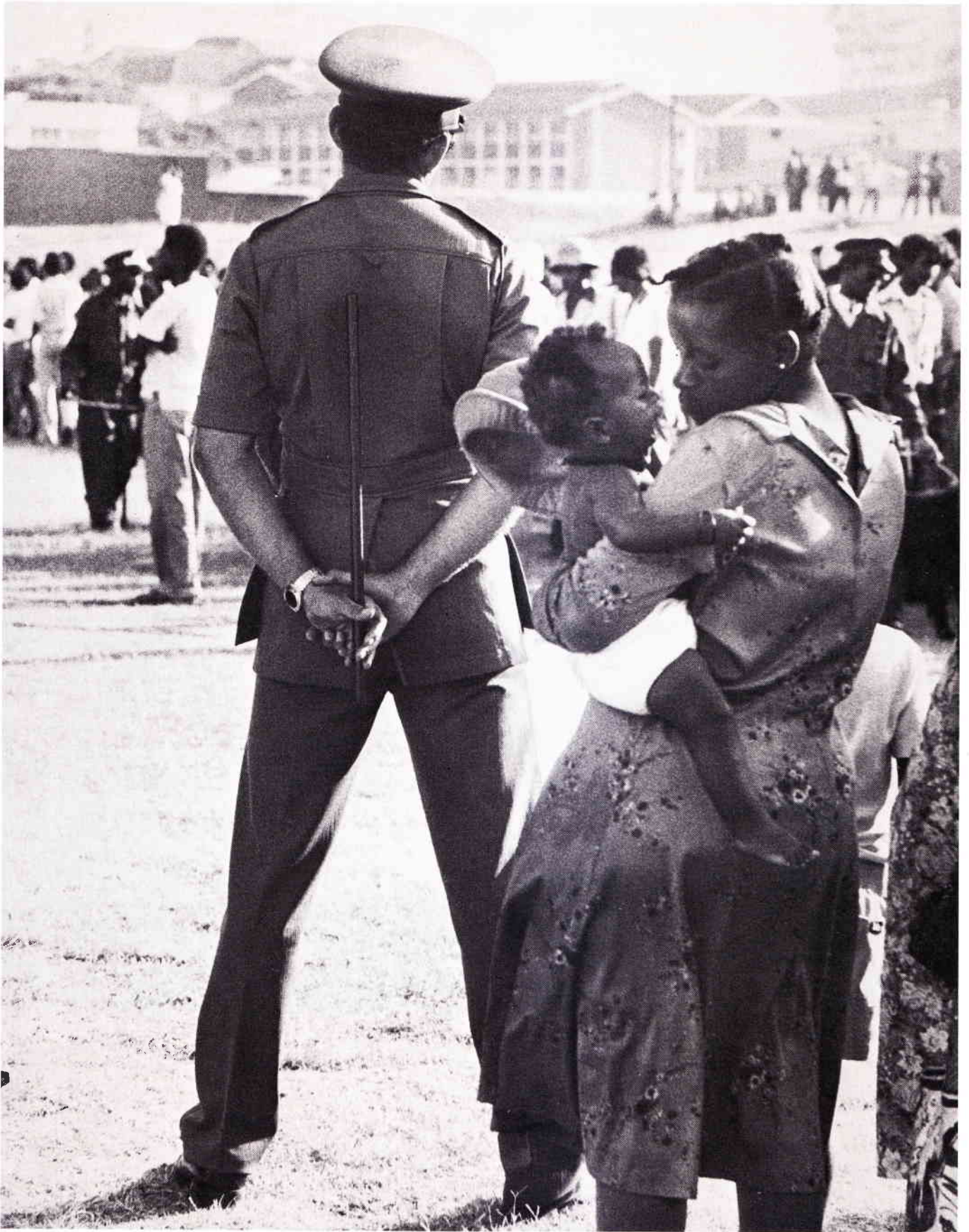
Namaqualand 1981, sheep farmer and son.



Wendy Schwegmann

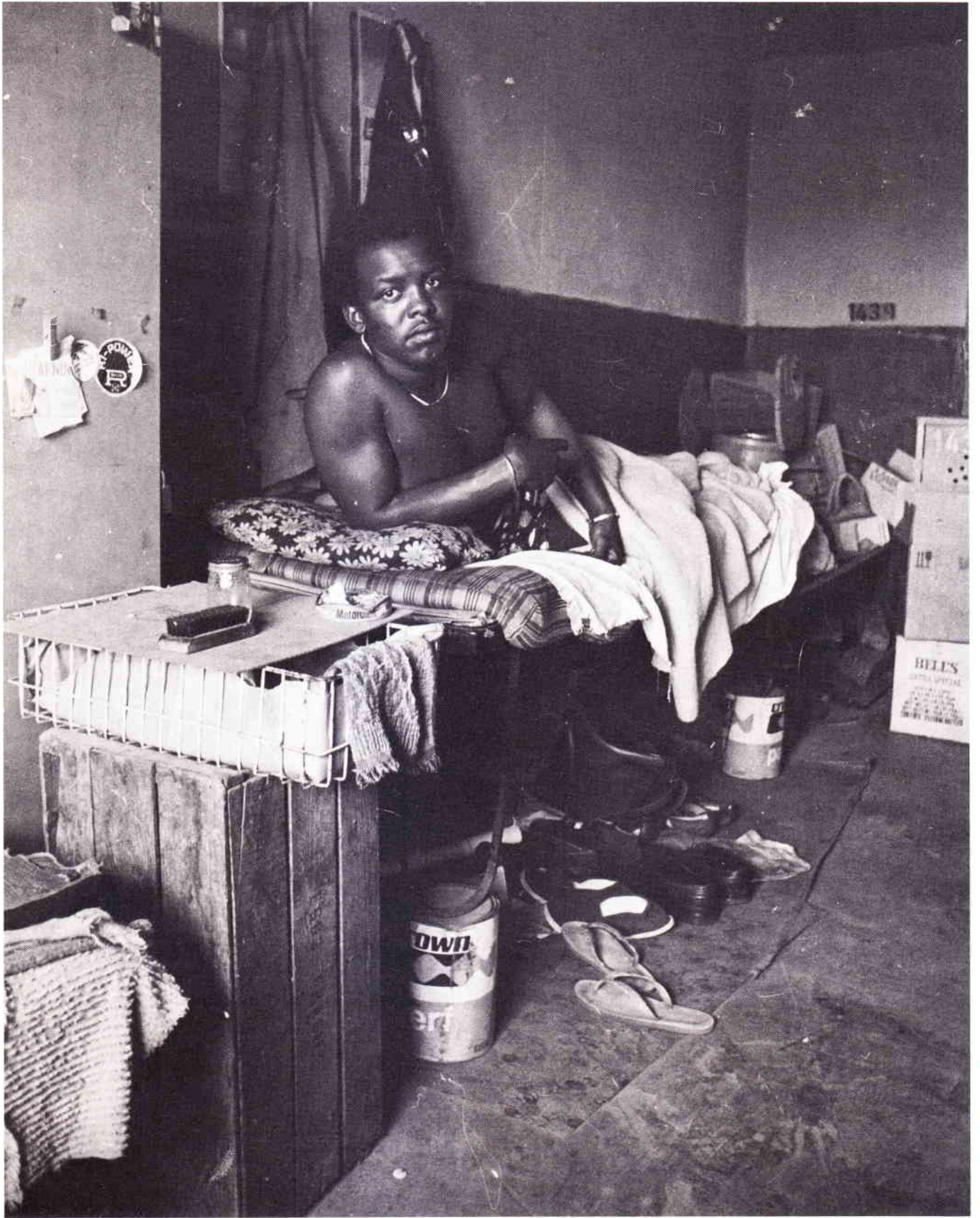


Shepard Nompunza



Tessa Colvin

Currie's Fountain



Judas Ngwenya



Mxolisi Moyo



Peter McKenzie

Central Johannesburg, 1983

SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The main intention of this book has been to recognise and evaluate the responses of social documentary photographers to a changing South Africa.

Change can be good or bad, negative or positive. Social documentary photography is not, in our view, neutral. In South Africa the neutral option doesn't exist — you stand with oppressors or against them. The question we pose is how do photographers hit back with cameras?

Photographs are part of a visual language — sometimes with the help of the written word, sometimes without, sometimes in a more complex semiotic series. An alternative press exists through which the visual element can help inform and mobilise. There are general publications ranging from newspapers to magazines which are open to another view. Posters, calendars, and informal exhibitions help qualify messages at meetings and other gatherings within the political and social process. All these are means whereby the photographer can hit back.

The photographer can also build. He can initiate workshops around him, he can initiate and encourage discussions about what photography is. He can join forces with other photographers and share ideas, experiences, skills and resources.

These are just some of the ways in which the photographer can communicate his messages from the other side of the fence. They are also suggestions as to how photography can be worked through, on all levels from technique to conceptualisation, in a way that breaks down mystifying concepts about the medium.

This publication is an edited version of the *Staffrider* Exhibition. If anything the exhibition illustrates that only the surface has been scratched in the area of documentary photography. For example there have been over 600 strikes in the last three years. How many have been recorded?

We say: pick up your camera and go and look, record and share. The right to see knows no obstacle. We also recognise that ideals can't exist if they're not based on the practical world. That's why we say, use the system to beat the system. A learning process is going forward, in which the practical experiences of the photographer are important.

Use these experiences to create more awareness, more consciousness around you. We are living in a country trapped in a civil war. Around us we see increasing militarisation, trimmed with hollow reforms.

Photographers deserve no special observer status. They're ordinary people who are faced with the same choices every South African is faced with — sit back and watch the bulldozer, or hit back. We say hit back with your camera!

CONTRIBUTORS

PAUL ALBERTS (pages 10 and 11) is a well-established documentary photographer and has three books to his credit, *Children of the Flats*, *The Klein Karoo*, and *In Camera*.

He has been instrumental in establishing an independent photographic publishing company.

His work has appeared in magazines like *Optima* and *Frontline* and he has worked as a photographer for *Magnum*.

JOE ALFERS, (pages 8 and 9), formerly a press photographer, has been documenting the rock art of the San people in Lesotho.

OMAR BADSHA (pages 12 and 13) is a prize-winning artist who has worked as a trade union organizer. He is a regular contributor to community journals. His first book, *Letter to Farzanah*, was published in 1981, the Year of the Child.

TESSA COLVIN (page 32) presently lives in Zimbabwe. Her documentation has highlighted resettlement and squatter conditions in the Durban area.

IVAN GIESON (pages 18 and 19) works as a newspaper photographer.

DAVID GOLDBLATT (pages 25, 26, 27, 28) is one of the pioneers of documentary photography in this country. His

publications include *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, *On the Mines*, and more recently, *On Boksburg*.

He has exhibited frequently and has won local and international acclaim for his contribution to documentary photography.

LESLEY LAWSON (pages 4 and 5) is an experienced journalist, audio-visual presenter and photographer.

Her work has appeared regularly in *Staffrider* as well as other community journals.

PETER MCKENZIE (pages 34 and 35) presently works for the *Sunday Tribune* and has contributed extensively to community photography in South Africa.

MXOLISI MOYO (page 3) studied photography at the Open School, Johannesburg. He has worked for *Post*, *World* and the *Tembisa Times*. He works mostly in Alexandra and Tembisa.

JUDAS NGWENYA (page 33) began his career taking pictures of weddings and people, on a freelance basis. Later he joined *The Voice*. He has been a regular contributor to *Staffrider*.

SHEPARD NOMPUNZA (page 31) lives in Guguletu, Cape Town, where he takes many of his photographs.

BIDDY PARTRIDGE (pages 14 and 15) worked on the visual side of *None But Ourselves*. Her interest in women's

issues has been a strong theme in her work. She contributed photographs to *Maids and Madams* and *Lip*, and presently works for *Moto* magazine.

JEEVA RAJGOPAL (page 20) is a self-taught photographer from Durban whose work is now being more widely recognized.

KARL SANSOM (page 24) is the youngest contributor in this book. As a school-boy he documented the people of District Six.

WENDY SCHWEGMANN (pages 29 and 30) is a Michaelis Art School graduate who presently works as a freelance photographer in Johannesburg. Her work appears regularly in *Learn and Teach* and *Upbeat*, and she contributed photographs to *Lip*.

PETER SETUKE (pages 6 and 7) is a press photographer at *City Press*.

PAUL WEINBERG (pages 21, 22, 23) is involved in alternative media photography. He has published and exhibited extensively. He now works as a freelance photographer.

JOHN WOLVERSTONE'S (page 16) photographs cover especially the Eastern Cape. His work has appeared in *Staffrider*.

MORRIS ZWI (page 17) is a medical doctor who uses photography in his work.

