Photo-journalist Peter Magubane's portrayal of the Mzumba dancers of Soweto, 1967

Photos: Peter Magubane

The power of pictures

In books, films, newspapers and magazines, women are either absent or are there only as mothers, wives and daughters. Women seldom appear in their own right. Well-known South African photo-journalist Peter Magubane has set out to change this in his latest publication, *Women of South Africa — Their Fight For Freedom*. *Rosalee Telela* spoke to him

Page after page of powerful pictures make up the book, "Women of South Africa – Their Fight for Freedom". What kind of person takes such incredibly moving pictures of South African women, as fighters and survivors?

"I'm a person who is concerned with and influenced by the situation of the ordinary person in the street," said Peter Magubane, a famous photo journalist living in Johannesburg.

Born in Vrededorp, he went to school, first in Sophiatown and then in Western Native township.

Magubane worked for Drum magazine and the Rand Daily Mail newspaper, and has been with Time magazine since 1978.

It was Drum that inspired Magubane to be a journalist who worked for justice.

"It was through Drum that I found out how many of our people were being killed by

A suspected police informer's car burns outside KwaThema stadium where a funeral of political activists was being held

The historic march of 20 000 women on the Union Buildings to protest against pass laws, August 9 1956

apartheid," he said.

Now, for almost 40 years, Magubane's photos have captured the essence of the struggle of black people and women, for equality.

His first big assignment was an ANC meeting in Bloemfontein and his first clash with the police was during the 1956 Treason Trial involving ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) activists.

In the same year, on August 9, 20 000 women marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria

to protest against the pass laws. Magubane was at the march and his photos of the historic event appear in his book.

The book goes beyond women's political lives. "It is a collection of the different sides of women's lives in South Africa — from the home to the struggle."

Indeed, each picture shows different aspects of women's lives — at home, at work and in the struggle. Yet, their struggle, as seen through Magubane's eyes, was

not only a struggle against apartheid.

"Women are oppressed in the house and by the law. They share the same political platform with their husbands, but it is the woman that has to prepare food for everybody when they get home. That is oppression."

Magubane believes women have been 'holding up the sun' of the struggle since the 1950's, yet their stories have never been told.

"The way I could tell it and at the same time pay tribute to

Ntsiki, wife of Steve Biko who was killed in detention in 1977, leaving the inquest into his death

ANC supporters outside the court during the 1967 Rivonia Trial of Nelson Mandela and others

women was to put together photos I took from the 1950's which show how and where women came from and where they are going."

Magubane has great admiration for women: "Women do not hesitate. If they want to do something, they do it."

This, he discovered at a young age. "My mother did not stand for any nonsense at all, especially when it came to policemen who sometimes came to our home, kicked the door down and asked my father

to produce a pass. My mother would step in and give them a rough time."

In the course of his career, Magubane has been beaten up by police, detained several times and banned for five years.

"**D**espite all that, I'm not bitter. If you hate, there is absolutely nothing you will do properly," Magubane argued.

Not only did Magubane learn that hatred gets you

nowhere, he also learnt how to be responsible for himself. "I have no problems cooking for myself or cleaning my house. I have no problems doing any job that is done by women."

He strongly believes that South African men should change their attitude towards women.

Magubane sees his future as clearly as he recalls the past: "I shall carry on doing my work as I have been. I just show my camera where the action is." ✪