

Strategies of Representation: South African Photography of the HIV Epidemic

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This thesis is dedicated to

Michael Godby and Nicoli Natrass

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with how South African photographers have responded to the HIV epidemic. The focus is on the different visual, political and intellectual strategies that photographers have used to document the disease and the complex issues that surround it. The study considers the work of all South African photographers who have produced a comprehensive body of work on HIV and AIDS. This includes both published and unpublished work. The analysis of the photographic work is situated in relation to other histories including the history of photography in Africa, the documentation of the HIV epidemic since the 1980s, and the political and social experience of the epidemic in South Africa. The reading of the photographs is also informed by the contexts where they are published or exhibited, including the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and aid organisations, and the fine art gallery and attendant publications.

In addition to the theoretically informed analysis of the photographic projects, I interviewed the photographers in order to learn more about their intentions and the contributing factors that shape the production of their work. Interviews were transcribed and used to develop my analysis of their projects and working process. While a number of photographers are included in the thesis, the major focus is on David Goldblatt, Gideon Mendel, Santu Mofokeng and Gisèle Wulfsohn. This thesis is not a comparative study but rather seeks to differentiate between four very different approaches to representing HIV and AIDS in South Africa. I specifically chose to focus on projects that demonstrated alternative visual and intellectual forms of engagement with the experience of the HIV epidemic. The selection aimed to reveal the relationships between the working processes, the contexts of display and publication, and the visual languages the photographers employed.

My interest lies in how and why the photographers documented this challenging subject. A close examination of South African photography reveals diverse and complex visual responses to the HIV epidemic. Importantly, some photographic projects challenge existing approaches and encourage alternative ways of looking at, and thinking about, the experience of the epidemic in the South African context.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	antiretroviral
AZT	Zidovudine
DFID	British Department for International Development
FET	Further Education and Training
FDC	fixed-dose combination
Global Fund	The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HCT	HIV Counselling and Testing
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
MCC	Medicines Control Council
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MTCTP	mother-to-child transmission prevention
NAPWA	National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (United States)
PMA	Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TB	tuberculosis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

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Introduction

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa has come to mean all things to all people, whether they are African or not. As the continent hit hardest, Africa is inevitably the focus of the world whenever this health issue is being discussed. For reasons of this close association, people's response to the epidemic becomes a kind of barometer of their response to African issues and challenges. Thus those traditionally pessimistic about Africa have another chance to reaffirm their negative views...And for the indifferent, the death toll may just be another statistic from Africa. However, for the vast majority of people, again both Africans and non-Africans, the HIV epidemic is a constant source of agony and grief. At the same time, it offers, paradoxically, a unique moment to revalidate African personhood, the permanent and irreplaceable value of being a person, in this instance, of African descent. Seen in this light, the enormous suffering and pain caused by HIV/AIDS lead, not to despair, but to the graciousness of sacrifice and love, of caring, of heroic struggle to preserve the life and dignity of humanity (Biakolo, Mathangwane & Odallo, 2003:7).

Throughout history, epidemic diseases have been seen as signs of social disorder and have given rise to multiple, and often contradictory, interpretations (Sontag, 1989:60). Since the early 1980s HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)¹ have been ascribed numerous meanings and metaphors. Over the years the South African HIV epidemic has been assessed and interpreted in historical, medical, political and social terms, but little has been written on its visual history, or more specifically photography representing HIV and AIDS in South Africa. This thesis is focused on South African photographers who have engaged with the HIV epidemic in their work. It aims to provide a theoretically informed analysis of how the photographers conceived of and executed their projects across a range of contexts, including the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the fine art gallery. It considers their diverse working processes which informed their distinct aesthetic and intellectual approaches to documenting the HIV epidemic.

¹ HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus which causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). AIDS is the final stage of HIV disease when the infected individual is sick. HIV destroys the body's ability to resist infection and disease, which can result in death. In this thesis I have chosen to use the term 'HIV and AIDS' over 'HIV/AIDS' in order to distinguish between the two.

HIV and AIDS have a specific social and political history within South Africa that not only has informed how locals understand the disease, but also shaped international opinion about South Africa, and Africa more generally. Importantly there is also a history of how the global North has responded to and represented AIDS in Africa (Sontag, 1989; Treichler, 1999; Thomas, 2007). This thesis situates the analysis of South African photographic responses in relation to this history and the relevant political debates in the country. The kinds of images that have been produced have changed over time and have responded to what was happening both locally and internationally in terms of the global spread of the epidemic, advances in HIV treatment and visual responses to HIV and AIDS.

My curiosity in this topic was originally sparked by reading international curator Okwui Enwezor's essay entitled 'The Uses of Afro-pessimism'² that accompanied the photographic exhibition *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (Enwezor, 2006). In essence, Enwezor voiced a concern about the role photography plays in projecting a bleak, and largely prejudiced, view of Africa (2006:11). He argued that the international media, in particular, portrays a sensational, over-simplified and ultimately distorted view of the continent. Enwezor went on to suggest that outsiders to Africa do not understand the continent and its people and therefore rely on existing stereotypes when reporting on Africa (2006:11). It is argued that these stereotypes, whether negative or positive, can be traced back to colonial views of Africa and are thus largely racist and prejudiced (Enwezor, 2006:11-12).

It is interesting to note that the majority of the photographers I interviewed raised their own concerns in relation to perpetuating negative stereotypes of HIV and AIDS in Africa and were particularly sensitised to spectacular images of African 'AIDS victims'. Some overtly stated that they were opposed to producing such images (Hutton, personal interview, 2011 July 14; Miller, personal interview, 2001 September 1). Others spoke of the challenge of revealing the human suffering caused by the HIV epidemic in light of accusations that their images were 'Afro-pessimist' or 'victimising' (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). The concern with 'Afro-pessimism' extends beyond the representation of HIV and AIDS

² In addition to this essay, a number of other texts influenced my early thinking about the representation of Africa (Fanon, 1967; Achebe, 1988; Mudimbe, 1988, 1994; Ndebele, 1991; Appiah, 1992; Ayittey, 1992; Hooks, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1997; Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2003; Mbembe, 2001, 2002).

within South African photography and local photographers, such as Pieter Hugo, continue to feel the need to defend themselves against accusations of projecting a bleak view of the continent (Nicolson, 2013).

Enwezor was not the first to raise these concerns, and the critique of the re-emergence of age-old stereotypes of Africa also features in early responses to the representation of AIDS in Africa (Sontag, 1989; Treichler, 1999). I was also interested in how Enwezor's ideas related to wider critiques of documentary photographic practice both internationally and locally (Tagg, 1988; Rosler, 1992; Solomon-Godeau, 1995; Campbell, 2009; Thomas, 2009). Photographs of HIV are also linked to a larger debate around images of human suffering (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997; Sontag, 2003; Reinhardt, Edwards & Duganne, 2007; Campbell, 2012; 2011; 2008). In her famous text *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag argues that there is a clear relationship between photographs of African suffering and perceptions of the continent in the developed world:

Thus postcolonial Africa exists in the consciousness of the general public in the rich world – besides through its sexy music – mainly as a succession of unforgettable photographs of large-eyed victims, starting with figures in the famine lands of Biafra in the late 1960s to the survivors of the genocide of nearly a million Rwandan Tutsis in 1994 and, a few years later, the children and adults whose limbs were hacked off during the program of mass terror conducted by the RUF, the rebel forces in Sierra Leone. (More recently, the photographs are of whole families of indigent villagers dying of AIDS.) These sights carry a double message. They show suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place. The ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward - that is, poor – parts of the world (Sontag, 2003:63).

The 'double message' of these kinds of images means that despite the intention of photographs linked to advocacy messages or news items that call for humanitarian intervention, the images normalise the idea that human suffering is a 'natural' and inevitable experience in Africa and the developing world. The problematic nature of photographs of suffering in Africa is intimately linked to the key debates about the representation of the HIV epidemic in South Africa. Some of South African photographers included in this thesis have

sought to redress existing, and often dehumanising, images of African suffering. And yet at the same time, others have felt compelled to represent the extreme human suffering and loss caused by the epidemic either to acknowledge the reality of the impact of the disease in the face of AIDS denialism, or in order to achieve advocacy goals.

This thesis focuses on the photographic representation of the HIV epidemic in relation to broader debates about the representation of Africa. While my starting point was an interest in arguments about the potential role of photography in depicting Africa in a bleak way, the thesis is not concerned with afro-pessimism *per se*, but rather how photographers document difficult social realities, in this instance the HIV epidemic, within the larger context of representing Africa. At the heart of this inquiry is the question of what motivates South African photographers to document HIV and AIDS. This thesis is concerned with engaging with the working process and intentions of specific photographers in order to better understand what informs the production of images of HIV and AIDS. My interest lies in the different visual, political and intellectual strategies that these photographers have used to document the disease and the issues that surround it.

Image and Context: how photographic meaning is made

The context that photographic work appears in shapes its meaning and the kind of audiences that view it (Sekula, 1982:91). As is argued elsewhere ‘Neither experience nor reality can be separated from the languages, representations, psychological structures and practices in which they are articulated and which they disrupt’ (Tagg, 1988:4). This thesis provides an analysis of the different contexts where photographs of HIV and AIDS are viewed, including the media, the fine art gallery and NGOs and international aid organisations. In this way I assess the extent to which meaning is made, how and by whom (Clarke, 1997:27-29). I am interested in how photographers engage with these different spaces for displaying their work and why they choose to show their work in them. In some instances, a photograph can move between these different contexts and is read in different ways depending on where it is seen (Sontag, 2003:106). Photographers make use of different forms and ways of publishing their work, not only to shape the meaning of the images but also to reach specific audiences, achieve advocacy or educational goals, and to further careers.

This thesis is informed by long standing debates and theory on the nature of photographic representation and the multiple ways in which meaning is created in the photographic image itself and shaped by the contexts that surround it. In his well-known text *The Photographic Message*, Barthes considers how the photograph's meaning is shaped by the photographer, the context of publication and text accompanying the image, and the audience or viewer (1988:29). Barthes also comments that the 'information' in a photograph consists of two parts; text accompanying the image and the formal qualities within the image such as line, tone and composition (1988:16). One of Barthes's major contributions to photographic theory is his idea of the 'denotative' and 'connotative' meaning of a photograph where the former is what is literally captured in the picture frame and the latter is the meaning derived from the context and interpretation of the image (1988:19-31). He also developed this idea further with the idea of the 'studium' and the 'punctum' where the 'studium' is derived from the actual elements within the image while the 'punctum' is that element within the image that ruptures the general meaning of the image and enables a critical reading of the image which is usually specific to different viewers (Barthes, 1981:26-60).

And yet Victor Burgin notes that while it is now common to describe photographs in terms of 'text' or 'language', it was only in the 1960s with the rise of semiotic studies that any serious attempts were made to look at how photographs communicate their meaning (2001:66). Burgin notes that semiotics effectively revealed that there is no 'language' specific to photography and that photographic meaning is comprised of a number of different codes, some of which are specific to the medium itself (focus, blur), while others such as text, are applicable to a range of other mediums (2001:66). Burgin goes on to comment on the nature of 'photographic discourse' which in his mind engages other social and historical discourses and therefore the photograph's meaning is closely informed by cultural and historical factors (2001:67).

Graham Clarke makes a similar point when he argues that the photograph 'exists within a wider body of reference and relates to a series of wider histories, at once aesthetic, cultural, and social' (1997:29). This thesis engages with a number of histories which I argue inform contemporary reading of photographs of HIV and AIDS. These histories include the colonial representation of Africa, the representation of the black body and human suffering and illness, the international history of photographing HIV and AIDS, and lastly, the social and

political history of the HIV epidemic in South Africa. The argument is made that these other histories play an important role in how contemporary photographers approach the issue of HIV and AIDS and their decisions about how and where to present their work.

This understanding of the overlapping discourses which inform how photographs are read was a radical departure from nineteenth century theory and discussion of photographs. Early commentators on the photographic image tended to emphasise the literal and focused on the way photographs transcribed the actual things represented, rather than cultural or social meanings (Clarke, 1997:27). In this way, photography was initially framed as an unmediated 'window on the world' which has since been resisted with the emphasis of the multiple ways in which the photograph is constructed, by the photographer's choice of exposure, composition and framing, as well the contexts in which the image appears and the viewer's interpretation of the image. This thesis engages with the ways in which photographers have constructed their images, as well as framed their projects with text and choice of publication or exhibition.

Susan Sontag addresses the notion of how context changes the meaning of photographs, despite attempts to constrain or limit its meaning, especially in relation to the idea of 'truth'.

Socially concerned photographers assume that their work can convey some kind of stable meaning, can reveal truth. But partly because the photograph is, always, an object in a context, this meaning is bound to drain away; that is, the context which shapes whatever immediate – in particular, political – uses the photograph may have is inevitably succeeded by contexts in which such uses are weakened and become progressively less relevant. One of the central characteristics of photography is that process by which original uses are modified, eventually supplanted by subsequent uses – most notably, by the discourse of art into which any photograph can be absorbed. And, being images themselves, some photographs right from the start refer us to other images as well as to life (Sontag, 2003:106).

Despite the extensive theory about the nature of photographic representation, it has also been argued that 'Photography, as a medium, is deceptively invisible, leaving us with a seamless act of representation, an insistent thereness in which only the contents of the photograph, its message, are offered to the eye' (Clarke, 1997:34). This suggests that despite awareness that

the photograph is constructed and is not simply a mirror of the world, we still tend to view photographs as reflections of ‘reality’. This is particularly true of documentary photographs and photojournalism and is in part informed by the context in which the images appear (such as the news media) and also the visual language of these forms which have become encoded with understandings of the ‘truth’ and an unmediated record. For instance, the use of black and white film and relying only natural light are both conventions associated with documentary photography that are believed to be ‘proof’ of its veracity as a record. This will be discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

The challenge of documentary photography

Most, if not all, of the photographic projects discussed in this thesis have some relationship to documentary practice and many of the photographers themselves have defined their work in these terms, or else resisted being framed in this way. This section will provide an historical overview of the ideas and debates connected to documentary practice which will be referred to in the chapters that follow in relation to specific photographic projects. Over the years a substantial and complex literature on documentary photography has developed. It is not possible to represent all these arguments in full or to give full expression to the nuance of all the debates within the confines of this section. My intention is to draw attention to major lines of thinking about or framing documentary practice in relation to the discussion of the representation of the HIV epidemic by South African photographers.

The term ‘documentary’ has come to mean different things to different people and over the years scholars, photographers, film makers and writers have contributed a number of definitions and histories of the term. In order to impose some structure on these multiple debates, this section will discuss the term in relation to three major influences or ideas connected to documentary photography. Firstly, I will consider the history of ‘social documentary’ photography which is based on an instrumental understanding of the image and the premise that photographs of social challenges are able to effect change for those depicted. Secondly, I will consider the relationship between documentary photography and journalism. In conclusion, documentary photography and art will be discussed in relation to both its history and contemporary contexts.

Before I engage with these debates, it is worth reflecting on Abigail Solomon-Godeau's well-known observation that the term 'documentary' only came into regular use from the 1920s onwards and that before this point all photographs were automatically seen to be documentary (1995:169). This tells us that the term 'documentary' is an historical concept that has been used to define a style or approach in relation to other kinds of photographic images.

One of the earliest moves to define photographs as 'documentary' was in response to ideas about photography as 'art' and the dominance of Pictorialism from the 1850s until the early 1900s (Solomon-Godeau, 1995:170). The Pictorialist approach used techniques that manipulated the photographic image to look more painterly, often with a soft or blurred aesthetic (Wells, 1997:14-15). Pictorialism was also interested in rendering themes already found in the fine arts or literature, or else producing romantic images often focused on rural life. In contrast to this aesthetic and choice of subject matter, there was a move towards making a 'straight' photographic image that emphasised the inherent qualities of the photographic image, such as clarity and focus. Photographers committed to this approach were typically interested in documenting urban life in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The term 'documentary' photography was used to describe this work in order to distinguish it from Pictorialist inspired images. Elsewhere it has been claimed that film maker John Grierson first used the term in 1926 in order to distinguish his films from Hollywood fiction and that the term was soon adopted within photography (Wells, 1997:69).

Social documentary photography and its critics

Many accounts of the tradition of social documentary photography have tended to emphasise, and critique, an American tradition which focuses on specific individuals and projects including Jacob Riis (1849-1914), Lewis Hine (1874-1940) and the photographers of the 1930s Farm Security Administration (FSA) (Rosler, 1992; 2004; Solomon-Godeau, 1995; Clarke, 1997; Stomberg, 2007). This approach has looked at photographic projects that were defined in reformist or ameliorative terms where the photographers were committed to the idea that their images of social suffering, usually related to poverty and issues of labour and class, could be instrumental in bringing about reform.

However, despite the noble intentions of these photographers, a number of twentieth century critics have interpreted the projects, especially Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* and the work of the FSA, as largely committed to retaining the social *status quo* rather than truly bringing about class reform and social change (Tagg, 1988:8; Rosler, 1992:303-304; Solomon-Godeau, 1995:175-176). Rosler famously argued that 'Documentary photography has been much more comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics' (1992:304). Rosler went on to argue that the rhetoric of compassion or outrage often linked to documentary images is in fact closer aligned to voyeurism where the 'poor' or people from a different class or culture are presented as exotic and strange to the socially powerful and affluent sectors of society. This allegation against documentary photography continues to rear its head in contemporary debates in South Africa with regards to the representation of poverty (Demos, 2011).

Sontag also comments on the relationship between photography and the socially and politically 'oppressed' when she writes:

Photography has always been fascinated by social heights and lower depths. Documentarists...prefer the latter. For more than a century, photographers have been hovering about the oppressed, in attendance at scenes of violence – with a spectacularly good conscience. Social misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from them. Gazing on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal (Sontag, 2003:55)

Critics of documentary photographs from this tradition have tended to sympathise with Leftist ideology and have called for a new approach to documentary. Central to this call is the argument that traditional approaches to documentary photography have presented their subjects as 'passive victims' or as 'social problems' (Tagg, 1988:11-12) and that the only way to bring about meaningful representation of their concerns, and effect true social transformation, is through self-representation (Sekula, 1982:109). The most extreme form of the criticism of documentary photographs of 'victims' is found in the statement:

We must ask, in other words, whether the documentary act does not involve a double act of subjugation; first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents (Solomon-Godeau, 1995:176).

These critiques of documentary photography as representing subjects as ‘victims’, and a sensitivity towards the power relations between photographer and subject in terms of class and race, have been widely employed in the South African context and will be discussed in more detail in relation to particular projects in the chapters that follow. It is interesting to note how the critiques of documentary photography emanating from this influential group of American and British Leftist photography critics writing mainly in the 1970s and 1980s have continued to be recycled in the South African context. Race has often replaced class in debates about South African documentary photography with concerns over the representation of black South Africans as ‘victims’.

And yet, there are some fundamental differences in the history of documentary photography in the South African context compared to that in America and Britain. South African documentary photography has been greatly influenced by ‘struggle photography’ which gained local and international prominence in the 1980s during the height of the anti-apartheid struggle (Newbury, 2009; Garb, 2011). The legacy of this strand of documentary practice, built on the principles of bearing ‘witness’ and the belief that the photograph was capable of initiating political and social reform, remain well-established within contemporary South African photography, along with other traditions including portraiture and anthropological images (Newbury, 2009; Garb, 2011).

Despite the Leftist credentials of ‘struggle photography’, it has come under attack for representing its subjects as victims with photographers such as Zwelethu Mthethwa arguing that in contrast to black and white anti-apartheid struggle images, his use of colour restores the dignity of his subjects (Godby, 1999:46-47; Enwezor, 2010:101-102). In a similar way to struggle photographers, photographers documenting the HIV epidemic, even within an advocacy or humanitarian framework, have also been accused of portraying people as ‘victims’. In this way, we can see how historical debates about the nature of documentary photography have continued to be evoked in relation to contemporary projects. It is

interesting to note how post-1994, many photographers committed to documenting the anti-apartheid struggle turned their lenses on the new ‘struggles’ of a democratic South Africa, such as poverty and significantly, HIV and AIDS.

Social documentary photography is often very closely linked to photojournalism with photographers choosing to publish images in the news media. For example, over the years Gideon Mendel’s work on the HIV epidemic has won World Press Awards and been extensively published in the online and print media, as well as appearing in NGO reports and campaigns and on the walls of galleries and in book form. In the next section I will consider the historical and contemporary relationships between documentary photography and photojournalism.

Documentary photography and photojournalism

Documentary photography and photojournalism are intimately linked and the boundaries or differences between these approaches are often unclear with both terms being used interchangeably at times or applied to the same photographer. One of the principles considered integral to both documentary photography and photojournalism is the idea of truth. Photography was historically framed as a ‘mechanical’ process and was therefore considered to be the ultimate objective record (Wells, 2009:12-19). This idea of photography as a copy devoid of any subjective interpretation was soon abandoned.

But the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace...cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude. Moreover, fiddling with pictures long antedates the era of digital photography and Photoshop manipulations; it had always been possible for a photograph to misrepresent (Sontag: 2003:41).

In this way, Sontag engages with the idea that a photograph is simultaneously objective and subjective. However, her point about the ability of a photograph to ‘misrepresent’ is of key significance in relation to documentary photography and photojournalism with the expectation that photography put to these uses may not manipulate the truth in any way. As early as 1877, a court found Thomas Barnardo guilty of altering the ‘truth’ in photographs he commissioned of children ‘before and after’ arrival at his Home for street children. While

the court found Barnado guilty of constructing the images to demonstrate the improvements of his Home on the children's physical and spiritual well-being, Barnado defended himself by arguing that although they were staged, the photographs were in keeping with reality (Tagg, 1988:83-85).

The historical precedent set by such examples has tended to reinforce the idea that documentary images present the truth, particularly those committed to recording social challenges with the view to bringing about positive change. This view is even more stringently applied to photojournalism and the professional ethics of photojournalism explicitly demand that the photographer not manipulate the image in any way. This has become increasingly fraught with the advent of digital photography as revealed in recent years with the World Press Awards disqualifying journalists found guilty of digitally altering their images beyond accepted norms of post-production.

In order to better understand the close relationship between photojournalism and documentary photography and ideas of 'truth' and 'authenticity', I will provide a historical overview of three important developments: the rise of modern photojournalism in the late 1920s in Germany, the growth of the illustrated magazine and the founding of the Magnum collective post World War II.

Modern photojournalism was developed in Germany in the late 1920s and was shaped by the experimental space of the Weimar Republic where industrial design and aesthetic form were celebrated. An important development was the production of small format 35mm cameras with fast lenses by the Ermanox and Leica companies (Boot, 2004:4). These cameras enabled photographers to work in a more spontaneous and immediate way without using flash and contributed to the development of a new photographic language within the context of Germany's highly competitive illustrated magazines. Sequences of photographs were presented over a number of pages and in this way the photo essay, or series, gained popularity and became known as 'reportage' (Boot, 2004:4). Hitler's rise to power effectively shut down this experimental and creative space with the closure of investigative and socialist presses. However, not before he had co-opted their innovative approach to photography for his own purposes with the founding of the Nazi propaganda publication *Signal*. Many of the leading figures behind the illustrated magazines were Jewish and went into exile, if they

could, in other European countries and the United States. In this way this approach to using photographs spread throughout the world and resulted in the founding of *Life* magazine in the United States, *Vu* in France and *Picture Post* in Britain. In the South African context, *Drum* magazine was also a product of this era (Newbury, 2009).

The illustrated magazines played an important role in developing more in-depth and complex photographic storytelling with the use of series in place of single images. The dominance of the concept that images were capable of communicating ideas, rather than simply illustrating a text, had a profound effect on the development of photojournalism. In many ways, the idea of telling a story through images is one of the fundamental elements of documentary photographic practice. The emphasis on human subjects is also another attribute of documentary photography. In the context of this thesis, Gideon Mendel, Gisèle Wulfsohn, David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng all produced photo stories or series of images in response to the HIV epidemic.

The Magnum photographic collective was founded in 1947 by a group of photographers who followed the German pioneers and many of whom had worked for the subsequent publications such as *Life*. In many ways, Magnum was shaped by a desire of the photographers to be free from the constraints of working for a particular magazine with its attendant ideology and way of commissioning work (Boot, 2004:5). Robert Capa, George Rodger and Chim Seymour had made their names as successful war photographers during and after the Second World War.

In contrast, Henri Cartier-Bresson not only resisted their idea of a photo story but also focused on very different subject matter. In essence, Magnum became defined by two contradictory influences which can be described as those of the reporter and those of the artist. While Capa, Rodger and Seymour were invested in reporting on news and world events, Cartier-Bresson was more interested in documenting the details of everyday life as a form of ongoing diary. This tension between an arguably more public versus private function of the photographic image is a key element within documentary photography and is addressed within this thesis. Closely linked to the photographer working independently from a commissioning publication, and the use of photography as a personal means of expression, is the development of documentary photography into an 'art'. This is discussed in more

detail in the section that follows. The idea of self-expression or the use of photography as an essentially selfish, or personal, pursuit is elaborated on in relation to work of Goldblatt and Mofokeng in subsequent chapters.

The legacy of both the illustrated magazines and Magnum photographers has meant that documentary and press images are traditionally associated with black and white 35mm film. With the developments in technology, including colour films and digital cameras, most press photography is now shot in colour, which has since been framed as more 'real' than black and white. It is interesting to observe how, despite the dominance of digital photography in photojournalism and documentary, many documentary photographic projects continue to be presented in black and white. The decision to desaturate colour images in digital post-production and transform them into black and white images is a deliberate step to evoke the long standing tradition of early documentary practice. In this way, black and white photography is associated with not only documentary style, but also with ideas of truth and authenticity. In the South African context, black and white images are also associated with 'struggle photography' and the idea of bearing witness.

Despite the historical framing of photojournalism in terms of documenting reality in an unmediated way, it has been argued that 'Due, however, to the recent influx of such technologies as television, video, and digital media, contemporary photojournalism seems to have lost much of its witnessing authority' (Duganne, 2007:57). This is attributed to the shifts in how images were digitally produced in the Gulf War of 1991 and most often disseminated by the military and shown on television. It has also been observed that it is now rare for photographs to break news and that most breaking news is now online and televised with the dominance of moving images over still (Duganne, 2007:57).

The repercussions of increased control over photojournalists, and in particular the practice of embedding journalists within the military, has also eroded ideas of objectivity and being a 'witness' (Broomberg & Chanarin, 2008). In response, a number of photojournalists have moved away from photojournalism and started to produce photographs that are described as 'aftermath photography' where, in place of showing the war or event itself, the images record the lasting impact or traces of the events. Simon Norfolk's ongoing examination of recent wars is an example of this move away from reporting breaking news and rather producing

more contemplative images on the impact of the conflict on the landscape (Norfolk, 2002; 2005).

An important aspect of these kinds of projects is that they are typically shot on medium or large format cameras and not the small, lightweight 35mm cameras associated with photojournalism. Medium and large format cameras require a slower working process and usually rely on the use of a tripod and light meter which makes them inappropriate for capturing the action of breaking news. These formats are also typically associated with fine art photography because of the quality of the images produced and the skill required to operate these more cumbersome cameras. It therefore comes as no surprise that these kinds of images tend to be shown in art galleries and published in large format art books, rather than appearing in the news.

The ideas associated with different contexts, such as the media or the fine art gallery or art publication, are intimately connected to the reading of the images that appear in these spaces. This is summed up by Duganne in her evaluation of the work of Luc Delahaye when she writes:

Since photojournalism remains bound to newspaper or magazine pages, its photographers necessarily and automatically “capture” the real without any self-reflexivity or critical detachment. Artists, on the other hand, due to the self-sufficiency and distance of their images from the real, can think about the nature of representation and its depiction of reality in a more oblique and, hence, contemplative manner (Duganne, 2007:59).

What I find fascinating about arguments like the one above is that the context and historical ideas associated with the terms ‘photojournalism’ and ‘art’ have come to define a specific aesthetic for each of these spaces. For example, images that reveal closeness to the subject and immediacy are associated with photojournalistic integrity and reflecting the process of being a witness as events unfold. The typical photojournalist award winning image is usually shot close to the action and often alludes to movement or being in the moment through cropping and the inclusion of blur. An interesting example of this is Tim Hetherington’s image of a soldier in Afghanistan which won the 2007 World Press Award but has

subsequently been described as ‘painterly’, which suggests a reappraisal of its aesthetics in fine art terms and therefore ascribe it greater value.

In this way, certain visual conventions, approaches and the choice of camera, predispose images to succeeding in different contexts. Duganne’s argument that photojournalists produce work without ‘self-reflexivity or critical detachment’ is simply not true of all photographers working for the media (2007:59). For example, Gideon Mendel’s extensive questioning of his work on HIV, much of which was produced for and appeared in the media, is a case in point and will be discussed in the chapter on his work. The value placed on fine art photography has demanded that it be framed not only as less factually driven and more contemplative and philosophical, but has also deemed some subjects more acceptable than others. It is interesting to observe that one of the few images of Gideon Mendel’s HIV-related work to be exhibited in a commercial fine art gallery in South Africa is an image that alludes to the Pieta (Figure 4.7).

Documentary photography and art

As argued above, the ideas surrounding art have shaped photography that appears in the context of the gallery and art book in particular ways. This section will look at the development of the idea of photography as an art, with specific attention to documentary images. This means that I will not consider important moments in the history of photography where various movements or individuals went to great lengths to frame photography as an art including Pictorialism, Group F/64 and Alfred Stieglitz and the journal *Camera Work*.

Early debates about photography often focused on whether or not photography could be considered an ‘art’ (Wells, 2009:13). The ability of photography to produce what were deemed accurate copies of what was placed in front of the lens was both celebrated and derided. For example, while Baudelaire projected that photography would ultimately replace painting if unchecked, he also argued that the photographic image was too ‘mechanical’ and could not be considered art because it lacked the artist’s imagination and the irrational and spiritual elements of creative process (Baudelaire in Wells, 2009:14). While the debate about photography’s status as art may seem antiquated in today’s terms, within the South African context, it was only fairly recently in the 1990s that photography attained widespread representation in commercial art galleries. What is interesting to note is how documentary

photography has become a dominant approach in the fine art context in South Africa (Garb, 2011).

Art photography is intimately linked to two ideas: the photographer as an artist who expresses a singular and personal world view and the value placed on the individual photographer's imagination or skill as a visual artist. Alan Sekula eloquently sums up these ideas in the following:

All photographic communication seems to take place within the conditions of a kind of binary folklore. That is, there is a 'symbolist' folk-myth and a 'realist' folk-myth. The misleading but popular form of this opposition is 'art photography' vs 'documentary photography'. Every photograph tends, at any given moment of reading in any given context, towards one of these two poles of meaning. The oppositions between these two poles are as follows: photographer as seer vs photographer as witness, photography as expression vs photography as reportage, theories of imagination (and inner truth) vs theories of empirical truth, affective value vs information value, and finally, metaphoric significance vs metonymic significance (Sekula, 1982:108).

One of the earliest examples of a documentary photographer's work being framed as art is the case of Walker Evans. The writing and promotional materials surrounding his 1938 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art helped not only to define Evans's approach to documentary photography but also shape certain long-standing ideas around documentary photography more generally (Stomberg, 2007:37-39). Although the promotion of Evans's work was in essence an aesthetic debate it was linked to certain ethical principles and deemed morally superior because of its 'honesty' and its close relation to the 'truth' (Stomberg, 2007:37). It is fascinating to track how ideas of truth shift depending on the context and take on different meanings in photojournalism compared to the fine art context. Evans's approach to documentary photography was successfully promoted as being authentic and pure and was contrasted with the work of Margaret Bourke-White which was deemed corrupt because of her 'manipulation' of the image through the use of flash and dramatic framing and cropping of the image. The lasting impact of this argument can still be seen in the continued belief that documentary photography should rely on natural light. Furthermore, the presentation of Evans's photographs in the book *Let us now Praise Famous Men* excluded captions and

therefore encouraged a primarily visual experience or reading of the images (Stomberg, 2007:50). David Goldblatt's preference for extended captions at the end of his books, rather than captions alongside each image echoes this sentiment.

Another important moment in the development of documentary photography within the fine art context was the publication of Robert Frank's book *The Americans* in 1959. Frank was supported by a Guggenheim grant and so while he worked in a similar way to the Magnum photographers, he was doing so outside of photojournalism. It is argued that Frank's independence from a magazine or other form of print media enabled him to execute a project entirely of his own making which wholly reflected his photographic vision and interests (Boot, 2004:7). An important aspect of the influence of Frank's project was its publication as a book and this is believed to have influenced a new generation of photographers within Magnum and others more broadly operating within a 'documentary' space by enabling them to expand on the concept of a photo essay into more extensive projects (Boot, 2004:7).

The legacy of Frank's book and his new mode of financing photographic work can be found in contemporary documentary projects worldwide. It is no accident that a host of other photographers who went on to become established names in documentary photography also received Guggenheim grants, including Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander and Gary Winogrand. It is also worth noting how all these photographers also enjoyed considerable success within the art market. Beyond the United States, documentary photographers who want to pursue extensive documentary projects also rely on grants or awards and aspire to publish their work in book and exhibition form. In the South African context the scarcity of comparable grants or funding opportunities has meant that photographers without access to personal financial means tend to do commercial photographic work to pay the bills and fund personally motivated projects.

The elevation of the photographer as 'artist' within the documentary tradition is discussed by a number of writers (Rosler, 1992:308; Clarke, 1997:153; Stomberg, 2007). The idea that a photographer is invested in pursuing a personal vision or philosophy is closely linked to the practice of a number of the photographers discussed in this thesis. While for some photographers this philosophy aligns with the social documentary mandate of bearing 'witness' or performing an advocacy function within the context of the media or NGO world,

others reject outright the idea that photographs can effect social change. And yet even these more sceptical photographers, who tend to work within a fine art space, still regard their work as participating in a dialogue with an audience.

Research approach

I set out to interview all South African photographers who had produced a comprehensive body of work on HIV and AIDS. I excluded those who had in passing completed a single assignment or taken a couple of images on the subject. I focused on those photographers who had given serious thought and consideration to the issue and who had photographed HIV and AIDS in a sustained or committed way and had produced series of images. I interviewed and communicated with the following South African photographers in order to get a sense of their approach and concerns when documenting the issue of HIV and AIDS: David Goldblatt, Pieter Hugo, Dean (Nadine) Hutton, Fanie Jason, Gideon Mendel, Eric Miller, Santu Mofokeng, Oupa Nkosi, David Southwood, Paul Weinberg, Graeme Williams, Sue Williamson and Gisèle Wulfsohn³.

I specifically wanted to interview the photographers because I was interested in what motivated them to engage with this issue. I wanted to better understand their different intentions and how they aimed to achieve them. This kind of information cannot be gained from an analysis of photographs alone. And even when photographers provided text to accompany images, their intentions were not always clear. I had multiple interviews with the photographers, most in person and others using Skype. I also used email correspondence to clarify points and follow-up discussions started in the interviews. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. In some cases I shared early drafts of my analysis with the photographers in order to continue the dialogue. This was a challenging process, both intellectually and personally, and in some instances led to disagreements, which then lead to more discussion and thought on my part. This helped me to gain a much deeper understanding of their work and form my own opinions of their work and ultimately enriched my analysis.

³ All the photographers gave me permission to record the interviews in the full knowledge that I would be using them in this thesis.

Through the interview method I hoped to gain an insight into each photographer's working process. I was interested to learn what other factors influenced their work and under what circumstances the work was produced. I aimed to develop an understanding of how photographers embarked on a commission, the relationships that were necessary to produce the kind of work they did and how they approached the image making process. As the interviews progressed, I became particularly interested in the trajectory of each of the photographers and how their work on HIV and AIDS related to other aspects of their careers. In those photographers who had photographed the issue over a sustained period, notably Gideon Mendel, I was also intent on showing how the work changed over time and responded to the evolution in images addressing HIV and also advancements in treatment for HIV infection.

One of the advantages of the interview approach is that it provided real insight into the thinking behind each project, as well as the different ways of working and external pressures that shaped how photographs were produced and where they were published or seen. This was an integral part of this thesis's contribution to knowledge. However, conducting interviews with the photographers also had its limitations and challenges. There was the danger that my reading of the images and different projects was overly influenced by the photographers' opinions. Bearing this in mind, my intention was to balance the information gained in the interviews with existing literature and my own theoretically informed analysis of the images.

Another danger of the interview method was elevating the photographers as arbiters of meaning. While the interview process intended to gain greater understanding of the ideas and influences on their work, photographic meaning was also shaped by a range of other factors often beyond the control of the photographer. As discussed above, these include the text that accompanies the image, the contexts in which the image is seen and the subjectivity of the viewer (Burgin, 2001; Clarke, 1997). In addition to the interviews I also relied on the additional texts and contexts where the work was published or displayed to inform my analysis of the photographic projects. It was not my intention to be the praise singer of any of the photographers. And yet certain projects or ideas did interest or challenge me more than others. In this regard, I was particularly intrigued by the difficult and complex nature of Santu Mofokeng's work.

Once I had a thorough understanding of the scope and variety of work produced by South African photographers on HIV and AIDS, I decided to focus on four photographers as case studies: David Goldblatt, Santu Mofokeng, Gideon Mendel and Gisèle Wulfsohn. A number of elements informed my choice. Firstly, I wanted to demonstrate a variety of responses. From my original survey it became clear that the photographers were informed by very different political, aesthetic and intellectual concerns. I was keen for the thesis to engage with a range of these concerns and demonstrate different intentions. I was interested in the relationship between the photographers' intentions and the aesthetic of the images produced.

In addition to personal motivating factors, the contexts or markets the images were produced for also shaped the work in important ways, including the choice of subject matter and visual language employed. Depending on whether the images were produced for the media, the NGO sector or a gallery, different kinds of images were produced. I wanted to include at least one example from each of these contexts in the thesis. And yet, while the categories of media, NGO and fine art gallery may help describe a particular market, client or viewer, I soon learnt the same image can move between these contexts and is framed differently in each one. The idea that photographic meaning is constructed was integral to this thesis (Clarke, 1997). I was interested in the elements that informed how meaning was shaped by a range of factors, including the photographer's ideas and working process and the contexts where the images were seen.

One possible criticism of my selection is that it appears to privilege a fine art approach or more generally the idea that the fine art context enables greater creative freedom. I firmly believe all contexts have both constraints and advantages. While many of the photographers I spoke to emphasised that they found those projects where they had greater agency more rewarding, this did not exclude work produced for the media or NGO clients. Of key importance were the relationships with organisations, or individuals within organisations. Depending on the nature of these relationships, the photographers negotiated greater or less autonomy and creative agency. What emerged was a continuum with a strict brief consisting of a shot list found on one extreme, and on the other, complete creative freedom from concept to implementation.

However, based on my original survey of photographs produced by South African photographers, it was also clear that the bulk of HIV-related images have been produced for the media and NGO contexts and certain repetitive patterns can be observed. For instance, the media has tended towards dramatic images of suffering, or else focused on activist responses and clashes between activists and government. Images produced for NGOs have also tended towards photographs of suffering but with the intention of raising awareness and funds. More recently NGO images have reinforced the idea of ‘living positively’⁴.

While there is of course a lot to be learnt from observing these patterns and commenting on the dominance of particular ways of representing the HIV epidemic, these images are in essence stereotypes and an extensive international ‘image bank’ of similar images exists. A broad history and critiques of these kinds of images is addressed in Chapter 3. When looking at these images it is difficult to differentiate one photographer’s work from another because of the similarity of the images. This thesis is concerned with assessing the contribution of specific South African photographers whose work offers alternative and less mainstream responses to the epidemic. I was interested in learning how and why certain photographers produced work that was distinctive - both aesthetically and intellectually. These photographers also tended to have produced extensive bodies of work over a number of years and therefore the volume of work, as well as the diversity and complexity of the projects, was in keeping with the scope of a doctoral study.

This thesis is not a comparative study. Instead it aims to offer the reader four different individuals and their specific approaches to documenting the HIV epidemic. In doing so some comparison is inevitable, but there are also limitations to the success of a comparative approach because of the very different nature of each photographer’s work. In many ways it is not possible to compare the work because of the very different intentions and ideas informing the work. The intention of the thesis is to highlight these differences in approach and context and track how they influence the kinds of images produced. This thesis does not aim to privilege one approach over the other, but rather to demonstrate how four photographers, working in and for different contexts, have produced distinctive work

⁴ With the advent of antiretroviral treatment, there was a move to shift public perceptions of AIDS as a ‘death sentence’. HIV infection was framed as a chronic and manageable illness. The idea of ‘living positively’ emphasises both a rejection of the stigma previously associated with HIV and AIDS and a celebration of a longer and healthier life.

addressing the HIV epidemic. Each photographer engages with, and makes use of, different strategies for representing and photographing their experience of the disease. Not all of the photographers necessarily see their work being ‘about’ HIV and AIDS. Nor did they all set out to photograph an ‘AIDS story’ but the issue entered their work because of personal circumstances, commissions or collaborative projects.

My conversations with the photographers revealed a resistance and unwillingness to be grouped with other photographers who worked for different contexts. Each photographer has worked hard to frame their work in a particular way because of their personal convictions and the context in which they have chosen to publish and display their work. This emphasised the importance of context and how photographers are very particular about how and where their work is shown. Different contexts are not only about different audiences but are also connected to different genres or approaches to photography which are informed by different intellectual or philosophical projects. These different approaches are linked to specific histories as discussed above and often represent particular modes of image making.

In addition to the photographers I also interviewed and spoke to people connected to the projects they worked on in order to get a fuller, and most often non-photographic, understanding of the projects. I often tracked the movement of photographs across different publications. I was interested to see how meaning shifted in these different contexts and how the photographers themselves were involved in this process. This meant that I sought out unpublished work, as well as work in the original format of magazine, newspaper, catalogue or book. In most instances, the unpublished work I refer to was not commissioned and was self-funded and remains in the photographer’s personal archive. For example, Gisèle Wulfsohn had unpublished images in her archive which were taken as part of projects she undertook in a personal capacity because of an interest in the material and in the hopes of selling the images in the future. There were also photographs that appeared in contexts known only to small, usually NGO audiences, which remained unknown to a wider public.

All the photographers included in this thesis earn a living from the sale of their photographs. At different points in their careers the photographers have taken on commissioned work, as well as pursued photographic projects that were self-funded and of personal interest. The photographers I spoke to often produced self-funded work in the interests of expanding their

portfolio or in the hopes that they may in the future be able to sell the images. Photographers who already had a particular area of interest often produced non-commissioned work on similar topics because of existing relationships with media publications, NGOs and other clients who would potentially be interested in the images. In this way, photographers often develop a personal image bank that they can search when requests for particular images arise. This is particularly common for photographers who sell images to NGOs and the media.

Those photographers who have made a success of the fine art market generally tend to have more freedom because their images are not fulfilling a commercial brief. And yet, within the gallery context other constraints are present. For example, commercial art galleries (versus museums or state and institutionally funded venues) rely on the sales of work for their very existence and are therefore influenced by visual trends and what is considered 'sellable'. The higher selling price for art photography, in comparison to images that appear in the media or non-governmental organisation materials, also enable fine art photographers to spend more time researching and working on a body of work.

My discussions with the photographers also highlighted the very different understandings of what photography is and does. For some of the photographers, their images are instrumental in the sense that through documenting social and political events their work is able to inform, and for some bring about change. For others their photography is a much more private or personal investigation and is primarily about their relationship to the world. And yet the very fact that their work is in the public domain is evidence of an intention to reach a wider audience and also earn a living. The different approaches or reasons for taking photographs heavily influences the way the photographers documented HIV and AIDS. My interest lies in how and why the photographers chose to photograph this challenging issue.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 is focused on a broad discussion of photography and its historical relationship to the representation of Africa. This chapter delves into the history of photography on the continent and the different uses and interpretations of colonial photography and its perceived relevance to contemporary documentation of the continent. Two major themes are addressed: the representation of the black subject and the representation of illness and human suffering.

This chapter aims to broaden the historical understanding of photography in Africa in order to acknowledge that images tend to be more complex and ambiguous than expected. This opening chapter provides a historical and theoretical context for the discussion of photographs of the HIV epidemic that follows.

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of the HIV epidemic in South Africa. It includes an overview of the Thabo Mbeki presidency and state-supported AIDS denialism and the rise of AIDS activism. However, this chapter also extends the understanding of the South African experience beyond a focus only on the battle for antiretroviral treatment⁵ and acknowledges the profound ways in which the epidemic has disrupted social and family life. This disorder may have been interpreted by many South Africans in spiritual terms and nourished indigenous beliefs related to witchcraft and the need to restore relationships with the ancestors. This section discusses both faith healers and traditional healers in order to provide an insight into indigenous understandings of illness and misfortune. The chapter concludes with a description of HIV management during the Jacob Zuma presidency.

Chapter 3 provides a history of photographing the HIV epidemic both internationally and locally. Three different contexts are considered in relation to where photographs of the HIV epidemic are published and displayed; the media, NGOs and aid organisations and fine art galleries and attendant publications. While this chapter seeks to situate South African photography of the HIV epidemic in relation to international markets and history, it is mainly focused on local photographers and their projects.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are each devoted to one of the four photographers that I have chosen to focus on; namely Gideon Mendel, Gisèle Wulfsohn, David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng. The intention of these four chapters is to provide an in-depth examination of the issues and challenges in documenting HIV and AIDS in South Africa in relation to each photographer's work. The intention is not to compare the work of the photographers, but rather to provide four examples of very different approaches that have resulted in distinct visual languages and very different ways of representing the epidemic.

⁵ Antiretroviral treatment slows down the replication of the virus and can lead to improved health and increased quality of life, but is not a cure because it does not eliminate HIV from the body.

The conclusion of the thesis reflects on the contribution of South African photographers to the representation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. I discuss both general trends and individual examples in order to provide an overview of the different projects and how they compare or differ from each other and international examples. I also situate South African photography of the HIV epidemic in relation to the developments in photographic technology and the changing markets for images. I am interested in the ways the photographers have negotiated the challenges of photographing HIV and how they use photography as a visual and intellectual tool. My aim is to reveal the different and diverse strategies of representation employed by specific South African photographers.

Chapter 1

Photography and the representation of Africa

It is impossible to discuss photographs of the HIV epidemic in Africa without considering the history of photography on the continent. This chapter engages with specific aspects of photography's relationship to Africa in order to provide a theoretical and philosophical context for the discussion of images in the chapters that follow. By the time South African photographers documented HIV and AIDS, a dense, complex and often uncomfortable visual record of Africa already existed. In addition to the images themselves, numerous ways of reading and framing historical photographs of Africa had been provided by a range of disciplines including art theory, anthropology and historical and media studies. Many of the photographers included in this thesis, especially the younger generation, were aware of the challenges to their representation of HIV and AIDS. Others, particularly those who photographed from the early days of epidemic, changed their approach over time in response to advances in HIV treatment and also the demand for different kinds of images. This awareness informed the particular angles they chose to document, their working methods, the contexts in which their images were published and ultimately the kinds of images they produced.

The history of photography in Africa is often flattened into a simplified account where the camera is framed exclusively as a colonial tool inextricably linked to the appropriation of Africa's wealth. This argument has also been extended to broader ideas about representation and race in the statement that 'From slavery on, white supremacists have recognised that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination' (Hooks, 1992:2). And yet, it is important to acknowledge that photography in Africa was not only tied to systems of colonial control and power and that the images produced were varied, complex and often ambiguous (Godby, 2010; Edwards, 2013; Garb, 2013). Haney suggests that:

Giving these photographs their due requires moving beyond the fiery narratives that perhaps drew us to them initially: African/European photographers; imported technologies/African adaptations; sophisticated photographers/naïve subjects;

colonial/post-colonial subjecthood. Things seem subtler now, more complex (Haney, 2010:9).

Since the arrival of the camera on the continent, photography has played a key role in shaping how the global North has understood the African continent and its people. However, photography not only communicated European ideas about Africans to Europe, but also enabled Africans to participate in this conversation. Up until the late 1980s the bulk of research on photography in Africa had focused on reading images in relation to European imperialism (Haney, 2010:10). The late 1980s and early 1990s saw increased interest in photography in Africa across the disciplines of history, art theory and anthropology (Vokes, 2012:4). The increase in academic research and writing, alongside the display of images by African photographers in the United States in exhibitions such as *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (1991) and *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (1996) not only focused the world's attention on photography in Africa, but also revised the way this history was understood. For instance, Olu Oguibe's re-evaluation of African portrait photographers in West Africa, long believed to be Europeans, was important because it revealed a cosmopolitan, racially mixed and mobile African elite who not only posed for photographs, but were also active in their production (1996:231-234).⁶

Apart from a new understanding of the authorship of some images, research also shifted ideas of photography as purely exploitative of passive subjects with accounts where African leaders willingly posed for European photographers in the knowledge that these images would communicate with audiences abroad. In some instances there was a clear understanding and use of the medium of photography as a way of securing specific privileges and negotiating a more equal relationship with a colonial power (Haney, 2010:74; Garb, 2013:24-26). Africans took control of the photographic medium and used it not only to position themselves in relation to colonial and settler culture, but also refashioned existing African customs to accommodate photography as a medium. For example, there was the adoption of photography in place of sculpture in Yoruba veneration of the dead in two different ceremonial contexts. In the instance of one twin child dying, a photograph was taken of the

⁶ Other classic and more recent texts on African photography have also informed my understanding of the history of photography on the continent (Bull & Denfield, 1970; Geary, 1991, 2003; Bell, Enwezor, Zaya & Oguibe, 1996; Edwards, 1992, 2001, 2013; Sanner, 1998; Saint Léon & Fall, 1999; Enwezor & Achebe, 2001; Graham-Stuart & Stevenson, 2001; Oguibe, 2001; Landau & Kaspin, 2002; Pinney & Peterson, 2003; Pinney, 2011; Garb, 2013)

surviving twin and through a double exposure in the darkroom an image was created of the twins using the negative of the image of the single, remaining twin. Prior to photographs, twin wooden sculptures had been produced. In the second example, a photograph in place of a sculpture was used as a funeral effigy in commemorating the life of a leader or elder (Sprague, 1978; Oguiibe, 1996:239-246). In other instances, photography lent itself to the documentation of existing traditions, such as the portraits taken of young West African women at their coming-of-age ceremonies (Haney, 2010:59). These examples demonstrate a wider understanding of the history of photography in relation to Africa beyond that of the colonial archive.

Even within the colonial archive, different ideas, intentions and values are found. Photographs from the colonial era can be seen as an attempt to ‘manifest two opposing values: freedom and power’ (Monti, 1987:4). In the first instance, colonial images of Africa captured wonder and rapture in what they documented; the grandeur of open spaces, extraordinary wild animals, exotic cultures and the beauty of uninhibited local bodies. These images framed Africa as free from the social constraints and dullness of a Europe transformed forever by the Industrial Revolution (Monti, 1987:16). In contrast to these ideas of freedom, was the desire to control and civilize, which tended to be tied to the accumulation of wealth. The gathering of data for scientific purposes, together with the pursuit of power and profit, produced the most dehumanising images of Africans and established negative stereotypes of the continent that until fairly recently have tended to dominate the understanding of colonial photography in Africa. Prior to the adoption of photography, colonial ideas of Africa were demonstrated in paintings and illustrations and the two mediums often influenced each other (Godby, 2001b).

The argument that photography in Africa was used as a colonial tool draws on specific ethnographic images that were indeed closely connected to ideas that justified European domination over Africa. An integral part of the colonial project was a belief in white supremacy founded on the value ascribed to technological and scientific achievement. These ideas, together with Christian evangelism and support for evolutionism as a model for understanding the natural world, resulted in framing non-European races as less developed than Europeans (Edwards, 1992:6). In this way, the colonial project was portrayed as a civilising mission that benefitted the indigenous inhabitants. This intellectual stance not only

justified colonial rule, but also downplayed its economic ends and assuaged any potential guilt.

The ascendancy of the nineteenth century colonial narrative also obscures the fact that the relationship between Europe and Africa dates back to the fifteenth century with the trade and movement of goods, ideas and people, especially in West African port cities (Haney, 2010:24). In addition to the sea routes opened by the Portuguese, there was also travel across the Sahara desert driven largely by the European demand for gold (Davidson, 1994:42-43; Kirkegaard, 2001:20-26). Throughout this early period, it is alleged that accounts of Africa were largely neutral or positive, but after about 1650 with the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade, European accounts shifted towards more negative stereotypes of the continent and its people (Davidson, 1994:43; Achebe, 1998:103). Perhaps the dominance of nineteenth century history is linked to the photographic documentation of this period, much of which survives to this day. Importantly, images from the colonial period continue to circulate in our contemporary visual world in archives, exhibitions, publications and online, where they often lack textual explanation and are open to various readings which tend towards negative stereotypes.

Another aspect to consider when discussing the colonial archive is that it comprises a number of different European countries and their encounters with different parts of Africa. There were both subtle and marked differences in how France, Britain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium and Germany explored and later ruled their respective colonies. Each culture saw Africa and its people in terms of how their own culture made them see it (Monti, 1987:70). Furthermore, the Europeans taking photographs during this period included explorers, missionaries, doctors, botanists, anthropologists and lastly, photographer entrepreneurs who tried to make a living from selling their images. Each of these social positions brought with it a range of different intentions and introduced a variety of dynamics into the relationship between photographer and subject.

Apart from the circumstances surrounding the photographic encounter, the contexts in which the colonial images were viewed also shaped their meaning. One example is how portraits commissioned by Africans could later appear on postcards as picturesque local types (Haney, 2010:65). In this instance the image might have suggested a variety of different

interpretations ranging from the civilising effects of colonial rule to mockery of what may be perceived as unsophisticated mimicry. In this example the shift from display within an African home to being printed on a postcard intended for a European viewership radically altered the possible reading of the image. This is just one example of the many ways in which the movement of images from one context to another altered their colonial era meaning, and later, contemporary understanding of them.

The history of photography in Africa is more complex than simply an exploitative and negative relationship, and yet this representation dominates contemporary critique of media images of Africa, including photography of the HIV epidemic. Of major concern is the repetition of old ideas about Africa when reporting on new issues which is evidence of the fixity of colonial ways of viewing Africa as 'other' (Bhabha, 2007:370). The rest of the chapter will focus on two topics that are closely connected to contemporary photographs of HIV and AIDS in Africa; the representation of the black subject and the representation of human suffering and illness. I do not aim to provide an exhaustive review of each topic, but rather focus on those arguments that are most relevant to my discussion of South African photography of the HIV epidemic.

1.1 Representation of the black subject

One of the dominant aspects of the representation of the black subject by the colonial photographer is the emphasis on difference in order to use the African as a foil to assert and differentiate 'whiteness' and European culture and identity. Within the separation of the European 'self' with the African 'other' two images emerged, both of which represented the African as primitive, but with very different connotations. The one image was the 'noble savage' where this primitive state was seen as original, pure, unspoilt and free, while the other view enforced an image of inferiority and lack of sophistication (Palmberg, 2001:15). The coexistence of such opposing stereotypes reveals the fragile nature of the European construction of African difference and how it fluctuated between admiration and disgust, love and hate.

Another interesting observation is that 'The concept of exoticism presupposed the will to assert a difference; it arises from dissatisfaction with one's own way of life. It means refusal

of the norm and research into the marginal' (Monti, 1987:12). This unhappiness, or perhaps disillusionment, with European culture may well account for the ambiguity within many colonial images, including anthropological ones. For instance, it is not always clear whether the documentation of an African subject was made with the intention of showing difference in a negative or positive light. Even portraits of types, such as those produced by Gustav Fritsch (Figure 1.1) and Alfred Duggan-Cronin (Figure 1.2), suggest ambiguous and varied motives and emotions that extended beyond colonial arrogance and racism (Dietrich & Bank, 2008; Godby, 2010). The attention to lighting, careful composition, vignetting around the portrait and other formal elements in the framing of the subjects, enable beauty and humanism to emerge.



Figure 1.1 Gustav Fritsch. Sazini, first councillor of Anta, Mbalu, Windvogelberg. Source: Dietrich & Bank, 2008:34. **Figure 1.2** Alfred Duggan-Cronin. A Venda Mother and Child at Sibasa. Source: Godby, 2010:69.

Another consideration when looking at colonial anthropological images is the desire to record cultures that were perceived to be disappearing. Many European photographers were concerned with the preservation of exotic cultures and their ways of life. This is true not only of European encounters with Africa, but also the Americas and the East. It is of course

tragically ironic that the loss of traditional African cultures was a direct result of the colonial project. Given the circumstances of the production of many anthropological images, it is interesting, and perhaps surprising, to discover support for Duggan-Cronin's photographs of 'tribal life' by African leaders, both at the time of their production in the 1930s (Godby, 2010:58) and later with the exhibition of the work in 2007 when Nelson Mandela himself praised the work for its contribution to recording African culture (Godby, 2010:80). Since the 1930s Duggan-Cronin's photographs have been framed in a number of ways as opinions and politics within the country have shifted. This example emphasises how the context in which photographs are shown or exhibited is able to profoundly alter the way audiences view the images.

Despite the coexistence of both positive and negative ideas underpinning the European obsession with the exotic 'other', negative stereotypes have tended to dominate general understandings of colonial photography. It is this focus that is the source of many critiques of European images of Africa; to the extent that any negative view of Africa is often automatically credited to the colonial legacy. One example is the linkage often made between contemporary international media reporting on Africa and colonial images of the continent (Enwezor, 2006:11-19). Another example is Treichler's argument that early images of the HIV epidemic in Africa 'reproduce familiar representations of the Third World and reinforce what we think we already know about AIDS in those regions' (1999:104). Both Enwezor and Treichler make the argument that colonial ways of picturing Africa remain largely intact in the contemporary image world and that new photographs of Africa tend to re-enforce colonial ways of representing the continent. In its crudest form, this argument is weak and often too generally applied as common wisdom. However, it is true of specific images. Perhaps more importantly it reveals the immense sensitivity towards contemporary images of Africa. In the context of this thesis, Gideon Mendel was criticised for his images of Africans dying of AIDS in his series *A Broken Landscape* produced in the 1990s which were seen to reinforce the idea of Africans as victims (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

Other people have argued that the European construction of the African 'other' was the result of an inability to acknowledge the individual identity of people they perceived as foreign. In other words the West has 'long denied the existence of any 'self' but its own' (Mbembe, 2001:2). It is argued that Africa is never considered in its own right, but always in relation to

some other people or place, most often the global North. This results in seeing Africa as an absence or lacking, and ultimately as ‘nothingness’ (Mbembe, 2001:4). These ideas of absence and ‘nothingness’ are similar to those found in early reporting on HIV where in Africa the epidemic was positioned as ‘unknown’ and beyond control while in America it was portrayed as being controlled by science (Treichler, 1999:101). Similarly, Thomas argues that the persistence of the representation of the HIV epidemic in Africa as a natural catastrophe, instead of as a manageable chronic illness, has had a negative impact on local attempts to treat and care for people (2009:358).

Another aspect of the documentation of the African ‘other’ was the focus on physical difference. These images ranged from studies of tattoos, scarification and display of jewellery to portraits of human ‘types’ that were typically photographed frontally, in profile and in three-quarter view. Among the most extreme images were those that posed subjects in front of a grid pattern, which became known as the ‘Lamprey grid’ after its originator, in order to enable what was believed to be the scientific documentation of the exact proportions of different races (Pinney, 2011:28-29). Another system of measurement used in order to standardise the way subjects were photographed was proposed by anthropologist Thomas Huxley (Godby, 1996; Edwards, 2001:137-140) and is demonstrated in Figure 1.3.



Figure 1.3 William Lawrence and David McKenzie Selkirk. 1870-1871. Anthropometric study according to Thomas Huxley’s system of a man known as //Kabbo. Source: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

These deeply dehumanising images documented African people with a focus on the physical body to demonstrate racial difference which aimed to serve as evidence in support of racist ideas about the evolution of different peoples. These kinds of anthropological photographs were very different to other ways of representing the African body that celebrated beauty and form and were linked to ideas of the 'noble savage'. In these images, African physiques were likened to Classical ideals (Godby, 2010:63). Regardless of the intended purpose or the ideological framing of colonial photographs of African bodies, the focus on the physical, and most often naked, body established a particular way of picturing African people.

The emphasis on the physical body is also evident in the photographic documentation of the HIV epidemic in Africa (Thomas, 2009:358). So while it is rare to see naked, or semi-naked, Europeans living with HIV, it is fairly common in the documentation of HIV in Africa. The criticism of these images is often based on what is rightly perceived to be a different way of representing African people living with HIV, compared to the developed world. The focus on the naked, wasted body tends to reduce the individual person to an example of extreme suffering, or even present them as a 'specimen'. This interpretation of such images as dehumanising draws on the historical precedent set by colonial imagery, both anthropological and medical.

This critique could be applied to Pieter Hugo's image (Figure 1.4) which appeared in the 2003 World Health Organisation (WHO) Tuberculosis advocacy report (WHO, 2003:49). And yet an equally harrowing image of a semi-naked Eastern European man also appears in the report (Figure 1.5) (WHO, 2003:75). While it is unlikely that an Eastern European woman would have been photographed bare breasted, it is also equally unlikely that in 2003, an American or Western European would be photographed semi-naked. The acceptability of presenting an African woman and an Eastern European man in this way, which is undeniably shocking and disrespectful of individual privacy, suggests a bias in terms of how illness is photographed in different parts of the world. However, it is also important to situate these images within an advocacy report where the intention is to shock in order to encourage shifts in health policy, the allocation of funds and other initiatives to address the treatment of in this case, Tuberculosis (TB).



Figure 1.4 Pieter Hugo. Tabalire Chitope, 30, at Bottom Hospital, Lilongwe, with her guardian, Eletine Nedi.

Figure 1.5 James Mollison. Polyshchuk is in his forties. Russian Federation. Source: *Tuberculosis Advocacy Report* (WHO, 2003:49&75).

In addition to colonial photographs that documented physical difference, another dominant theme in the colonial representation of the African subject was sexual difference. Once again the duality of two very different perceptions is evident. Some of these images clearly presented the African woman as an object of desire. These images reveal links to Orientalism and the desire for foreign women who were perceived as lacking sexual inhibitions (Gilman, 1985:120). European male lust for these women was framed as ‘a return to primitivism, to an immediacy of passion that Western custom had long since rejected’ (Monti, 1987:73). In contrast to photographs that presented African women as exotically desirable were other images that focused on documenting genitalia and what was perceived as aberrant sexuality. The most famous example of such dehumanising scrutiny was Saartjie Baartman, who became known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’ (Gilman, 1985:112-113).

Colonial photographs that represent African sexuality as deviant, violent and promiscuous are among the most damaging images produced during this period and have contributed to stereotypes that continued to be evoked in reporting on the HIV epidemic in Africa. This will be further discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to images that appeared in the international

media in the 1980s (Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988; Treichler, 1999). However, as recently as 2001, negative stereotypes of African sexuality resurfaced in a *Time* magazine article accompanied by photographs by American photographer James Nachtwey (Nachtwey & McGeary, 2001a).

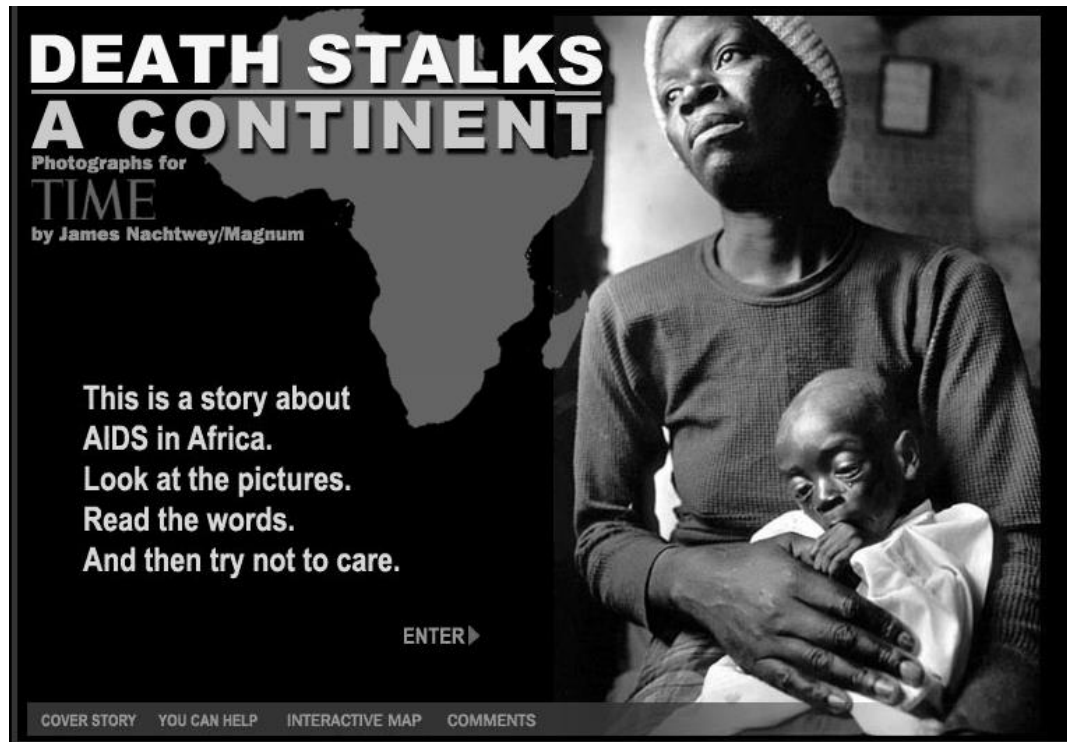


Figure 1.6 James Nachtwey. The title page of the story *Death Stalks a Continent* as it appears online. Source: www.time.com

The story (entitled *Death stalks a continent* in the online version and *Crimes against Humanity* in the print version) reports on the impact of the HIV epidemic in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The images and text present a series of harrowing stories with the focus on individuals who are presented as ‘the prostitute’, ‘the truck driver’ and so on (Nachtwey & McGeary, 2001a). The overt stereotypes evoked by these labels preclude any attempts to present the story in nuanced terms. While the intention of the article is ostensibly to alert the American reader to the suffering caused by the HIV epidemic in the absence of antiretroviral treatment, the images of extreme human suffering together with the text portray Africa as overwhelmed by the epidemic. The stories are biased towards reporting on fear, denial, stigma, ignorance and inevitable death. While the print version includes three small inserts on the formation of a support group, a person living publically with HIV and the re-emergence of virginity testing in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the online version emphasises the

experience of 'A continent in peril' and likens the HIV epidemic to 'The Plague' (Figure 1.7).

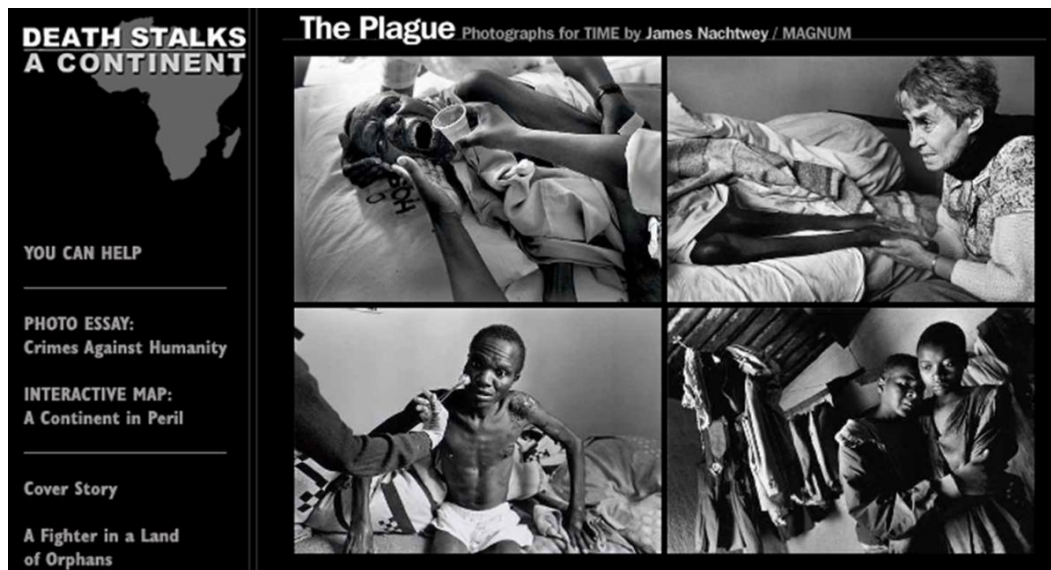


Figure 1.7 James Nachtwey. Four additional photographs as they appeared in the online article. Source: www.time.com

The article implies that African people are passive and ignorant in the face of one of the worst challenges to the continent since independence. Not only is African response to the epidemic seen as different, but so too is African sexuality. It is also suggested that the reason for the high HIV prevalence in the region is due to sexual promiscuity. This is clearly implied in the text:

In fact, casual sex of every kind is commonplace here. Prostitutes are just the ones who admit they do it for cash. Everywhere there's premarital sex, sex as recreation. Obligatory sex and its abusive counterpart, coercive sex. Transactional sex; sex as gift, sugar daddy sex. Extramarital sex, second families, multiple partners. The nature of AIDS is to feast on promiscuity (Nachtwey & McGeary, 2001a:50).

Apart from the absurd implication that other cultures do not experience these kinds of sexual relationships, the singling out of promiscuity as the sole reason for high prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa is also epidemiologically incorrect (Lagarde et al., 2001). The reoccurrence of these negative stereotypes in mainstream international media reporting reveals the extent to which these ideas continue to hold currency. It is useful to consider former South African

President Thabo Mbeki's response to the epidemic in light of the context of this article because it reveals how broadly accepted these views of the HIV epidemic in Africa were at the time of his presidency. The legacy of colonial prejudice, and in particular a sensitivity to the negative representation of African sexuality, was overtly revealed in Mbeki's speech at the inaugural Z.K. Matthews Memorial lecture at Fort Hare University in 2001 when he argued:

Convinced that we are but natural-born, promiscuous carriers of germs, unique in the world, they proclaim that our continent is doomed to an inevitable mortal end because of our unconquerable devotion to the sin of lust (Mbeki, 2001).

Mbeki references not only prejudiced historical views of African sexuality as promiscuous, but also highlights the way sexuality and illness was often intertwined in colonial views of African people. Mbeki's speech confirms how colonial discourses inform not only international opinions of Africa, but also how Africans believe the world views them. In light of the *Time* magazine article, Mbeki's sensitivity may in many ways be justified, but it had tragic consequences when translated into the management of HIV and AIDS in South Africa during his presidency.

Critiques of contemporary photographs which are said to reinforce colonial stereotypes often draw attention to who is behind the camera. In his attack on the way the international media continues to portray Africa, Okwui Enwezor argues that '...the act of photographing Africa has often been bound up with a certain conflict of vision; between how Africans see their world and how others see that world' (Enwezor, 2006:13). This is not the first time Enwezor has raised the question of who represents Africans and what their images mean. In 1997, Enwezor's essay *Reframing the Black subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation* (1997) was the catalyst for a heated debate within the art world about white South African artists and their representation of the black body in their work.

The artists that Enwezor's critique focused on had used colonial type images or tourist photographs of black South Africans which they had altered through collage or painting over. Enwezor's critique and the multiple responses to it were published in a book entitled *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Atkinson &

Breitz, 1999). The thirty-five essays by artists, critics and academics written in response to Enwezor's initial article raised a number of complex issues and revealed a sensitivity in relation to race and representation which was particularly heightened in the years following the end of apartheid. For the purposes of this argument, I want to focus on those points in what became known as the 'Grey Areas' debate, that are pertinent to photographing the HIV epidemic.

Part of Enwezor's objection to the re-use of colonial and tourist photographs was that despite the artists' intentions of subverting the original meaning of the images, in his opinion they simply reinforced the historical hierarchy of the white settler being in control of representation and speaking for the black subject (1997:25). Enwezor also objected to what he believed was a misplaced and undeserved sense of familiarity with black experience by the white artists. Enwezor expands on this point by arguing:

For while the dominant trope and discursive address of the black subject by these artists is predicated on their over determined sense of familiarity of African identity, a sense thoroughly evoked by what Susan Vogel, to her eternal damnation, called "intimate outsiders", the black subject continues to elude the primary task of such discourse (Enwezor, 1997:31).

Enwezor's critique draws attention to some of the challenges in documenting the HIV epidemic in Africa and in particular the potentially problematic space white South African photographers occupy. The 'Grey Areas' debate extended beyond the fine art market and included conversations with photographers Omar Badsha, David Goldblatt, Peter Magubane, Lesley Lawson, Guy Tillim, Paul Weinberg and Herbert Mabusu among others (Oliphant, 1999:157-162). Central to their conversation was the discussion of the potential barriers and value to photographing subjects from different racial, cultural and socio-economic parts of society. The 'Grey Areas' debate followed on from previous public controversies sparked by the work of Kim Gray, Steve Hilton-Barber and Gideon Mendel in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Oliphant, 1999:159-160).

Kim Grey photographed sex workers and Hilton-Barber documented a North Sotho initiation ceremony. Mendel's project *Beloofde Land* looked at Afrikaner nationalism and documented

the commemorative celebrations of the Great Trek. All these projects were severely critiqued for documenting a culture other than the photographer's own, but in all cases there was a profound mismatch between the photographer's intentions and the way the images were received. All the photographers included in this thesis would have been familiar with the 'Grey Areas' debate, as well as the controversies that arose from the work of these three photographers.

While the 'Grey Areas' debate took place in the 1990s, the arguments and sensitivities it raised continue to haunt South African art. This was clearly demonstrated by the outrage caused by Brett Murray's painting *The Spear* in 2012 which depicted President Jacob Zuma, with his genitalia exposed, in the style of a Russian socialist-realist poster of Lenin. The reprinting of the image in the media took the debate out of fine art circles and into a popular public domain and gave rise to a torrent of comments on social media platforms, in the media, statements by the ruling party, the vandalism of the art work and extensive public debate. What is particularly interesting to note is how a number of responses and critiques of the image reminded the reader of other previous injustices where white artists had represented black bodies and sexuality in what was perceived to be a demeaning way (Dana, 2012; O'Toole, 2012b). These examples started with the historical example of Saartjie Baartman and continued with Steve Hilton-Barber in 1990, Kaolin Thompson's sculpture of a black vagina in 1996, and concluded with Zapiro's cartoons including 'Lady Justice' in 2008 (Dana, 2012; O'Toole, 2012b). In this way, it is clear that the sensitivities provoked by white artists representing black bodies, and in particular naked bodies and sexuality, continue to be viscerally experienced in the South African context.

1.2 The representation of illness and suffering

Many of the arguments for and against the production of photographs of human suffering relate directly to critiques of the representation of HIV and AIDS in Africa. This section will address some of the main concerns with the production of images of human suffering and their intention and purpose. Most contemporary debates focus on the problems raised by portraying sick or suffering Africans as 'other' and as passive victims. These critiques are predominantly aimed at images produced for and circulating within the international media. Although there are both subtle and significant differences in images of illness and other forms

of human suffering, these differences are often not evident in photographs, especially in the absence of text or when there is poor reporting. Images of suffering in Africa are often ambiguous and at times it is unclear if one is looking at illness, or suffering caused by famine or war. In this way the images operate as vague symbols of 'African suffering' that refer back to the legacy of colonial modes of representing the continent as an uncivilized place in need of 'saving' (Campbell, 2011).

Colonial images of illness in Africa tended to be produced by doctors and missionaries and served as records of the cases they treated. These medical images presented their patients as specimens or examples of various tropical diseases and in some cases showed 'before and after' images to demonstrate a successful treatment (Ransford, 1983). In pro-colonial discourse, medicine was often held up as an example of how African people benefitted from the colonial project and yet despite this humanitarian rhetoric, it has also been argued that 'The widely publicised fight against tropical diseases went into effect only when epidemics threatened the supply of native labour' (Monti, 1987:26). It is worth noting that the discourse of healing and Christianity continued to be evoked in apartheid era photography documenting the work of the Dutch Reformed Church (Breyer, 1977).

The association of Africa with illness during the colonial era arose from the accounts of the early explorers and missionaries. Many official records and works of fiction set in Africa added an element of heroism with descriptions of colonial triumph over illness (Hammond & Jablow, 1992:56). While many early European explorers died of Malaria and other tropical diseases unknown to Europe, what is often ignored is that Europe was also responsible for bringing disease to Africa (Sontag, 1989:136). The European idea of Africa as diseased contributed to the development of the discourse of Africa as the 'dark continent' and suggested a primordial landscape without order, medicine or science. Moreover, disease, and particularly AIDS, was often linked to stereotypes of African moral disorder and sexual deviance (Sontag, 1989:137-138). The legacy of this colonial discourse was evidenced in Mbeki's speech discussed above.

During the colonial era, images of African suffering were usually repressed or censored because they reflected poorly on the colonial powers. It is also evident that from the first colonial photographic campaigns, there was an awareness of the risk of Africans gaining

access and using the medium of photography to document the true conditions of colonial rule and not a celebratory account or picturesque images of tribal life (Monti, 1987:8). The colonial powers had every reason to be concerned about the use of the camera as a subversive tool. The most searing images of African suffering during the colonial period are those that documented the cruelty and horrors inflicted on the people of present day Democratic Republic of the Congo during King Leopold's rule. These images were mostly produced by missionaries and were instrumental in alerting Europe and Britain to the cruelties of this regime (Haney, 2010:101-102).

Contemporary critiques of images of African suffering are most often focused on the representation of the African subject as different and 'other' which is attributed to the legacy of the colonial archive. It is argued that images of foreign suffering in the media highlight difference rather than a shared humanity (Taylor, 1998:129). Unlike reporting on European suffering, images of people in the global South tend to emphasise the strangeness of the victim which distances them from Northern viewers. Their strangeness may rest on racial or physical difference, or the exotic nature of their culture and dress. In some cases their suffering or illness itself may make them 'other'. A common argument is that the international media reveals a bias in terms of its reporting on human suffering and death and that while it is often normal to see images of human suffering from the global South, similar depictions of Europeans are much less common (Taylor, 1998:129). Sontag makes a similar comment when she writes 'The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying' (2003:63).

With regards to photographs of the HIV epidemic in Africa, the depiction of skeletal bodies reveals an extreme form of human suffering largely foreign to Northern audiences, and outside their realm of experience. These kinds of images echo earlier images of 'AIDS victims' in media reporting on the epidemic in the 1980s that focused on gay men in the United States and Britain. In his attack on images of 'AIDS victims' which depicted people as physically withered and cadaverous, Watney argues 'This is the *spectacle of AIDS* [italics in original], constituted in a regime of massively overdetermined images...' (1987:78). While Watney's critique is concerned with the way these images were intended to identify the 'look' of not only AIDS, but also homosexuality, his unease with the 'overdetermined' nature of the images is also true of photographs of HIV in Africa. The argument that is

usually made is that images of skeletal African bodies also operate as spectacle and emphasise the difference between viewer and subject, and in doing so deny the humanity of the subject (Taylor, 1998:129). This gives rise to damaging and offensive ideas such as the notion that because of the excessive exposure to illness and misfortune, Africans and other non-European people, do not suffer or grieve as Europeans do (Sontag, 1989:137).

While many images of human suffering can serve as spectacle, photographs of the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa in the pre-treatment era were especially prone to this because of the scale of the epidemic in this region and the extreme physical wasting caused by the disease. And yet despite the consensus that many images of human suffering operate as spectacle, Sontag is highly critical of this idea and argues that it denies the reality of very real suffering in the world.

To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breath-taking provincialism. It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment - that mature style of viewing which is a prime acquisition of 'the modern', and a prerequisite for dismantling traditional forms of party-based politics that offer real disagreement and debate. It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world (Sontag, 2003:98).

The horror of spectacular images lies both in the visceral suffering they depict and their dehumanising effect. An observation of the social impact of a cholera epidemic concluded that 'The most terrifying diseases are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanising, literally so' (Sontag, 1989:124). Even though cholera killed fewer people than smallpox it was more feared because of the humiliation of diarrhoea, vomiting and a shrunken body. Other people have made similar observations about the HIV epidemic and have commented on how the experience of the disease often resulted in a breakdown of social and familial support:

The vertiginous disintegration of the body, as manifested in a successive series of afflictions without a cure, drew fear. The failure of bodies to hold, to maintain a modicum of coherence was externalised and mirrored an experience of collapsing sociality (Henderson, 2013:42).

It is argued that images of human suffering often present the subject as a victim. The assumption that victims are passive and without agency is questioned in the course of this thesis. The word 'victim' has developed such strong negative associations that the term 'survivor' is often used in its place, especially with regards to sexual abuse and gender-based violence. While this may appear to be nothing more than politically correct semantics, the point is that even in dire circumstances people can be resilient and courageous. The concern is that showing people as victims strips them of their humanity, whereas showing agency restores this quality. And yet the idea of 'resilience' is itself a sensitive issue with people of colour often depicted as being more resilient than Europeans (Sontag, 1989:137). Photographer Santu Mofokeng raises similar concerns which will be discussed in the chapter on his work.

Media depictions of African people as victims has drawn particularly harsh criticism because it is believed that such reports suggest that the survival of Africa is dependent on Western aid agencies or other forms of intervention from the global North (Taylor, 1998:136; Enwezor, 2006). While the reliance on external assistance may be true in particular cases - for example international support for the provision of antiretroviral therapy - the paternalism inherent in this supposition is highly problematic, especially when paired with beliefs that the suffering of others is the result of their own moral or intellectual failure (Taylor, 1998:136).

The implication that human suffering is the result of inaction, laziness or lack of intellect or will ignores the context or cause of the suffering and instead attributes it to individual failure. When these judgements are centred on suffering in Africa, such as HIV and AIDS, they are also potentially racist. The dominant image of African 'AIDS victims' in early reporting on the HIV epidemic not only confirmed stereotypes, but also ignored less sensational stories about local initiatives that addressed the spread and impact of the disease. A similar concern about portraying people living with HIV as passive victims was raised within the American context where the efforts of those infected with the virus was largely ignored (Grover, 1987:29). While the Ugandan government was a leader in terms of an African state actively taking steps to spread awareness of the epidemic, there were also initiatives by ordinary civilians such as forming support groups and anti-AIDS drama groups among school children (Diop, 2000).

Presenting people as victims is often linked to external judgement where people are either framed as ‘innocent victims’ versus individuals who are seen in some way to be responsible for their situation. In the case of HIV infection, it has been noted how children infected through vertical transmission⁷ and ‘AIDS orphans’ are framed as innocent victims, while sex workers or people perceived as sexually promiscuous are seen to ‘deserve’ HIV infection (Treichler, 1999:77). The moral judgement inherent in these ways of viewing people with HIV is highly problematic and also obstructs efforts to address the epidemic. And yet it is not unique to HIV and AIDS. Societies in the past have often identified illness with evil and used it as a scapegoat and way of apportioning blame on certain individuals or groups, especially the poor and people of colour (Sontag, 1989:113). The stigma associated with HIV infection is largely because of its association with sexual excess, and in the instance of homophobia, ideas of sexual aberration (Sontag, 1989:111).

Another concern about images of AIDS sick individuals is the power imbalance between subject and photographer. It is argued that even in instances where the photographer is following ethical guidelines, such as model release forms, or working with the intention of raising awareness, the subject remains powerless and is often unable to refuse their image being taken and is unable to endorse its circulation in the international media. The subject’s lack of authority or control is the product of their physical illness and language barriers, but may also be linked to the mediating role of an aid organisation. Photographers are often introduced to their subjects through an aid or non-profit organisation. In these instances, in the light of their dependency on the assistance they are receiving from the organisation, the subject’s ability to refuse to be photographed is questionable.

This is not the first time in the history of photography that the issue of the photographer’s relationship to the subject has come under scrutiny. As previously discussed in the introduction to this thesis, documentary photography has been criticised for further oppressing subjects who are already victims of their socio-economic circumstances (Solomon-Godeau, 1995:176). It was also argued that the alleged ‘compassion and outrage’ in documentary practice was nothing more than a fascination with the exotic and amounted to voyeurism and careerism (Rosler, 1992:306). It was suggested that in these images ‘the

⁷ Vertical transmission is when an unborn child is infected by the mother in utero, during child birth or from breast feeding.

oppressed are granted a bogus Subjecthood when such status can be secured only from within, and on their own terms' (Sekula, 1982:109).

More recently with regards to images of human suffering it has been argued that through the publication of these images, the subject endures a 'second suffering' (Bal, 2007:95). And yet many of the photographers included in this thesis show that it is possible to represent human suffering caused by HIV and AIDS in ways that do not immediately make 'victims' of the subjects. I believe that similarly to the 'compassion fatigue' thesis, which will be discussed shortly, the argument that documentary photographs present people as victims has become a rote response and is often applied uncritically when looking at documentary work. From my experience of interviewing a number of photographers, not only were they highly sensitised to these types of accusations but they also actively sought out ways of resisting presenting their subjects as victims.

An additional argument made about images of victims is that they often suspend the greater context that caused the suffering (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997:7). The image becomes a symbol of human suffering and is divorced from the socio-economic and historical context that gave rise to or enabled the subject's misfortune. It has been noted that many photographs of HIV and AIDS in Africa zoom in on the subject's body and exclude the details of their environment (Thomas, 2009:358). While it is not possible to fully explain or capture the possible causes of an individual's suffering in a single image, a photo essay together with in-depth text is often able to give the reader a fuller understanding. Elsewhere it has been argued that images that focus on individuals as icons of human suffering are incapable of presenting the context, regardless of text (Campbell, 2011).

One of the major arguments for the production of images of human suffering is that these images can fulfil an advocacy function (Armstrong, Carpenter & Hojnacki, 2006). One study suggests that media coverage of HIV has had a positive impact on donor assistance (Carmignani, Lordan & Tang, 2012). And yet elsewhere the ability of images appearing in the media to alter the circumstances of those pictured has been questioned (Broomberg & Chanarin, 2008:4). It has also been argued that:

It is as if, in affluent countries, the failure of a credible media can be cause for a sense of guilty relief, allowing for a disconnect from the problems of the world...But once there was a fairly widespread belief that the photographer, publishing in magazines and newspapers, could serve as an eyewitness to alert society to major problems (Richten, 2009:130).

The belief in the instrumentality of the photograph and the ability of an image of human suffering to bring about change is historically linked social documentary photography described in the introduction of this thesis. It is also linked to the journalistic ideals of being a witness and recording the 'truth' which can be traced to the early days of Magnum's founding photographers, also discussed earlier. More recently, David Campbell confirms that 'The dream of photojournalism is that when a crisis is pictured the image will have an effect on its audience leading to action' (2012:2). And yet despite these claims, images of human suffering appearing in the media, and also in NGO materials, are often more likely to be criticised for being voyeuristic and giving rise to what has become known as 'compassion fatigue' (Campbell, 2012).

In his well-researched and compelling analysis of the emergence of the claim of 'compassion fatigue' in relation to images of war, violence and human suffering, Campbell offers a convincing rebuttal to the pervasive use of this term (Campbell, 2012). He reveals the lack of evidence of the claims that photographs of atrocity numb viewers who are then unable to respond (Sontag, 1977; Moeller, 1999). Campbell also shows how Sontag's initial ideas about the ability of photographs to 'anesthetise' and 'deaden conscience' (Sontag, 1977:20-21) have continued to dominate discussion, despite her retraction and questioning of these claims in her later book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Sontag, 2003:93). He effectively shows how

...in the context of media and politics, 'compassion fatigue' has morphed into a catch-all concept that is both cause and effect, reason and consequence, which is somehow designed to explain many of the ills that beset both international reporting and global politics. It is little more than an allegory that serves as an alibi for other issues while preventing their critical investigation (Campbell, 2012:23).

One of the major problems identified by Campbell is that arguments about the instrumentality of photographs, including the ‘compassion fatigue’ thesis, focus on individual reactions to images, rather than collective action (2012:24). This is a major stumbling block in terms of images being able to bring about real change on a political level. This links back to arguments made by Solomon-Godeau (1995) and Rosler (1992) that documentary photography concerned with social suffering operates within, and is thus unable to challenge, larger systems that are often the cause of suffering in the first place.

In addition to the arguments that images of suffering present people as victims and result in ‘compassion fatigue’, another common cause for concern is that photographs of human suffering are at times beautiful. The beauty of these images has given rise to debates about exploitation and the relationship between subject matter and aesthetics. One concern is that if human suffering is beautified it neutralises the distress these kinds of images should evoke (Reinhardt & Edwards, 2007:8). Elsewhere it has been argued that images of suffering are only justified if they serve as political art (Bal, 2007:95). And yet interestingly enough, Bal does not exclude the potential for beauty to carry forward a political point of view when she writes ‘Aestheticisation or stylisation can prettify away any horror, but it can also place it in the foreground in novel ways that do justice to the political content’ (Bal, 2007:108). A similar argument has been made in relation to Gideon Mendel’s images of AIDS sick people (Godby, 2003:18). It has also been noted that in a similar way to ‘compassion fatigue’ the criticism of ‘aestheticisation’ is often a mask or catch-all phrase to critique everything that makes people feel uncomfortable about viewing human suffering (Reinhardt, 2007:22).

1.3 Conclusion

The history of colonial photography in Africa has resulted in a substantial archive of images which cannot be ignored by contemporary photographers. In recent years, this archive has been re-evaluated and shown to be far more complex and variable than simply a record of colonial subjugation and abuse. The nuances and contradictions in many colonial images, as discussed in this chapter, have broadened contemporary knowledge of the kinds of images produced and also the relationship between African subjects and the production of photographs. Despite the emergence of more equitable and humanistic examples of photographs taken during the colonial period, the legacy of some forms of colonial images,

such as ethnographic images of Africans as scientific types, have contributed to negative images of African people which are believed to have set a precedent for reporting on HIV and AIDS in Africa.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the main concern about the legacy of colonial photography of Africa was the re-emergence of negative stereotypes when reporting on the HIV epidemic. It was argued that these stereotypes tended to focus on the perceived physical and sexual difference of African people. This emphasis on difference was particularly prevalent in media reporting and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. The other major critique was connected to the way photographs of illness and human suffering often functioned as pure spectacle and were deeply dehumanising. Additional concerns were linked to 'compassion fatigue' and the beauty of images of suffering. And yet, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow many of these critiques of images of human suffering tend to be repeated indiscriminately and no longer apply to many contemporary projects.

Chapter 2

The HIV epidemic in South Africa

The history of the HIV epidemic in South Africa has been powerfully shaped by two forces; state-supported AIDS denialism⁸ during the Thabo Mbeki presidency and the rise of AIDS activism based on human rights and the provision of antiretroviral treatment. This history profoundly informed the development of a particularly politicised way of understanding the HIV epidemic in South Africa, and also gave rise to specific photographic projects, which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. The scale of the suffering and death caused by HIV infection in South Africa, together with the knowledge that antiretroviral treatment had successfully restored health to HIV-positive people in the global North and prevented vertical transmission of the virus from mother-to-child also encouraged a biomedical way of framing the disease and its treatment.

However, the HIV epidemic was not only experienced as a political battle for the constitutional right to healthcare in the 2000s. It also disrupted social and family life in profound ways which many South Africans may have interpreted as a spiritual crisis. During this period life expectancy dropped from 62 years in 1990 to an estimated 41 years in 2010 (Fassin, 2002:64). In 2003, it was estimated that 600 people were dying a day due to AIDS-related illnesses (Heywood, 2009:34). In rural and urban South African communities alike, predominantly young adults fell ill and died, leaving behind their aging parents and young children. The material and emotional costs of caring for loved ones during prolonged illness, followed by the financial burden of burial and the loss of income from breadwinners, has been devastating. The impact of the epidemic also disrupted familial and communal expectations that the young would look after the old and many elderly observed that it was not right to outlive one's children (Henderson, 2013:60-62).

⁸ I am aware of critiques of calling Mbeki's response as AIDS 'denialism', and while I agree that the issues surrounding Mbeki's heterodox thinking are more complex than simply 'denial' (Schneider & Fassin 2002:S46), for the sake of this argument I will frame Mbeki's position as both 'denialist' and 'dissident' in line with major studies of this period (Cameron, 2005; Natrass, 2007; Kalichman & Natrass, 2009; Fourie & Meyer, 2010; Geffen, 2010; Natrass, 2012).

This crisis in the social order of 'how things should be' was understood by many to indicate spiritual disharmony. While many people interpreted HIV and AIDS in Christian religious terms and saw it as punishment for the corruption of modern society (Caldwell, 1999:245), others interpreted the epidemic in relation to indigenous belief systems and sought to appease the ancestors as a means of restoring harmony between the living and the dead (Liddell, Barrett & Bydowell, 2005; Wreford, 2008b). In this context, traditional healing practices, as well as other faith-based healing practices, may be seen to offer a way of returning to health, both physical and spiritual.

While antiretroviral treatment remains the only successful way of treating HIV infection, by engaging with non-biomedical understandings of the epidemic I aim to widen the discussion of the experiences of the HIV epidemic in the South African context. My intention is to show how the two narratives of biomedicine and indigenous healing strategies run parallel, and while they have at times been seen as opposing each other, many South Africans experience them as part of a medical pluralism and move between them, not always in beneficial ways (Wreford, Hippler & Esser, 2006; Wreford, 2008b; Henderson, 2013). This argument aims to show how for many South Africans, HIV and AIDS have not simply been experienced in terms of accessing antiretroviral treatment, but have also been shaped by larger questions related to spiritual and social order:

Indeed as a reflection of a society's health beliefs and practices, medical systems offer a particularly valuable perspective with respect to a society's collective worldviews. Health beliefs and practices reflect a fundamental understanding of how societies view an individual's and a community's place within the world and how societies interpret an individual's and a community's relation to the natural, supernatural, and social worlds (Baronov, 2008:18).

This thesis is concerned with photographic responses to the HIV epidemic in South Africa. While it is focused on images produced in response to the epidemic, it also aims to encourage a reading of the different photographic projects in relation to a range of experiences of the HIV epidemic. Each photographer has been informed by different cultural, political and social belief systems. This has influenced their understanding of the epidemic and how they responded photographically to it.

The sections that follow will provide an historical overview of AIDS denialism and activism, followed by a discussion of indigenous interpretations of the HIV epidemic and traditional healing practices. I will also look at the problems that arose during the Mbeki presidency with the promotion of the idea of ‘choice’ in relation to treatment for HIV infection and the ways in which traditional healing became enmeshed in the denialist agenda of the Health Minister and President. I will conclude with a brief synopsis of the current management of the HIV epidemic during the Zuma presidency. My intention is to contextualise the photographic projects that will be described in more detail in the chapters that follow.

2.1 The rise of AIDS denialism and AIDS activism

South Africa has the unenviable position of being the country with the highest number of HIV-positive citizens in the world (UNAIDS, 2013a:7). In a space of thirty years, from when the first two HIV infections were diagnosed in 1983, to the current tally of about 6.1 million HIV-positive citizens, South Africa has been shaped by a range of political and social forces (UNAIDS, 2013b:A14). The collapse of the apartheid state and the move towards a democratic society tragically coincided with the rapid spread of the epidemic within the country. Gross social and economic inequalities entrenched by apartheid shaped the ways in which the epidemic took hold in South Africa and continue to inform current experiences of it (Fassin, 2007).

By the time the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) took power in 1994 the HIV epidemic had already established itself in the South African population (Luiz, Roets & Smart, 1995:31). Despite the adoption of a progressive National AIDS Plan in 1994 and the formation of the National AIDS Convention of South Africa (NACOSA), failures in implementation meant that little was done to halt the spread of the disease or provide care for those already infected. This meant that throughout the 1990s the epidemic spread unchecked in South Africa and prevalence peaked in the mid-2000s. In a similar fashion, AIDS deaths rocketed from 1992 onwards and only slowed in the mid-2000s (Figure 2.1). It has been estimated that more than 330 000 South African lives were lost between 2000 and 2005 because of the failure to implement an antiretroviral treatment programme (Chigwedere et al., 2008:410). More recent estimates suggest that more than 3.2 million South Africans died of AIDS between 2001 and 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2011:7).

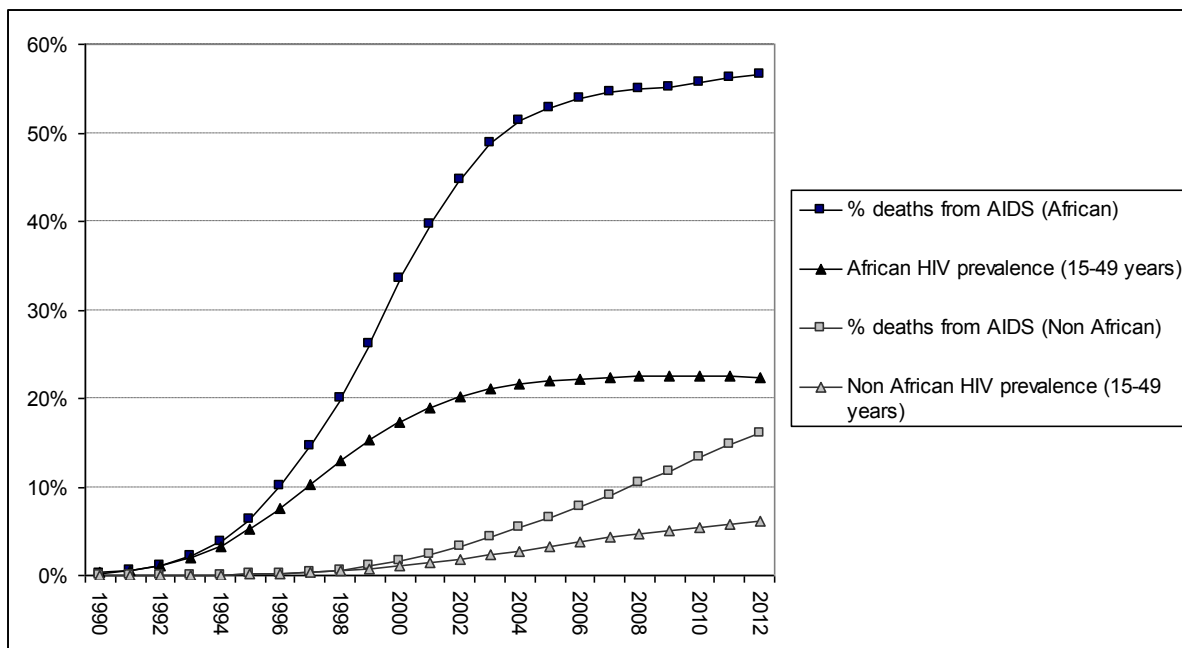


Figure 2.1 HIV Prevalence and Percentage of Deaths caused by AIDS in South Africa (projections using the ASSA2003 model which can be downloaded from: www.assa.org.za). Source: Nattrass (2012: 15).

The 1990s in South Africa also saw a number of HIV-related scandals that highlighted the absence of appropriate leadership on the issue at the time. The first scandal to make news was the improper allocation of European Union funds for the production of the *Sarafina II* AIDS awareness play, which also had a hugely inflated budget. This was followed by government support of research into the drug Virodene which was alleged to have antiviral affects (Cullinan & Thom, 2009:2; Palitza et al., 2010: xii; Geffen, 2010). The research into Virodene was severely flawed from the start since the researchers did not get approval from the Medicines Control Council (MCC) or the University of Pretoria ethics committee (Myburgh, 2009:4). Despite this, the South African government committed millions of rand to research and development of the drug. Virodene was conclusively proven not to cure HIV in 2002 (Myburgh, 2009:14).

The Virodene saga also revealed a high level of political interference in the scientific governance of medicine with Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Health Minister Dlamini-Zuma attempting to dissolve the MCC when it refused to sanction the Virodene study. This would come to characterise the government’s approach to HIV management going forward (Nattrass, 2007:41-45). State meddling with medical governing bodies signalled that HIV was not seen only in terms of a health crisis. It became increasingly evident that unlike other

diseases, there was something unique about the HIV epidemic that presented an ideological challenge to key government figures. This came to be characterised by debates that questioned conventional scientific knowledge about the virus and thus questioned the efficacy of antiretroviral treatment.

Despite the 1990s being dominated by AIDS-related scandals, it is important to acknowledge that the government also adopted other progressive health policies, such as the National AIDS Plan. One of the most important actions, which was later widely reported on, was the amendment of the Medicines and Related Substances Control Act to enable the import and production of generic drugs (Nattrass, 2007:50). The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association (PMA) resisted this move in a case brought against the South African government in 1997, and then again in 2001.⁹

In 1998, a group of leading medical practitioners and scientists called on the South African government to provide the antiretroviral drug AZT (Zidovudine) in order to prevent the transmission of HIV from mother-to-child. A successful clinical trial in Thailand had showed that a short course of AZT resulted in significant reductions in mother-to-child transmission (Coovadia, 2009:62). Despite the success of the Thailand study, and some provinces within South Africa establishing pilot programmes, the government stalled on the provision of AZT to pregnant women. It was in this climate of political uncertainty that the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was founded in December 1998 (Geffen, 2010).

The following year, newly elected president Thabo Mbeki appointed Manto Tshabalala-Msimang as health minister. This marked a major turning point as the government began to adopt an increasingly aggressive stance against the use of antiretroviral treatment. At this point President Mbeki began publically to question whether HIV caused AIDS, and to solicit advice from AIDS dissidents and denialists, including the Perth Group, which insists HIV does not exist, and Peter Duesberg who acknowledges the existence of the virus but argues it does not cause AIDS (Nattrass, 2007: 54-90).

⁹ In the later court case, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) supported the government, and focused on the need to produce generic antiretroviral treatment. The case was settled in favour of the government in April 2001. Media reporting on the settlement as a victory for AIDS activists resulted in the public perception that there was substantial shift in the South African government's position on AIDS treatment when this was not the case (Nattrass, 2007:105).

In November 1999 President Mbeki publically declared that AZT was potentially harmful and therefore could not be provided to pregnant women to prevent the transmission of the virus to their infants (Cherry, 1999:225; Coovadia, 2009). This stance contradicted international studies, the WHO and the South African MCC review that concluded that the benefits far outweighed the risks (Nattrass, 2007:62). While at this point many people saw Mbeki's hesitancy pertaining specifically to AZT, it soon became apparent that his resistance was to antiretroviral therapy as a whole (Nattrass, 2007:63).

The discussion of potentially harmful side effects dominated much of the early debates around the provision of antiretroviral treatment in South Africa. An early and extensive evaluation of antiretroviral treatment did indeed record a number of temporary side effects (skin rash, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea) which tended to cease after a few weeks of treatment (Carr & Cooper, 2000). More serious side effects included lipodystrophy¹⁰, lactic acidosis¹¹, peripheral neuropathy¹² and pancreatitis¹³ (Carr & Cooper, 2000). However, since 2000, significant improvements have been made with the advancement of new drugs and new regimens and the phasing out of treatments that cause side effects (Broder, 2010). Antiretroviral drugs, like the majority of other medicines and treatments, do have side effects but a disproportionate emphasis was placed on them by President Mbeki and the Health Minister. This was especially strange considering that antiretroviral treatment was the only treatment available that had been proven to slow the progression of HIV and save people's lives (Palmisano & Vella, 2011).

In 2000 South Africa hosted the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban and the world was stunned by President Mbeki's speech which emphasised poverty and poor nutrition as the cause of high mortality in the country. While Mbeki was correct in highlighting the negative impact of poverty on the health of many South Africans, his failure to acknowledge AIDS as the leading cause of death in the country revealed a major ideological impasse. In one of the most compelling explanations for Mbeki's questioning of AIDS science, it has been argued that his search for alternative explanations for the high HIV prevalence within

¹⁰ Lipodystrophy is a condition where fat in the body is redistributed. Fat is often lost from areas such as the arms, legs, face and buttocks and redistributed to the belly, breasts and back of neck.

¹¹ Lactic Acidosis is a life-threatening condition where the blood contains too much acid.

¹² The symptoms of peripheral neuropathy include nerve pain which can range from mild discomfort to shooting pains, most commonly in the feet and lower legs.

¹³ Pancreatitis is the inflammation of the pancreas.

sub-Saharan Africa was a reaction to the lingering ghosts of colonial medicine and racist assumptions about African sexuality (Schneider & Fassin, 2002:S49; Mbali, 2004:104; Fassin, 2007:xix). Others have drawn similar conclusions based on close analysis of Mbeki's speeches and public responses during this period and highlight how Mbeki saw the demand for the provision of antiretroviral treatment (which precludes acknowledging the viral cause of AIDS and sexual transmission of HIV) as evidence of 'an offensive racist agenda, rooted in stereotypes about the rapacious and violent sexuality of black men' (Posel, 2005:142).

Mbeki's position on HIV and AIDS and antiretroviral treatment resulted in strengthening the resolve of activists and civil society. Mbeki's stance also allegedly brought the ANC close to internal rupture (Posel, 2005:140). Some have even argued that the government's final capitulation and commitment to providing antiretroviral therapy was informed by the upcoming national elections and the fear that they were losing voter support (Natrass, 2007:119). In February 2003 between 10 000 and 15 000 protesters gathered in front of parliament during Mbeki's State of the Nation address calling on the government to commit to a national AIDS prevention and treatment plan (Natrass, 2007:108). The level of protest escalated the following month following the Minister of Health's failure to endorse the plan. The TAC launched a civil disobedience campaign, reminiscent of the famous anti-apartheid Defiance Campaign of 1952, where TAC members occupied police stations and government buildings to force arrests (Natrass, 2007:114). Cabinet finally made the announcement committing to the universal provision of antiretroviral therapy in November 2003 (Palitza et al., 2010:xiii).

Despite this announcement, the delivery of antiretroviral treatment was stalled by delayed drug procurement, a shortage of healthcare workers and slow accreditation of clinics able to administer treatment (Natrass, 2007:128-130). This meant that in many parts of the country treatment only came available years later and even then there was huge disparity between provinces in access and on-going support for those on treatment. For example, in 2005, only a quarter of South Africans needing antiretroviral treatment were accessing it (Natrass, 2007:5).

In February 2007 Health Minister Tshabalala-Msimang was hospitalised and her deputy, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, together with the Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,

took over the management of the government's HIV policy. Their commitment to addressing the AIDS crisis was evidenced in the launching of the progressive *HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa, 2007-2011* in March 2007 (Palitza et al., 2010:xiv). However, it was only in 2008 when Mbeki lost leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) to Jacob Zuma, and therefore had to step down as president, that significant positive changes were able to take place under the leadership of Aaron Motsoaledi as new Minister of Health.

2.2 Indigenous spirituality and healing in the time of AIDS: African Independent Churches and traditional healers

In the introduction to this chapter I presented the argument that many South Africans may have responded to the profound disruptions of family and social life caused by the HIV epidemic by seeing it in terms of a spiritual crisis. 'Spiritual' in this context refers to African cosmology and in particular the belief that harmony between the ancestors and the living is essential in order to experience good health and prosperity. The aim of this section is to provide an insight into an alternative interpretation of the experience of the HIV epidemic and to demonstrate how many South Africans may have interpreted it as evidence of a rupture in the social and spiritual order. I will focus on two major sources of spiritual authority in black South African communities: the African Independent Churches and traditional healers, such as *sangomas*.¹⁴

While antiretroviral treatment is at present the only successful way of treating HIV infection (Hammer, Squires & Hughes, 1997; Broder, 2010), this section aims to show how and why many South Africans interpret HIV and AIDS not in biomedical terms, but in spiritual terms. This means that while acknowledging the efficacy of biomedicine in treating certain sicknesses, many South Africans may see the symptoms of AIDS-related illnesses as evidence of witchcraft and therefore seek out traditional or faith-based healers in order to counter the bewitchment. In this way we can see how South Africans may make use of both biomedical and traditional forms of treating illness, depending on the nature of the complaint.

¹⁴ The Zulu word '*sangoma*' is widely used to describe traditional medical healers in South Africa. *Sangomas* rely on communication with the ancestors and the spirit world to locate the causes and treatments for illness and other misfortunes.

In her seminal study on Zulu¹⁵ interpretations of health and illness Ngubane explains the differences between diseases that are the result of ‘natural’ or biological causes and those that are believed to be caused by ‘ecological factors’ (Ngubane, 1977:23). She describes how ‘natural illnesses’ are perceived to be common to most people, including people outside of Africa, and therefore African people are happy to choose biomedical or ‘Western’ treatments for these illnesses. Importantly, ‘natural illnesses’ are understood to ‘just happen’ and are not the fault of the person who falls ill and are not the result of malice in the form of witchcraft. However, there is a second class of illness which is interpreted according to Zulu cosmology. These illnesses are referred to as ‘diseases of the African peoples’ because the causation and cure is based on African cultural world views (Ngubane, 1977:24).

Ngubane explains how in Zulu cosmology people are believed to have a relationship to their environment. There are various ways in which the environment can come to pose a danger to the individual and indigenous healers are called on to develop and maintain resistance to these dangers. In order to achieve immunity, ‘balance’ needs to be established between a person and their environment (Ngubane, 1977:26). This ‘balance’ is understood in terms of a ‘moral order’ and relates to a person’s relationship not only with their physical environment, but also other people, the ancestors and other mystical forces (Ngubane, 1977:27). Good health is therefore understood not only in terms of a healthy body, but also as proof of a wider harmonious situation.

Ancestral care and protection is considered a vital component in ensuring that an individual is healthy. If a person neglects certain rituals and offends the ancestors, it is believed that he will experience ill health and other hardships until he acknowledges the short falling and makes amends. If a dutiful person who has no reason to believe he may have offended the ancestors falls ill, he will seek an explanation for the lack of ancestral protection. In these instances, witchcraft is the common explanation for the reason why the ancestors have abandoned the person and therefore made him susceptible to illness and other misfortune (Ngubane, 1977:46).

¹⁵ While I am aware of the many differences between Zulu and other South African cultural groups, the broad interpretation of illness and its causes and cures in Zulu cosmology are not dissimilar to other groups as evidenced in other studies (Wreford, 2008b; Ashforth, 2002; Niehaus, 2007). Ngubane herself notes the shared world view between African cultures that makes it possible for a Zulu healer to operate in a Sotho, Pedi or Shona society (Ngubane, 1977:24).

When considering the interpretation of illness in these terms it is important to acknowledge that these are not ‘traditional’ beliefs in the sense that they belong only to traditionalists or rural and uneducated South Africans. Geschiere makes an important point in relation to the contemporary nature of beliefs in witchcraft and their continued relevance in African cultures:

To many Westerners, it seems self-evident that the belief in witchcraft or sorcery is something ‘traditional’ that will automatically disappear with modernisation. But this stereotype does not fit with actual developments in Africa today. Throughout the continent, discourses on sorcery or witchcraft are intertwined, often in quite surprising ways, with modern changes (Geschiere, 1995:2).

While Geschiere was writing about witchcraft within the context of politics in Cameroon, his observations about ‘the modernity of witchcraft’ and the ways it is grafted onto contemporary challenges is pertinent to the discussion of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. It is important to think of witchcraft in terms of a worldview that interprets illness and other misfortune in particular ways. The person experiencing illness has either been bewitched, or has committed some social taboo and offended the ancestors. In both cases there is an imbalance in the natural order of things which has made the person vulnerable to illness or other hardships. Traditional healers and faith-based healers from the African Independent Churches offer solutions to these problems. Both are able to offer protection from witchcraft and also advise on how to restore harmony with the ancestors.

The African Independent Churches broke away from mainstream churches (Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Protestant) in the 1880s, chiefly because of the limitations on black believers to take on positions of leadership within these churches. The African Independent Churches enjoy significant popularity among the black South African population, especially the Zionist church, which currently has the largest following of any denomination in South Africa (Krakauer & Newbery, 2007:28). Thirty per cent of the South African population consists almost entirely of African ‘Zionist’ and ‘Apostolic’ churches (Anderson, 2013:68). The Zionist movement combines Christian teaching with indigenous customs such as animal sacrifice, divination, prophecy and a belief in the ancestors (Krakauer & Newbery, 2007:28). Healing is often the primary focus of Zionist churches which tend to be led by a prophet

(Cocks & Dold, 2000:1509; Krakauer & Newbery, 2007:28). Others have shown that regardless of membership in Christian Churches, many people also concurrently consult traditional healers and carry out traditional ceremonies and rituals for health and success (du Toit, 1980:21). Niehaus confirms that people seek out both traditional healers and Christian healers especially when they suspect witchcraft as the cause of illness (2007:858).

While the exact numbers of South Africans who seek the help of traditional healers is not agreed upon (Ashforth, 2002; WHO, 2002; Natrass, 2005), it is generally accepted that many South Africans make use of both biomedical and traditional healthcare sectors (Natrass, 2005; Mills, 2005). This is in keeping with early studies that show that many if not most people accept that some illnesses can be cured with biomedicine, while others require traditional healers (Ngubane, 1977). Others have revealed that people move between health strategies and often choose biomedical treatment based on the experience of seeing other people's health improve (Henderson, 2013:105-126). The ways people make use of multiple health-seeking strategies emphasises the need to acknowledge that ontological beliefs surrounding disease powerfully inform how South Africans experience and treat their illness. Wreford describes these concerns as the 'Why me? Why now? Who has sent this? system of causation indispensable to traditional African healing' (2008a:80).

The HIV epidemic has provided an especially fecund environment for interpretations of witchcraft because many of the symptoms of AIDS illness, and the fact that the virus is transmitted via bodily fluids, resonate with signs of bewitchment (Ashforth, 2005; Wreford, 2005; Henderson, 2013). Others have argued that witchcraft is at times used to attribute blame to a cause rather than having to accept a diagnosis of a highly stigmatised disease (Mills, 2005; Wreford, 2008b). Elsewhere Wreford argues that the acceptance of being bewitched and then taking action by going to consult a traditional healer gives the individual personal agency (2009:18). Niehaus goes even further and argues:

Witchcraft was less stigmatising, perceived as more amenable to cure by healers who do not operate in dreaded hospitals, and also more tolerable to the self. Moreover, accepting an HIV-positive diagnosis would imply that certain individuals might have infected their sexual partners with an incurable illness (Niehaus, 2009:57).

Ashforth (2002) describes how in Soweto there are essentially two understandings of AIDS illnesses; the one is considered to be caused by *isidliso* or witchcraft, while the other is caused by HIV infection. Once again this resonates with Ngubane's description of 'natural' diseases and diseases connected to African cosmology (1977:23). And yet this dichotomy is also blurred because AIDS could be sent by someone and is therefore the result of witchcraft (Ashforth, 2002:121). In a different study in the region of Bushbuckridge people believe that witches are unable to infect people with HIV, but they can send illnesses that mimick the symptoms of AIDS-related illnesses (Niehaus, 2009:37).

A number of studies have confirmed how ideas connected to witchcraft, religious faith and maintaining social harmony by honouring the ancestors have framed the experience of the epidemic (Ashforth, 2002; Niehaus, 2007; McNeill, 2009; Henderson, 2013). These studies have shown how beliefs have shaped decisions on how to treat AIDS-related illnesses. In some instances a mixture of biomedical treatment and indigenous beliefs fused in unexpected ways. For example, one account reveals how a man took antiretroviral treatment because he believed in the power of the word of the medical doctor who said he would die if he failed to do so (Niehaus, 2009:45). The same man did not believe he was infected with HIV, but that he had been bewitched which gave rise to symptoms that mimicked AIDS-related illnesses and his return to health was on account of a Zionist prophet and his adherence to the prophet's recommendations (Niehaus, 2009:46).

However the majority of accounts of this nature reveal how the different ways of understanding HIV and AIDS mostly resulted in death because the ill person or their family understood the cause of the illness to be witchcraft and therefore avoided biomedical treatment. The tragic consequences of dying of a treatable illness are cause for concern and understandably have given rise to a desire to promote biomedical knowledge of HIV and AIDS (Nattrass, 2007; Geffen, 2010). The TAC's HIV literacy campaign was clearly framed within this emancipatory project where it was argued that it was essential for ordinary South Africans to understand the science of HIV and AIDS in order to protect themselves from the virus and also access and adhere to antiretroviral treatment and therefore avoid dying (Geffen, 2010). It was also argued that it was patronising to assume that Africans could not understand or learn the science of HIV and therefore understand the implications for both prevention and treatment (Geffen, 2010).

While it is important for all South Africans to understand the biomedical nature of HIV in order to save lives, it is nevertheless the case that ‘education’ is not a simple solution. Biomedical explanations of HIV and AIDS have failed to reach many South Africans because indigenous beliefs have not been adequately considered:

Very few studies in relation to HIV and AIDS have paid attention to the ways in which the illness is folded into already existing social and cultural repertoires...The importance of doing so helps to write against the grain of many studies where people living outside of the dominant frames of discourse are characterised by a lack of qualities and possibilities, by passive ‘emptiness’ or forms of abjection in need of outside intervention, where vulnerabilities are both externally defined and pathologized (Henderson, 2013:184-185).

Henderson reminds us of the damaging ways in which many studies have framed people who do not conform to the dominant, biomedical understanding of HIV and AIDS as lacking and passive. The harm here is not in bringing biomedical interventions into these communities, which is essential in addressing the HIV epidemic and offering appropriate healthcare, but the failure to acknowledge their existing ways of understanding illness. A greater sensitivity towards and respect for indigenous worldviews is necessary. This discussion has aimed to assert a more complex understanding of the impact of the HIV epidemic on the lives of ordinary South Africans that extends beyond the fight for healthcare and antiretroviral treatment. Importantly, it also resists branding people who seek traditional or faith-based healing as ignorant and seeks to encourage a more nuanced and respectful understanding of these healing approaches as an integral part of people’s worldview.

2.3 The problem of ‘choice’ and its impact on perception of traditional healing practices

Even after the South African government undertook to provide antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare sector in late 2003, President Mbeki and especially the Health Minister continued to create confusion as to the acceptability and efficacy of antiretroviral treatment. It was during this period that the discourse of ‘choice’ arose in relation to how to treat HIV infection. Health Minister Tshabalala-Msimang actively promoted ‘alternative’ treatments

for HIV and AIDS including diet and nutritional supplements such as garlic, beetroot and African potato. It was no coincidence that the African potato was singled out as having potential curative effects (despite the fact that it has been shown to be harmful to those with HIV) as it is commonly used by traditional healers. In fact some healers expressed disappointment with the government for not acknowledging its link to traditional healing knowledge (Mills, 2005:152). Tshabalala-Msimang's support also extended to other untested (and almost certainly ineffective if not harmful) products promoted by Tine van der Maas, Matthias Rath and Zeblon Gwala, all of whom were subsequently shown to be profiteering entrepreneurs (Nattrass, 2007; Geffen, 2010).

The support for these 'alternative' treatments was cleverly (and incorrectly) framed in terms of wider discourse around traditional healing practices. Tshabalala-Msimang promoted the idea of 'natural' remedies versus 'chemical' antiretroviral drugs which were likened to 'poison' (Nattrass, 2007:143&164). In this way, antiretroviral treatment and biomedical approaches to treating HIV and AIDS were framed in opposition to traditional medicine and indigenous beliefs widely held by many South Africans. In a political climate that promoted ideas of an African Renaissance and finding 'African solutions to African problems' antiretroviral treatment was treated as yet another instance of the West foisting Western ideas on Africa.

Some healers were attracted by the Health Minister's promotion of 'traditional' healing and were drawn into a loose allegiance with her (Wreford, 2008a:77). This extended to some traditional healers supporting the use of untested health products promoted by the Rath Health Foundation. This support also included some traditional healers opposing a court application made by the TAC to end the Rath Foundation's claims that the TAC was a front for pharmaceutical companies (Nattrass, 2007:150). It is unclear if the traditional healers were cognisant of the damaging effects of being involved in the government's campaign for 'alternative' treatments (Wreford, 2005b:67).

In 2006 Mbeki established the Presidential Project on African Traditional Medicine which was to test the efficacy of herbal treatments administered by traditional healers (Nattrass, 2007:180). This project was couched in terms of establishing an African response to the epidemic. The leadership of the project was assigned to two highly problematic individuals:

Herbert Vilakazi (who had promoted the untested AIDS cure Ubhejani) and Christine Qunta (a known AIDS denialist). Far from being an objective study, the project was clearly aligned with an AIDS denialist stance. In this way the government collapsed dissident views with traditional healing practices and promoted both under the banner of an Africanist approach to addressing the epidemic. Traditional healing was recruited as an ally in the fierce struggle for asserting the legitimacy of denialist beliefs because it resonated with many South Africans' belief systems.

On the other end of the spectrum, the TAC, while actively campaigning for access to antiretroviral treatment, recognised the importance of engaging with traditional healers given the respect and support they enjoyed in the communities where TAC worked (Nattrass, 2007:181). One of the TAC's approaches was the running of educative workshops with traditional healers that promoted biomedical understandings of the disease (Gonyela, 2005). Some have been critical of these kinds of trainings where traditional healers are 'taught' biomedicine because of the one-way nature of this exchange which does not acknowledge that the healers themselves have something to offer (Wreford, 2008a). However the workshops clearly showed that the TAC acknowledged the role of traditional healers in communities where they worked, and that many people move between traditional and biomedical healing paradigms.

2.4 Recent management of HIV and AIDS (2009 to the present)

Despite the welcome end to state-supported AIDS denialism, the Zuma presidency has not been without its own share of controversy in relation to HIV and AIDS management. The start of Zuma's presidency was over-shadowed by both a corruption case dating from 2005 and the alleged rape of an HIV-positive woman in the same year. Even though Zuma was acquitted of rape, his conduct and that of his supporters, raised concerns for gender activists. For example, during the trial it was argued that the sex was consensual because of the complainant's choice of dress (Waetjen & Maré, 2009:76). Zuma also defended his actions claiming that he had acted in accordance with Zulu culture where a man cannot leave a woman sexually aroused (Waetjen & Maré, 2009:73-4). But it was Zuma's claim that he had showered to protect himself from HIV infection that drew the harshest criticism. Zuma's statement exhibited a complete lack of knowledge of HIV transmission and was perceived to

be extremely damaging to public understanding of prevention messages. This was particularly troubling considering that Zuma was head of the South African National AIDS Council.

Unfortunately, Zuma's conduct during the rape trial set a precedent where his personal life, rather than his government's policy making on HIV and AIDS, has tended to dominate public reporting during his presidency. Zuma has had six wives, four of whom he remains married to. He is also currently engaged to a fifth woman and is father to a number of children born out of wedlock. In January 2010, Zuma's personal life came under the media spotlight again with the news that he had fathered his twentieth child with the daughter of prominent businessman and soccer boss Irvin Khoza. In the midst of the media frenzy, Zuma defended polygamy at the World Economic Forum by arguing:

People interpret cultures in different ways. Some think that their culture is superior to others, that's a problem we have in the world...That's my culture. It does not take anything away from me, from my political beliefs and everything, including the belief in the equality of women (Berger, 2010).

Zuma's remark echoes Mbeki's sensitivity to colonial stereotypes of African sexuality as promiscuous and aberrant. Zuma's comment also potentially suggests that HIV prevention messages which promote monogamy, or partner reduction, are hostile to African cultures. While it is unreasonable, and in this instance irresponsible, to cast cultures as static and unable to adapt to new ways of behaving, the promotion of a single 'correct' mode of behaviour does recall an all too familiar history of colonial prejudice and prescribing how Africans should behave.

Despite the personal scandals that have plagued Zuma's presidency, a number of positive HIV policy changes have occurred during his tenure. Apart from openly acknowledging the challenges the country faces in addressing the HIV epidemic, Zuma's government has expanded the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare sector with the implementation of new guidelines which demand the earlier initiation of treatment for infants, tuberculosis patients and HIV-positive pregnant women (Smith, 2009). In April 2010 a nationwide HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) campaign was launched with high

profile government leaders publically being tested for HIV in order to promote testing and confront stigma associated with the disease.

In order to extend the reach of HCT services, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi developed partnerships with several businesses and NGOs. The campaign aimed to make HIV counselling and testing available in all government hospitals and clinics, all universities and Further Education and Training (FET) campuses and also through mobile units in rural areas (Department of Health, 2010). An important aspect of the new campaign was the introduction of provider-initiated counselling and testing where all people accessing public health care would routinely be offered HCT and TB screening (Pillay, White & McCormick, 2012). Furthermore, in an effort to expand service delivery the Department of Health also introduced nurse initiated and managed antiretroviral treatment, instead of restricting this task to doctors.

In 2011 the Minister of Health announced that all HIV-positive patients with a CD4 count of less than 350 would be eligible for antiretroviral therapy which meant that South Africa fully complied with WHO guidelines (Pillay, White & McCormick, 2012). While implementation and service delivery in more remote parts of the country remain a challenge, the last few years have seen a marked improvement in HIV management. From mid-2004 to mid-2011, the total number of patients receiving antiretroviral therapy in South Africa increased from 47 500 to 1.79 million (Johnson, 2012:23). In 2012, it was estimated that this figure was 2 010 340 (UNAIDS, 2013b:A84).

In April 2013 the Department of Health started to provide fixed-dose combination (FDC) antiretroviral treatment across the country (Department of Health, 2013). FDC antiretroviral treatment combines between three and five separate pills into a single pill taken once a day. This is an important step in reducing the risks of patients defaulting on treatment because of the pill burden and is expected to improve the quality of life of individuals on treatment. The new treatment guidelines recommends that all new antiretroviral patients will be started on FDC, as well as pregnant HIV-positive women and HIV-positive women who are breastfeeding (Department of Health, 2013:7-12). It is also recommended that individuals currently on a multi-pill regimen should be transferred onto FDC over time, especially if they have other conditions or infections (Department of Health, 2013:4).

In June 2013 the latest WHO guidelines were released which recommend the initiation of antiretroviral treatment to people with a CD4 count of 500 or less. Priority will still be given to people with advanced HIV disease and those with a CD4 count of 350 or below. It is recommended that antiretroviral treatment be initiated regardless of CD4 count in individuals with TB, hepatitis B virus, chronic liver disease, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and children younger than five years of age (WHO, 2013:26). A significant new guideline is the decision to offer antiretroviral treatment to people who have HIV-negative partners (WHO, 2013:26). This guideline is significant because it is the first time antiretroviral treatment has been recommended for prevention purposes in serodiscordant couples¹⁶ in South Africa and signals a shift in the use of antiretroviral drugs. It also suggests that with the new advancements in treatment, the advantages to taking antiretroviral treatment are now considered to outweigh the disadvantages.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the history of the political and social history of the HIV epidemic in South Africa. It has included a look at the impact of state-supported AIDS denialism and the rise of AIDS activism, both of which influenced the kinds of photographs produced by South African photographers during the 2000s which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. This chapter has also considered a broader understanding of HIV and AIDS in terms of indigenous and faith-based healing. South African photography reflects many of the shifts in the political and medical history of the epidemic described in this chapter, as well as the spiritual challenges posed by HIV infection.

¹⁶ Serodiscordant means that one partner is HIV-positive and the other is HIV-negative.

Chapter 3

A brief history of photographing the HIV epidemic

Two major periods define the photographic representation of the HIV epidemic globally. There are images produced prior to the development of antiretroviral therapy, and then there are photographs taken after this point. However within this neat division, a much more complex story emerges because of the ‘treatment divide’ between the global North and South. By the 1990s the first experimental antiretroviral treatments became available in North America and Western Europe. In 1996 triple therapy became the standard medical approach to treating HIV infection in the global North. In contrast, in Africa, antiretroviral treatment was only available to those who were wealthy enough to access it privately, and unlike the North where numbers were low and patients could be accommodated in specialised hospital wards, in Africa the number of people testing HIV-positive was high and many hospitals lacked basic care such as drugs for adequate pain relief.

In the 1990s and early 2000s the disparity in access to treatment translated into a situation where images emerging from the global North increasingly showed people managing a chronic illness, while in Africa photographers tended to document human suffering and death on a horrific scale. More positive images of people living with HIV in Africa started to emerge in the mid to late 2000s. Another contributing factor was the relative absence of international reporting on HIV and AIDS in Africa in the 1990s after the initial flurry of coverage in the late 1980s (Moeller, 2000:89). It has been argued that this was a result of improvements in antiretroviral therapy coupled with the realisation that the United States was not going to experience a heterosexual epidemic on the same scale as Africa. Renewed coverage of the epidemic in Africa only emerged during and after the International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000 (Moeller, 2000:89).

Another factor to consider when discussing the history of photographing the HIV epidemic is the considerable stigma associated with the disease, especially in the early days of the epidemic. Photography, especially early media reporting, has arguably contributed to this stigma by showing wasted bodies which have emphasised the idea that HIV infection resulted

in death. A study in South Africa has confirmed that the association with death, rather than immorality, has fuelled HIV stigma (Niehaus, 2007). In America and Britain, early photographs of people with AIDS in the 1980s were critiqued for promoting the association of AIDS with homosexuality and encouraging moral judgement in viewers by suggesting that AIDS was a form of punishment for what was perceived as immoral sexuality (Watney, 1987). The prevalence of HIV stigma in the South African context was highlighted by many of the photographers included in this thesis who described the challenge of finding subjects willing to be photographed because of HIV stigma and fear of discrimination.

The sections that follow focus on three contexts in which photographs of the HIV epidemic are most commonly published; the media, NGOs and aid organisations, and fine art exhibitions and publications. While I have separated them in order to probe the particular history of images of HIV and AIDS in each of these spaces of publication and display, it is important to emphasise that photographs move between these different contexts and photographers often produce work simultaneously for different contexts or clients, even when on the same assignment or documenting the same issue. Photographers are aware of the constraints and the advantages of each of these settings, as well as the criticism their work could attract by virtue of such affiliations. As will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, photographers make strategic use of these different platforms in order to reach different publics and shape the way their work is received. These different contexts also enable and encourage different kinds of visual languages.

3.1 Media coverage of HIV and AIDS in Africa

The media has played a critical role in terms of how the HIV epidemic in Africa has been reported in the West (Brodie et al, 2004). This coverage by the international media has not only contributed to how HIV and AIDS in Africa are understood by the global North, but has also shaped the way Africans believe the rest of the world views them. Most of the early images of the epidemic appeared within the international media. These early photographs, regardless of whether or not they captured the epidemic in the United States, Britain or Africa, portrayed emaciated ‘AIDS victims’ and ‘disease carriers’ which created a lasting impression on the public (Watney, 1991:173; Lupton, 1994:10). The media dominated the production of images of the epidemic in the 1980s. In contrast many of the images produced

in other contexts, principally by activists and visual artists, were designed to resist the negative and prejudiced images that appeared in the early coverage of the epidemic (Grover, 1994:219).

While the bulk of critical responses to the representation of HIV in the media have focused on international reporting on Africa, the South African media also played an important role in framing how the epidemic was seen locally. In this section I will first discuss the kinds of images produced by the international media, followed by those published in the South African media. I will not provide an exhaustive review, but will draw on the main trends and critiques in order to sketch a broad history. The photographers discussed in this thesis have both observed and contributed to this history and so it informs the work they produce.

3.1.1 International media¹⁷ reporting on the HIV epidemic in Africa

The first images of HIV and AIDS in Africa in the 1980s were generated largely by foreign reporters and these images appeared in newspapers and other media in the West. Although it has been argued that the HIV epidemic in Africa was represented differently to how it was in other parts of the world (Treichler, 1999:105), early images universally presented people as ‘AIDS victims’ with portraits of people suffering (Campbell, 2008: 31). This was largely because of prejudice and the lack of antiretroviral treatment which meant that HIV infection resulted in terminal illness (Grover, 1994:219). In news photographs of the African experience of the epidemic, images of the sick and dying tended to show them alone, deserted by both family and medical help. Other common scenes focused on failing healthcare systems and sex workers (Treichler, 1999:105). A number of critiques argued that there was inherent racism in the representation of HIV and AIDS in Africa in the international media in the first two decades of the epidemic (Hammonds, 1987; Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988; Austin, 1990; Treichler, 1999).

It has also been noted that in the 1980s when the international media first reported on AIDS in Africa, many of the stories were primarily concerned with how the African experience of the epidemic revealed the future horrors that would be experienced in the West in the

¹⁷ In this thesis I use the terms ‘Western media’ and ‘international media’ interchangeably. Both these terms carry various associations, but in this thesis they are used to describe print and online news media produced primarily by and for North America, Britain and Western Europe.

heterosexual population (Treichler, 1999:120). The main criticism of early images of AIDS in Africa that appeared in the Western media was that the images evoked and drew on existing stereotypes from the colonial past (Treichler, 1999:106). A critique written in the late 1980s on reporting in the American press confirms the persistence of sexual stereotypes about Africa such as violent African sexuality, widespread female genital mutilation, promiscuity and prostitution (Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988:17-18). Apart from the prejudice evident in these stereotypes, the media reports also failed to pay attention to details including the differences in regional practices and used data from one city or area to speak for the continent as a whole (Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988:17).

This sloppy misuse of data and the complete disregard for seeking out accurate, specific information, resulted in vague reports appearing to represent the entire continent, whereas the epidemic has effected different parts of the continent in very different ways in terms of prevalence figures and also local responses to it (UNAIDS, 2012a). This generalised reporting on the epidemic in Africa also extended to the kinds of images that were produced. And yet the HIV epidemic is not the only issue to be represented in the media in generalised terms. It has been argued that since Africa no longer relates to the global North as a colonial or Cold War story, it is reduced to journalistic stereotypes because of the lack of in-depth reporting on the region (Franks, 2010:72).

The dominance of images that showed Africans as victims without agency or social context, not only functioned to affirm colonial views of the continent but also ensured that life in the global North was presented as superior and safer (Bleiker & Kay, 2007:151). It has also been argued that the Western representation of 'African AIDS' as alien and incomprehensible was motivated by a need to justify intervention and assert control over of the epidemic (Treichler, 1999:101). The projection of the West being in control of the epidemic positioned it as superior and emulated colonial era power structures where Africa was in need of 'saving'.

The representation of HIV and AIDS in Africa had a precursor in the United States with the way in which Haitians and other people of colour were positioned as 'other'. Sontag similarly noted the emergence of racist stereotypes in response to the African origins of the disease and the rise of anti-African prejudices (Sontag, 1989:137-8). The bias around reporting on HIV and AIDS resulted in some African governments, such as Kenya and

present day Democratic Republic of Congo, taking steps to repress the publication of articles on AIDS in Africa (Shilts, 1987:459; Knight, 2008:10). Two African academics also fought back and produced a book that argued that the thesis that AIDS originated in Africa was unfounded and purely a racist attack on the African continent and its people (Chirimuuta & Chirimuuta, 1989).

Despite the compelling argument that reporting on the HIV epidemic in Africa is a continuation of the legacy of colonial rule, it is useful to take a step back and assess the ways in which the international media operates more generally and the role played by photography in the media. While some may promote the call for balanced reporting of Africa's social issues (Made, 1999:44-45), others argue the bottom line for the media is to entertain and sell (Seale, 2002:64-65). Lupton suggests that:

...the ideologies supporting the status quo are generally reproduced in the mass media because the powerful own the media and their opinions receive privileged attention in the media (Lupton, 1994:28).

The importance of the market value of images that appear in the media cannot be underestimated, especially when considering coverage of the HIV epidemic. As argued above, the drop in coverage of HIV in Africa in the 1990s in the international media has been attributed to the West no longer seeing the African epidemic as having a direct bearing on the experience of HIV in the West and it therefore lost its value as a news item (Moeller, 2000:89). In the past, the often haphazard and shallow reporting on HIV and AIDS has been defended by the media who claim that the public are tired of the issue (Treichler, 1999:139).

This example demonstrates support of the 'compassion fatigue' thesis described in detail in Chapter 1 (Campbell, 2012). While Campbell demonstrates that a number of studies have shown that despite being exposed to a large number of images, people do not lose their ability to be moved by photographs of human suffering, in the 1990s photographers were struggling to get their images of AIDS published (Pledge & Friend, 2001). Despite the resistance to publishing stories on HIV and AIDS after it first burst on the scene in the 1980s, a small number of photographers, including Gideon Mendel, James Nachtwey and Don McCullin,

were successful in keeping the issue of the epidemic in Africa alive in the news in the global North in the 1990s and 2000s.

Apart from the mainstream media, alternative magazines are another space that has also published photographs connected to HIV and AIDS. For example, since 1994 *Colors* magazine¹⁸ has almost continually addressed the issue with the inclusion of articles and images that raise awareness about prevention and also describe the impact of the disease in different parts of the world. Two complete issues were dedicated to the topic in 1994 and 2006 and the latter issue included the work of South African photographers. The front cover of the 2006 edition is one of the images from Hugo's *Bereaved* series which will be discussed later in this chapter (Figure 3.19). Pieter Hugo and David Southwood have both had photographs related to HIV published in *Colors* magazine. Southwood produced an extended photo essay on the impact of HIV on Swaziland for the issue entitled *The Road* published in 2002 (Figure 3.1). The article accompanying the images discussed the spread of HIV along trucking routes in Swaziland.

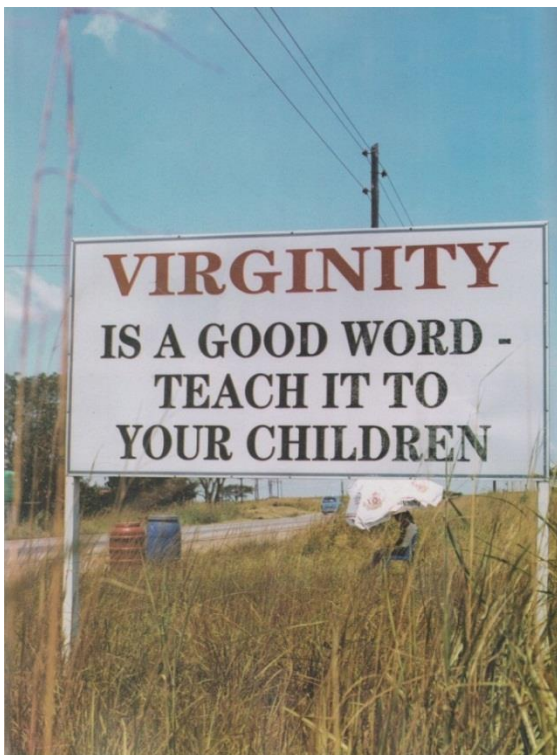


Figure 3.1 David Southwood. Source: *Colors* magazine. Issue 51.

¹⁸ *Colors* magazine is the brainchild of photographer Oliviero Toscani and art director Tibor Kalman. The duo are famous for their often controversial advertising for the clothing label Benetton. The magazine was launched in 1991 and is largely concerned with reporting on social issues around the world.

It is commonly argued that Western photographers have broader access to distribution systems, such as wire services, and reach a larger audience because of their relationship with the Western media (Matshikiza, 1999:36; Bardhan, 2001:293; Enwezor, 2006:14). This has resulted in a situation where Western media images dominate reporting on Africa and therefore are largely responsible for shaping international opinions. In the light of this powerful position held by Western photographers, it is worth considering what stories are selected and what kinds of images are produced. A story emerging from a country in the global South tends to be assessed on its newsworthiness based on economic and historical ties with a country in the global North (Greenwood & Smith, 2007:83). Media organisations often select news based on what their audience has previously been exposed to and therefore reinforce particular preconceptions (McQuail, 2002:231).

Furthermore, news coverage of the global South tends to focus on extreme events and typically scenes of disaster, such as earthquakes, famine, war and disease. And yet the futility of looking at images of human suffering is compellingly critiqued in the following way by two of the judges of the World Press Awards in 2008:

We have found images that are constructed to evoke compassion or concern, pathos or sympathy – often the measure of a successful image – increasingly problematic. The act of looking becomes cathartic, a celebration of the sublime, but nothing else. It is a passive and quite worthless act (Broomberg & Chanarin, 2008:4).

This statement links to concerns about the lack of action in response to images of human suffering discussed earlier (Rosler, 1992; Campbell, 2012). It also confirms concerns about the reception of images of suffering, typically taken far from the viewer's home, and the way these images of foreign suffering circulate within the privileged spaces of the media and gallery in the developed world (Sontag, 2003).

Others have argued that regardless of whether or not these depictions of 'foreign' suffering invite revulsion or compassion, they tend to focus on difference (Taylor, 1998:129). Very rarely are images of normal, healthy Africans (or other people from the global South) shown in the international media (Franks, 2010:75). And yet by the same token, it is rare to find everyday images of people, regardless of their country of origin, in the media because this is

simply not deemed newsworthy. South African photographer Eric Miller argues that ‘...the media never have, and probably never will, reflect the broad range of social activity – they focus on aberration’ (Miller, 1999:50). Despite this, Miller calls for more balanced reporting on the African continent by the international media and states a number of personal examples of how in his experience, while he and colleagues have covered the tragic consequences of war, famine and the HIV epidemic, they have also found stories of tremendous courage and generosity of spirit which have subsequently been published in a book entitled *Reality Bites* (Espelund, Strudholm & Miller, 2003).

In conclusion, it is interesting to note the emergence of Al Jazeera’s new series *South 2 North*, a talk show hosted in Johannesburg which focuses on issues affecting Africa and the global South. One recent 2013 show invited international curator Okwui Enwezor, together with a South African and a Nigerian photojournalist, to discuss the dominance of negative stereotypes of Africa in the international media (*South 2 North*, 2013). It is worth noting that the guests did not demand ‘positive’ stories about Africa, but rather for more balanced reporting which pays attention to the ‘bigger picture’ and is not only focused on sensational news bites.

3.1.2 South African media reporting on the HIV epidemic

Following the first reports of the two HIV-positive flight attendants in 1983, there was limited reporting on HIV and AIDS in the South African media¹⁹ until the 2000s (Robins, 2004:657). The instatement of Thabo Mbeki as president in 1999 resulted in an increase in news coverage of HIV and AIDS. This was largely due to his controversial views on the causes of AIDS and his association with international AIDS dissidents which ignited activist responses as described in Chapter 2. It is hardly surprising then that in the period 2000-2002, the South African media was dominated by debates over the causality of AIDS and the provision of antiretroviral therapy in the public health care system (Ek, 2005:289; Jacobs & Johnson, 2007:137).

¹⁹ Most studies on the South African media focus on daily newspapers which tend to report ‘breaking news’ as opposed to offering in-depth analysis more typical of weekly newspapers such as the *Mail and Guardian* and *The Independent*. I am grateful to the photographers I interviewed for alerting me to the differences in these formats.

Media coverage was dominated by sensational reporting on and photographs of the clashes between government and the TAC, with an emphasis on the president, the health minister and TAC leaders. This prevented more nuanced debate about the epidemic and how it affected the lives of ordinary South Africans (Jacobs & Johnson, 2007:144). The TAC were also media savvy and used the media, along with the courts and community mobilisation, to communicate their aims and profile their campaigning for access to antiretroviral therapy (Robins, 2004:663-664). The sensational nature of the TAC's campaigning and their framing of the provision of antiretroviral treatment as a human rights issue, broke the silence surrounding HIV and AIDS in the South African news, and also captured the attention of the international media. Despite the preoccupation with access to treatment and marginalisation of stories with less 'news value', the reporting on the TAC was a powerful antidote to the international media stereotype of 'AIDS victims' and Africans as passive recipients of foreign aid. Photographs of TAC protesters became a common motif in local and international news (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2 Mike Hutchings. AIDS activists protest against the slow roll-out of antiretroviral drugs by the South African government in Cape Town on November 4, 2004. Source: Reuters.

Other people have argued that media representations of the epidemic in newspapers have predominantly framed HIV and AIDS as a medical problem (Campbell & Gibbs, 2008). They also argue that by and large reports on HIV management in the country tend to focus on prominent individuals, such as national leaders, doctors and nurses and donors, which marginalises the active responses of local communities who are then depicted as passive recipients rather than active players (Campbell & Gibbs, 2008:195). This study was focused on newspaper reports from 2006 to 2007, following the dominant ‘fighting for treatment’ narrative of the early 2000s. This suggests that post 2006 there was a return to an image of ordinary citizens and local people as passive recipients, rather than active citizens.

During Jacob Zuma’s presidency the photographs that appeared within both the local and international media have tended to focus on Zuma’s personal life which was discussed in Chapter 2. For example, images of Zuma dancing in traditional dress at his weddings in 2010 and 2012 have appeared in local and international newspapers. In some instances, these images have been accompanied by articles that discuss his leadership on the issue of HIV and AIDS (Dugger, 2010). This is evidenced in the captioning of the images below which has been reproduced verbatim (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3 Peter Andrews. President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, center, joining a traditional dance at his wedding in January. The president, who has three wives and a fiancée, has expanded efforts to combat AIDS. Source: Reuters.

In addition to the images that appeared in the daily news in connection with the HIV epidemic, a number of South African photojournalists produced more in-depth photo essays. These include Fanie Jason, Oupa Nkosi, Dean (Nadine) Hutton, Graeme Williams and Eric Miller. Interviews with these photographers revealed how they felt compelled to go beyond surface reporting and attempt to grapple with more complex and individualised approaches to documenting the impact of the epidemic on the lives of South Africans.

Dean (Nadine) Hutton, who was employed by the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper between 1997 and 2006, directly recounted her frustration with the superficial images she was often required to produce and how her experience of producing a self-initiated essay on the impact of the epidemic in KwaZulu-Natal changed her approach:

Most of the time we were asked to photograph HIV/AIDS not as in-depth documentation, but for pictures to illustrate stories. At that time the HIV story was conflict driven. And I did it for a while, but [then] I decided, I think it was 2002 or 2003...there was lots of pressure on Mbeki about the ARV [Antiretroviral] rollout and I wanted to photograph a story. So I took leave and I went for two weeks to KZN and I came back with really dramatic pictures and also with the resolution never to photograph HIV again as a stand-alone picture, [but rather] to concentrate on the people. It was very much like me saying that like these are people, not subjects, they are not just illustrations... (Hutton, personal interview, 2011 July 14).

Hutton also discussed the emotional impact of producing the story and her refusal to produce images that showed people as victims. She was critical of work by foreign correspondents who she believed tended to produce dramatic images which in her mind were abusive because the subject was presented without dignity (Hutton, personal interview, 2011 July 14). Hutton acknowledged that the photograph of Ntombizonkhe Magoso (Figure 3.4) could be said to fall within the cannon of images of ‘AIDS victims’ but argued that this is overruled by the subject of the photograph looking directly at the camera which affirms her presence and participation in the moment of making the image. While meeting the photographer’s eye does not always necessarily mean the subject approves of the image being taken (as demonstrated by many colonial era images), Hutton’s refusal to show the extreme physical wasting presents her subject in a gentler and more humanising way. This image was printed as a double-page spread in the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper in 2003, along with the rest of Hutton’s essay.



Figure 3.4 Dean (Nadine) Hutton. Mother of four, Ntombizonkhe Magoso (29) lies wasted on a bed in a mud hut atop a hill rural Nyaywini, KwaZulu-Natal. Her mother, who could not handle the shame of her daughter's illness, abandoned her at her grandmother's doorstep. She died 2 weeks after this photograph was made in 2003 while then South African president Thabo Mbeki was asking if HIV causes AIDS.

Following an internship in 2005 at the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper, Oupa Nkosi was employed by the newspaper where he remains working as a staff photographer. Since 2006 Nkosi has documented the issue of HIV and AIDS from a range of angles, including an essay on care-givers in Soweto. Talking about the series, Nkosi explained:

...for me it was a positive story, people who have devoted their lives to others without ...getting compensated, they don't earn much...but also for me it was to tell the government, you know, there are people willing to help...(Nkosi, personal interview, 2011 July 15).

Fanie Jason's documentation of the impact of HIV and AIDS on his wider township community in Gugulethu, Cape Town, was initially prompted by a news assignment he covered, but grew into a much larger and in-depth body of work entitled *Living in Denial*, for

which he was awarded the Fifty Crows award in 2004 (Jason, personal interview, 2012 May 19). While this work tended towards the dramatic and even sensational (Figure 3.5) and could be criticised for showing people as victims, it was motivated by an intense belief in the need to show the reality of what was taking place and being hidden. The extreme suffering revealed in images such as Figure 3.5 of skeletal figures being bathed, too weak to stand, does shock and I believe this was the intention of the work – to represent the suffering that was being kept secret behind closed doors.

And yet these images do more than focus only on suffering, they also show people being taken care of. The sharp focus on the thin hand being gently held by a gloved hand in the foreground of Figure 3.5 emphasises the act of attending to the needs of the ill. It also shows the use of gloves to prevent HIV infection when coming into contact with the bodily waste of AIDS sick individuals. While the argument is often made that images that focus on extreme physical suffering dehumanise the subject, I would argue that images that show people in this state being cared for highlights the notion of humanity. The provision of care to people who are dying, and especially individuals with late stage AIDS with the visceral realities of the loss of bowel control, is the ultimate act of showing love and affirming the dignity of a person, even in their most depleted state.

In another series of photographs taken during this period, entitled *Sounds from Gugulethu*, Jason offered a more personal visual account of the declining health and death of a locally celebrated jazz singer and friend (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). In these images, Jason focuses on the story of a single person and in addition to chronicling her deteriorating health he also shows a fuller story of her life as a jazz singer. In Figure 3.6, the focus on the subject completely lost in song, her eyes closed and her face full of emotion emphasises the fullness of her life and is the ultimate expression of individual talent and passion. In this way, the photo series presents the subject in a way that emphasises her life and individuality, rather than her HIV status. And yet the series also shows her deteriorating health.



Figure 3.5 Fanie Jason. *Living in Denial*. 2004.



Figure 3.6 Fanie Jason. *Sounds from Gugulethu*. 2004.

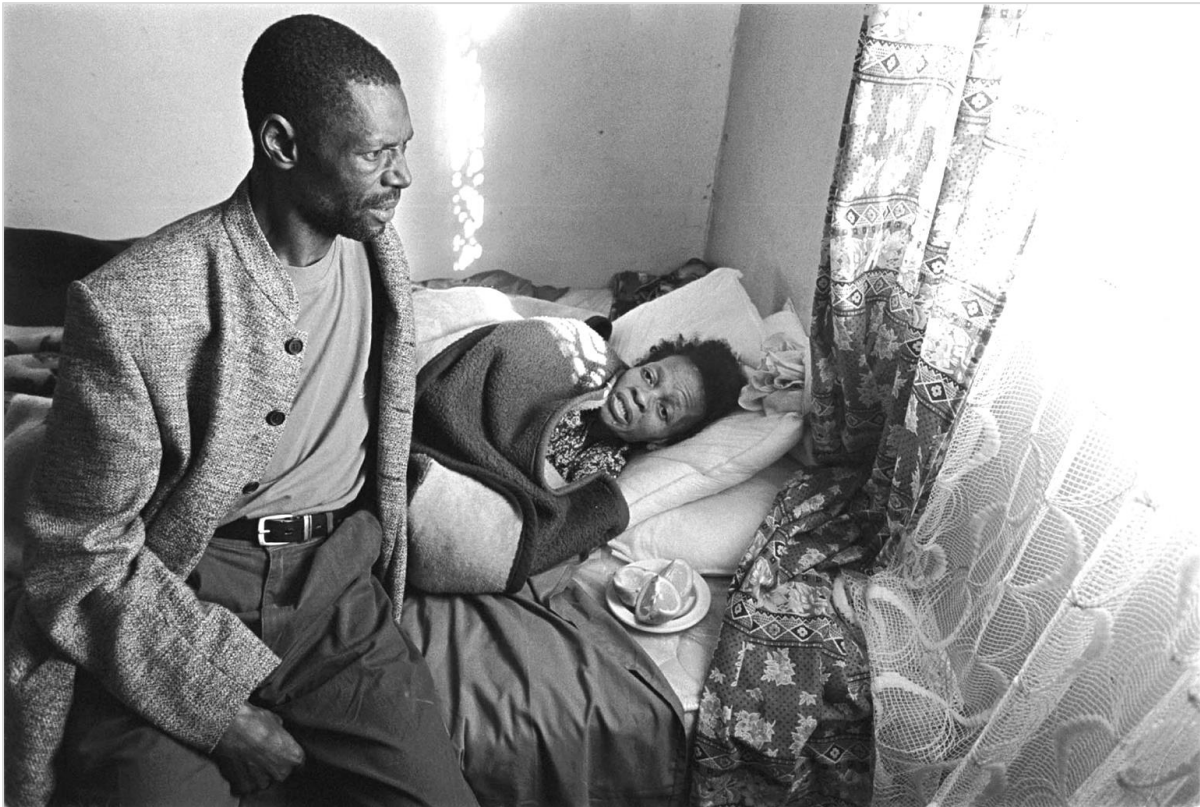


Figure 3.7 Fanie Jason. *Sounds from Gugulethu*. 2004.

Graeme Williams has produced two series on HIV and AIDS, both of which were not commissioned assignments. Williams described both series as responses to his experience of working as a journalist for Reuters between 1989 and 1994. For example, he described how the series taken at the Sacred Heart House hospice in 1989 and 1990 was a ‘counterbalance’ to the extreme senselessness of the violence and death he was photographing in the townships at the time leading up to the first democratic elections. He argued that even though people were dying they were treated with dignity and kindness, which is evident in the images that he took in the hospice (Figure 3.8 and 3.9) (Williams, personal interview, 2011 November 24). These images focus on the care provided, not only in the choice of subject matter, but also in the framing of the images. For example, Figure 3.8 focuses on the touch and the gentleness of a massage for an AIDS sick person. In Figure 3.9 the act of shaving a man who is unable to do so himself also emphasizes care and consideration for not only the physical needs of the ill, but also ways of preserving their sense of self in the terminal stages of their illness.



Figures 3.8 Graeme Williams. South Africa, Johannesburg. 1991. Sister Cecelia gives Roger a bed-bath. **Figure 3.9** Graeme Williams. South Africa, Johannesburg. 1991. Sister Cecelia gives Andre a shave.

In 2001, Williams worked with home-based carers affiliated to the Cotlands organisation over a period of eight months to produce the series *Hlabisa Portraits* (Figure 3.10 and 3.11). Williams described this series as the antithesis of the kind of work he had to do on assignment and framed this work as an attempt to redress the kind of images he had produced in the past in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

I felt I had kind of crossed the line in terms of what was...for me acceptable on a human level...I mean I would go to a funeral and there would be some woman crying because her husband or child had died and in the news world I had to photograph that. So there was no choice, either I leave the news world or I do it, and I did it even though I felt uncomfortable. So this was an opportunity to approach this from a position where I could feel it was kind of working towards something... I wanted to try and limit that as much as possible, the intrusion of people (Williams, personal interview, 2011 November 24).

Williams also described his decision to use a medium format Hasselblad camera²⁰, as opposed to 35mm film, as a deliberate move to construct the portraits carefully and that it also forced him to slow down and in his words ‘look properly, beyond the surface...’(Williams, personal interview, 2011 November 24). He also talked very clearly of how his intention was to convey a sense of the individuality of each person:

...the photographs became something which had some gravity to them in a way and almost for me it was a way of getting beyond those numbers, because living in the suburbs you just sort of read [about AIDS] in the newspapers and with the statistics you can lose sight of the individual (Williams, personal interview, 2011 November 24).

And yet, the frontal framing of the full-length portraits and the avoidance of close cropping does introduce a formality, and even stiffness, into the images. In contrast to the intimate images Williams took at the Sacred Heart Hospice the Hlabisa portraits suggest a distance between the photographer and the subject. This may also be the impact of using a medium format camera, which may well have needed a tripod, which automatically introduces a more cumbersome and orchestrated way of working. So while the portraits do indeed focus on individuals, as the viewer we do not get a very real sense of their fuller lives, as was experienced in Jason’s *Sounds from Gugulethu* series.

The Hlabisa portraits were exhibited as almost life-size prints at the 6th Wonca World Congress of Family Doctors in Durban in 2001, as well as at WITS medical school. Williams describes how post-1994 he completely stopped taking photographs for the news and then slowly started to transition from a photojournalistic approach to producing more abstracted and evocative images. The Hlabisa series marked a particular moment within that process and was the last body of work that he did using a more traditional documentary approach (Williams, personal interview, 2011 November 24). Williams has since received acclaim within the fine art context with the inclusion of his work in the international exhibition *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (Garb, 2011).

²⁰ A medium format film camera is not generally suited to covering news because it often requires a tripod and generally demands a slower way of working. In contrast, a 35mm camera is better suited to photographing news because it is small, lightweight and flexible with an in-built light meter. Hasselblad cameras are renowned for their high quality lenses and are generally used for the production of fine art images.

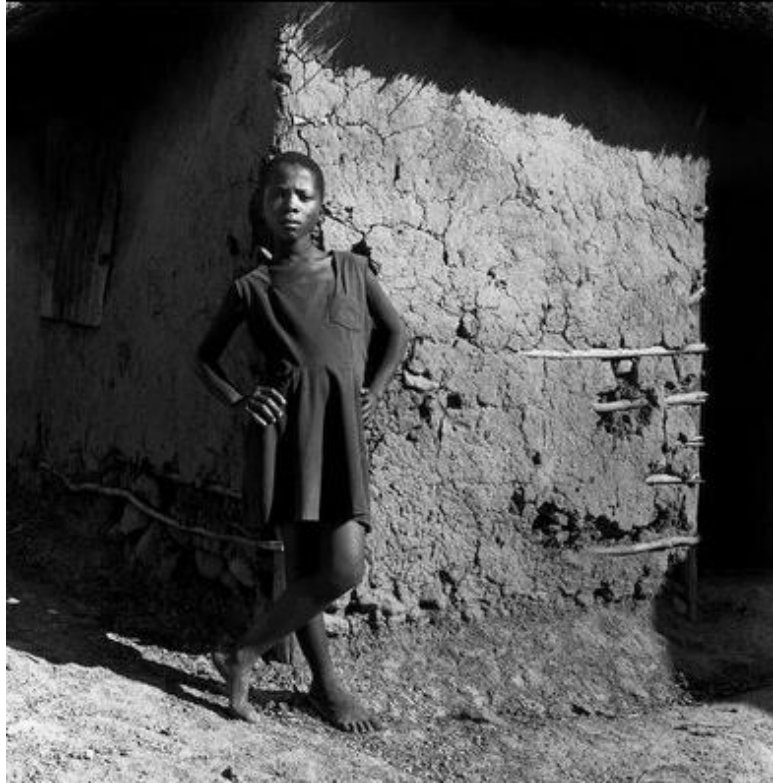


Figure 3.10 Graeme Williams. Mabongi (12) is looked after by her grandmother. Hlabisa. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 2001.

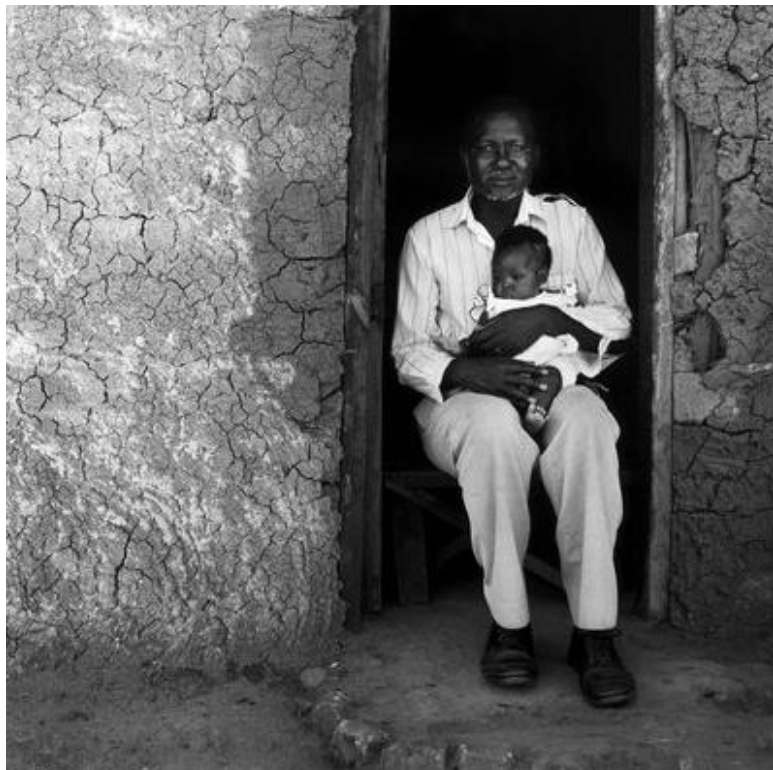


Figure 3.11 Graeme Williams. HIV-positive Aniliswa (3 months) with her father. Hlabisa. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 2001.

3.1.3 Conclusion

As is evidenced in this broad description of the major trends in photojournalism in the international and local media, there has been a shift away from what is now widely understood as the damaging stereotype of the ‘AIDS victim’. A dominant critique is that while this stereotype was found in images appearing in international reporting on HIV and AIDS in the 1980s, it was particularly damaging in reporting on Africa because it evoked colonial stereotypes of African sexuality (Hammonds, 1987; Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988; Austin, 1990; Treichler, 1999).

The South African media also tended to rely on stereotyped images in its daily news reporting, including the ‘AIDS victim’. In the 2000s, the daily news focused on protests and clashes between TAC supporters and the Minister of Health which gave rise to the image of the activist. This new stereotype and the ascendancy of images of ‘positive living’ will be discussed in more depth in the chapters that follow. As discussed above, a number of local photojournalists, such as Dean (Nadine) Hutton, Fanie Jason and Graeme Williams, felt the need to produce more in-depth photo essays that looked at stories that were not generally commissioned or published in the mainstream media.

3.2 Photography produced and used by NGOs and international aid organisations

Since the earliest humanitarian and activist responses to the HIV epidemic, photography has been used to communicate specific messages about the disease and represent the needs of people living with HIV. The first organisations to be formed in response to the epidemic were created by activists, many of whom were infected with the virus, which informed the activities of the organisations and the types of photographs they used. In New York, the Gay Men’s Health Crisis was founded in 1981 followed by others such as the Terrence Higgins Trust in Britain and AIDES in France. Many of these organisations focused on ways of caring for people living with the virus, but also agitated for better funding and research into treatment (Knight, 2008:10).

Many of the early non-government groups in America were activist organisations, such as ACT UP and Gran Fury, who both attacked negative media images of ‘AIDS victims’ and also produced their own counter-images and visual media (Grover, 1994: 221). In 1988, ACT UP famously protested in response to the portraits by photographer Nicholas Nixon of AIDS-sick individuals in America showing at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Their protest was based on their interpretation of the images as victimising and they made demands in a flyer that was distributed at MOMA for ‘no more pictures without [political] context’, and in their place argued for images of people living with HIV ‘who are loving, vibrant, sexy and acting up’ (Grover, 1994:220-221). Around the world, activist organisations have tended to generate and promote images of people living with HIV and AIDS that show empowered individuals rather than passive victims. These images have aimed to normalise HIV infection and reduce stigma.

In the South African context, organisations such as the TAC, Community Media Trust (CMT) and Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Education (CADRE) have been responsible for generating ‘positive’ portrayals of people living with HIV that emphasise an activist or otherwise empowered identity where individuals are shown to be knowledgeable about their illness and how to take care of themselves. CMT was formed in 1998 and produced the first South African televised talk show hosted by HIV-positive people (Hodes, 2007a). Apart from bringing important information about living with HIV to the viewers, the show also projected a positive image of informed, healthy and vibrant HIV-positive people. CADRE was established in 2001 in order to foster research-driven responses to the HIV epidemic (CADRE, 2003). CADRE commissioned a number of photographic projects as part of their *Beyond Awareness Campaign*,²¹ which will be discussed in detail in the chapter on Gisèle Wulfsohn’s work.

In Uganda, in 1987, Noerine Kaleeba together with a small group of colleagues founded The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) (Grebe, 2012:140). Similar groups were formed in Senegal and other countries in Africa as the epidemic spread. These grassroots organisations were the first African NGOs to address the epidemic. On an international level, the Special Programme on AIDS was formed in February 1987 and was renamed the Global Programme

²¹ The *Beyond Awareness Campaign* also involved the South African Department of Health and was funded by a range of donors which included foreign aid organisations.

on AIDS (GPA) in January 1988. The GPA was later moulded into a new form and was launched as the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in January 1996 (Grebe, 2012:11).

This section will provide an overview of the kinds of images used by both local NGOs²² and international aid organisations. Although local NGOs and global aid organisations are often linked through funding, collaboration or partnerships, their use of photographs is often quite different because of the work they do and the diverse audiences they intend to reach. International aid organisations are typically addressing an audience in the global North and the photographs generally fulfil two purposes: to fundraise, or to report on projects that have been funded by Northern donors. These images are mostly found in fundraising initiatives, on the organisation's website and in their print materials. In contrast, local NGOs tend to address a South African audience and the photographs in this instance are used primarily to protest, raise awareness, educate and inform. While local NGOs also use images in annual reports and to raise their profile, the former contexts are more publically visible. I will start by looking at photography used by international aid organisations and will engage with the historical context and critique of this use of photography that precedes the HIV epidemic but informs the way organisations use photography today.

3.2.1 Photographs used by international aid organisations

All major organisations, such as UNAIDS, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the WHO, use photographs within their publications, webpages and reports to illustrate the work that they do, as well as campaign for funding. Other prominent organisations that have contributed to addressing the epidemic in South Africa include the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the British Department for International Development (DFID), The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation among others.

²² For ease I will use the term 'NGOs' to also include non-profit organisations (NPOs) and other community-based organisations (CBOs) which are not affiliated to government or profit driven.

Despite the humanitarian principles underpinning the work of international aid organisations, there is a history of critique of the kinds of images that have been used to achieve their ends. This debate extends back to the 1980s where in response to images of the Ethiopian famine, a number of NGOs conducted a study on the way these photographs had shaped European perceptions of the African continent (Van der Gaag & Nash, 1987). The main concern was that the images that had been used to fundraise for famine relief presented the subjects as passive victims who were unable to solve the challenges they faced. The study concluded that while photographs had indeed instilled a negative association of Ethiopia (and Africa more generally), the images were successful in generating donations in the North.

It is somewhat ironic that the same famine was evoked in the visual imagery projected on the screens for the United Kingdom *Live 8* concert in 2005 (Enwezor, 2006:15). The intention was to link the 1984 Ethiopian famine with the new fundraising initiative related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).²³ Critique of the use of images of famine for the *Live 8* concert was focused on the way in which images of African suffering come to speak for the continent as a whole and suspend it in a perpetual state of underdevelopment and crisis. So while such images may make the viewer feel obliged to make a donation to the cause at hand, it is argued that they ultimately ‘amplify the African dependency complex’ where ‘Africans are always at risk and white Europeans are forever there to deliver them.’ (Enwezor, 2006:17).

The problematic nature of images of African suffering used in this way is also encapsulated in the argument that the image ‘may have been intended to provoke action, but it may also have hardened the belief that there is a necessary gulf between those who are civilised enough to have aid to distribute and those who are merely civilised enough to receive it’ (Taylor, 1998:136). More recent criticism of the ways in which photography used by NGOs reinforces colonial era beliefs in European superiority has called for more frank discussions of how Europe has benefitted from its relationship with Africa and also its role in perpetuating a mutual dependency to this day (Cohen & Manspeizer, 2009:92). African spokespeople, such as Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, often echo this sentiment (*Talk to Al Jazeera*, 2013) Despite domestic spending on AIDS in Africa almost doubling from

²³ While the images of the famine addressed the first MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, the sixth MDG is to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

2008-2011, in 35 countries across the continent donor support still accounts for more than half of current financial investment in AIDS responses (UNAIDS, 2013a:13).

In contrast to the historical critique of images used by international aid organisations in the past, in the case of the HIV epidemic, current images used by organisations such as UNAIDS, PEPFAR and USAID focus on the positive outcomes of projects. Since 2000 images typically profile site visits where members from the organisation are shown with local beneficiaries of the fund (Campbell, 2008:91). Alternatively, images document interventions, such as workshops and meetings with local people in order to develop better services. It could be argued that despite the more positive spin of these images, the underlying message remains that the global North is the benefactor and the global South is on the receiving end. Although many images appearing in NGO publications communicate a clear sense of upliftment, hope and positive change, images of emaciated bodies are not completely absent (Campbell, 2008:93).

Another criticism that still haunts images of the epidemic in Africa taken for the NGO context is that they often present individuals in a way that is ahistorical and does not show the greater social context of their lives (Bates, 2007:71-72). In this way the individuals become symbols and stereotypes of the HIV epidemic in Africa. The text that accompanies images is considered an important tool for avoiding this and differentiating a specific individual's story from the stereotype (Campbell, 2008:96). However, a recent UNAIDS Special Report flies in the face of criticism of NGOs presenting individuals as stereotypes. In addition to summaries of new figures and facts about the HIV epidemic on the continent, the report profiles individuals from different African countries. A very strong sense of each individual is created through the use of a portrait, verbatim text of them talking about their lives and a page devoted to 'ten things they couldn't live without' (Figure 3.12). The layout and overall feel of the double-page spread presents the individuals in a positive way, albeit in a pop culture magazine layout.



Figure 3.12 Double page spread from the recent 2013 UNAIDS Special Report on Africa. Source: www.unaids.org

A number of South African photographers have worked for foreign NGOS or aid organisations funded by governments in the North, including Paul Weinberg, Eric Miller, Gisèle Wulfsohn, Pieter Hugo and Gideon Mendel. With the decline of the print media, these organisations have also become a significant source of income for photojournalists and documentary photographers with an interest in social and development issues. In Chapter 4 and 5 I will discuss the role of aid organisations and NGOs in the production of images of the HIV epidemic more carefully in relation to both Gideon Mendel and Gisèle Wulfsohn’s work.

It is interesting to see how Weinberg’s previous anti-apartheid struggle networks²⁴ supported the exhibition of some his HIV-related work at the Belgian Trade Union Movement in

²⁴ Paul Weinberg, together with Graeme Williams, Gisèle Wulfsohn, Santu Mofokeng and Eric Miller, were all members of the anti-apartheid photographic collective called Afrapix.

2004.²⁵ In the post-apartheid period, Weinberg was active in documenting the changes taking place in the country, such as the return of communities to land they had had been forcibly removed from during apartheid (Weinberg & Winberg, 1996). In the 1990s Weinberg also worked for a number of NGOs, including those addressing the HIV epidemic. However, Weinberg found this work increasingly restrictive and was frustrated by briefs, often by foreign donors, that did not reflect the lived reality on the ground (Weinberg, personal interview, 2012 February 24). This sentiment was also expressed by other photographers I spoke to (Hugo, personal interview, 2012 May 10), and yet other photographers such as Wulfsohn and Mendel found relationships with NGOs to be more mutually beneficial. This will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters on their work.

Like Weinberg, Eric Miller also started his photographic career in the 1980s as part of the anti-apartheid movement. Miller recalled how he most likely first photographed a story related to HIV in the early 1990s in Uganda when he went on assignment and produced a number of general stories on the country, one of which addressed HIV and AIDS (Miller, personal interview, 2011 September 1). By the mid-1990s Miller began to photograph a number of HIV-related assignments almost exclusively for foreign clients. Miller recalls how he rarely worked directly for local media but often sold stories made for overseas clients into the South African market after their first publication abroad (Miller, personal communication, 2013 July 14). The bulk of Miller's HIV-related work over the years has been commissioned by foreign donors or aid organisations, as well as local NGOs and more recently the Western Cape Department of Health (Miller, personal communication, 2013 July 14). This more recent work has also tended to include HIV and AIDS as part of broader programmes addressing a range of health issues such as TB. Since the 1990s, Miller has consistently turned his lens to document a wide range of social issues in South Africa and other African countries.

In a recent project, Miller's involvement in documenting the organisation Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA) has resulted in an extended project developed over a number of years and resulted in the exhibition *Amatsha Ntliziyo – 'the never-give-ups'* shown at the District Six Museum and Khayelitsha Community Centre in 2011. Miller's images

²⁵ Other photographers included in this exhibition were Gideon Mendel, Fanie Jason, Gisèle Wulfsohn, Graeme Williams and Dean (Nadine) Hutton.

include portraits taken on a Hasselblad medium format film camera in a make-shift studio at the place the grandmothers met (Figure 3.13), as well as portraits of them with their families in their homes (Figure 3.14). Miller wanted the individual portraits to serve as a testament to the courage and spirit of the grandmothers and reflect how they wanted to be represented. While Miller originally intended to exhibit these images on their own he later decided he needed to also document their lives at home to reflect the families they supported. The portraits possess a formality, both in the composition and the way a number of the grandmothers chose to dress in traditional Xhosa dress (Figure 3.13). The simplicity of the white backdrop contrasts with the detail of the home interiors and the dress of the other family members in the group portraits (Figure 3.14). The group portraits also provide the viewer with a much fuller insight into the socio-economic contexts of the grandmothers and those they support.

This work was exhibited at two venues in the United States of America in September and October 2013. Miller and the writer Joanne Smetherham, together with three of the grandmothers from GAPA attended the openings and eBook launch and made several public talks. Miller has also started preparatory work for a video documentary on the project. Miller recently reflected on his engagement with documenting the HIV epidemic and commented:

I was never 'comfortable' in focusing on the most 'visible' aspect of the pandemic... the dying people with wasted bodies...there was too much victimology in it, and it felt too easy. I have always tended to look for the consequences as the pandemic rippled into broader society, the orphans, and now the grandmothers (Miller, personal communication, 2013 July 14).



Figure 3.13 Eric Miller. Mrs Qaiya. One of the members of GAPA. 2011.



Figure 3.14 Eric Miller. Mrs Qaiya and her family. 2011.

3.2.2 The use of photography by South African NGOs

A number of local South African NGOs and community organisations have contributed to shaping the way photography has been used to represent the epidemic and those affected by it. While local organisations also use photographs in reports to donors, the most visible use of photography by NGOs is in educational materials and awareness campaigns. Mainly the larger, and better funded, organisations make use of photography. Printing posters, magazines and other media with photographs is expensive, and yet a number of organisations have used outdoor media as a means of reaching their target audiences, especially with education campaigns aimed at a youth audience.

The Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Education (CADRE) based in Johannesburg was a forerunner in acknowledging the role of media and using it as a tool for HIV interventions. One of their early projects was the Media Workers Project where they recruited photographers to produce images for use in the media that countered negative reporting that focused solely on death and dying. This project will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 in relation to Gisèle Wulfsohn, but for the purposes of this argument it is interesting to note how CADRE aimed to challenge dominant media images in the early 2000s by commissioning counter images and news stories.

The following two examples illustrate how photography has been used by local NGOs to communicate specific messages about HIV and AIDS to a South African audience. Both the examples are drawn from well-known and also relatively well-funded HIV organisations; the TAC and *Brothers for Life*. I have chosen to compare two posters so that the format in which photography is used is the same, but the *Brothers for Life* campaign also featured large scale billboards and radio and television campaigns. The TAC poster was produced in 2001 at the height of activism for the provision of antiretroviral treatment and was part a set of posters that aimed to increase local knowledge about HIV and antiretroviral treatment as part of TAC's Treatment Literacy programme (Figure 3.15). In contrast, the *Brothers for Life* poster (Figure 3.16) was produced in 2009 once antiretroviral treatment was more widely available and was concerned with a broader approach to public health education which extended beyond a focus only on HIV and also included non-health related issues, such as gender-based violence.

In the first poster, a photograph of an individual with a speech bubble is used to recount a personal testimony of starting antiretroviral treatment. This particular person was one the recipients of treatment through a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) pilot programme started in 1999 in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, prior to the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare sector. The photograph performs an important function because it presents a person who is speaking from personal lived experience, rather than a fictional character. At this time, there was not only a great deal of stigma associated with the disease, but the general public also associated HIV with people who looked physically ill. The inclusion of Thobani Ncapai's name on the poster was also a powerful statement because it amounted to public disclosure of his HIV-positive status. The wearing of the signature TAC t-shirt also clearly associates the organisation with the message on the poster. These posters were produced in a number of South African languages including isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans and English and were hung in clinics, community halls and other public places in townships throughout the country.

BLOOD TESTS: CD4 COUNT & VIRAL LOAD
 A CD4 Count of less than 200 means an increased risk of getting serious Opportunistic Illnesses. It is time to consider your option to start ARV treatment.

ARTS: RETROVIRALS (ARVs)
 Medicines which lower the level of HIV in your blood, and help you live a healthier life. Follow everything you are told. They do not cure HIV/AIDS.

I started taking ARVs when my CD4 count was 56. It is not good to wait this long because some people who start ARVs at very low CD4 counts do not make it. But the ARVs have helped me and now I am very healthy again. Many of us only test for HIV when we are already ill. Some people think because they look fat and feel healthy their immune system is still strong and they do not have to worry about doing CD4 counts. With HIV, this is not always true. If you test early you can start treatment earlier if you need to, or get advice on how to live healthily while your body is still strong.
 -Thobani Ncapai

CD4 COUNT measures the strength of your immune system.

VIRAL LOAD shows how much HIV is in your blood. Both the viral load and CD4 count tests will be done before you start and while you are on treatment to check if the ARVs are still working for you.

Depending which ARV combination you take, Full Blood Count (FBC), ALT and other tests might also be done regularly.

Make your Treatment Plan personal. It is your right to ask your clinic or hospital for a CD4 count or be referred to a place that can do it for you. Do not wait until you feel ill to test if your immune system is healthy.

TAC TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN

NATIONAL OFFICE: 021-788 3507, 021-304 3573
 GAUTENG: 011-493 0505/2593, MPUMALANGA: 013-752 2268
 UMPHONG: 033-391 0985, EASTERN CAPE: 043-725 2945
 WESTERN CAPE: 021-447 2550/4

Plan for Life: Get Tested - Get Treatment - Use Condoms

Figure 3.15 One of the posters produced by TAC in 2001. Source: www.tac.org.za

The second poster image was produced in 2009 as part of the *Brothers for Life* campaign that aimed to initiate positive lifestyle changes ranging from health related issues (including HIV)

to affirming positive male behaviour around fatherhood and relationships with their partners and children. The campaign included interpersonal training, as well as a nationwide marketing campaign that used television commercials, billboards, posters and leaflets. One of the pillars of the campaign was the use of positive male role models who were mostly well-known sports or entertainment personalities. In a similar way to the previous image, the use of a portrait confirms a lack of shame surrounding the disease and also the notion that it can affect anyone. The styling of the image and how it is lit and framed pays careful attention to presenting the person in a way that affirms dignity and self-respect, but also goes further in terms of presenting him as stylish, urban and confident.

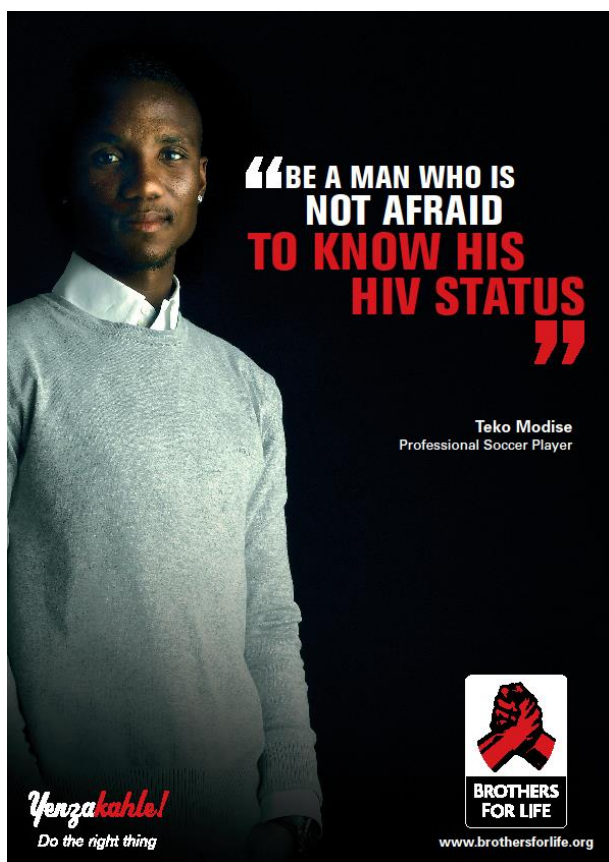


Figure 3.16 *Brothers for Life* Poster. 2009. Part of the national campaign launched in 2009. Photographer: George Mahashe. Source: www.brothersforlife.org

In both these instances, the posters made use of a South African person who would be recognisable to the intended audience. While the soccer star Teko Modise in the *Brothers for Life* poster (Figure 3.16) would be known on a national level, Thobani Ncapai would only be

known within his community (Figure 3.15). Regardless of how well-known the individuals are they are identifiable as people whom a South African audience would relate to. While Ncapai is represented in an everyday sense, his t-shirt positions him as an activist. The colourful poster has a lot of text and the emphasis is on communicating information. In contrast, Modise is represented in a more glamorous and stylish manner with dramatic lighting and is shot slightly from below which emphasises his status and a sense of being in control. This poster is aspirational and wants the audience to buy into an outlook or a way of being, as well as learning information. While the intention of these two posters is different, they are both crafted to reach a local South African audience and present the people in the images as empowered and in control. They also demonstrate local action and local success stories.

Both these organisations also used photography in their online communication, training materials, educational pamphlets and other forms of media that aimed to inform and increase knowledge about a broad range of topics related to HIV prevention, care and treatment. The *Brothers for Life* campaign shows an increased sophistication in the use of photography as a visual tool, as well as an evolving approach to HIV messages with the inclusion of other social and health-related issues that extend beyond a focus on HIV. While the full campaign cannot be discussed at length here, it is important to note that it included a wide range of issues affecting men in South Africa and aimed to promote a positive and responsible form of masculinity. In contrast to media images of ‘AIDS victims’ and early South African education campaigns that focused on death (Crewe 1992:61), most local NGOs including Community Media Trust, TAC and *Brothers for Life*, present positive images, usually with an emphasis on healthy-looking South Africans who represent an aspirational lifestyle. This reflects both the changes in the epidemic and access to antiretroviral treatment, and also captures the shifts in the representation of people living with HIV and AIDS.

3.2.3 Conclusion

While in the early days of the epidemic, international aid organisations tended to emphasise the difference between the donor and the recipients of aid, more recent campaigns use photography to convey a strong sense of individuality and shared humanity thereby encouraging a more equal relationship between donor and those benefitting from aid. Local

NGOs tend to use photographs of individuals as role models, or trusted sources of information, in order to communicate information about HIV prevention and treatment.

3.3 Fine art photography in response to the HIV epidemic

Since the early days of the HIV epidemic visual artists, including photographers, have played an important role in drawing attention to the disease, mostly for advocacy purposes and increasing awareness. These responses have included a range of media, such as painting, film, sculpture and also crafts including sewing, textiles, basket weaving and beading, especially in the South African context where these skills are part of local material culture. Apart from the gallery context, there were also a number of awareness campaigns which included using billboards, murals and the making of memorial quilts in the tradition of the Names Project²⁶ (Mundawarara, 2000; HIV/AIDS and STD Directorate & Department of Health, 2000).

I will focus on South African photographic responses to HIV and AIDS that have appeared in fine art galleries and related publications. Within the gallery context, I will also distinguish between ‘AIDS art exhibitions’ where various artists, including photographers, contribute or respond to the theme of ‘HIV and AIDS’, and solo exhibitions by a photographer who addresses the subject in a personal capacity, rather than in response to a commission.

3.3.1 ‘AIDS art exhibitions’ in South Africa

The first exhibition responding to HIV and AIDS in South Africa was opened in 1995 at the Iziko South African National Gallery (Allen, 2009:404).²⁷ The exhibition, entitled *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV*, was entirely photographic and was an international project initiated by Network Photographers in 1993. It was brought to South Africa in 1995 on the understanding that a new photographic essay by Gideon Mendel²⁸ addressing the epidemic in

²⁶ The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was founded in 1987 by gay rights activist Cleve Jones and several others to commemorate those who had died of AIDS by sewing together individual panels to make a large quilt.

²⁷ Prior to this in 1993 the AIDS memorial quilt was displayed at the Iziko South African National Gallery and in 1996 the gallery was wrapped in a red AIDS ribbon for World AIDS day.

²⁸ Mendel was also instrumental in bringing the exhibition to South Africa in 1995.

South Africa would be added. This became a model for ensuring local relevance and also building global understanding about the different ways the disease affected different parts of the world. A second *Positive Lives* exhibition was opened on 1 December 2001 which once again included international photographers and a selection from Gideon Mendel's extended essay on the epidemic in Southern Africa, entitled *A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa*, that was published as a book and launched at the gallery (Mendel, 2001a). Both these exhibitions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

In 2000, Marilyn Martin, then director of the Iziko South African National Gallery, curated *Artworks for AIDS* which was also shown at the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban. Following this the exhibition travelled abroad and was shown in Washington D.C. at the Women's Museum. The intention of the exhibition was to raise awareness and also funds through the auction of the artworks. Artists from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland were commissioned to respond to the theme. Photographs by David Goldblatt, Sue Williamson, Penny Siopis and Jane Alexander were among the works shown. A sequel to this show was the *AIDSArt/South Africa* exhibition that was shown in 2003 and 2004 at the Iziko South African National Gallery. The show was a collaborative project and grew out of a conference held at Wellesley College in the United States entitled *AIDS and South Africa: The Social Expression of a Pandemic* (Kauffman & Martin, 2003).

Two years later the exhibition *Embracing HIV/AIDS* including work by various South African artists opened on 1 December 2006 at the Iziko South African National Gallery. In 2010 the travelling exhibition entitled *Not Alone* was shown at the Iziko Goodhope Castle in Cape Town, the Durban Art Gallery and Museum Africa in Johannesburg, as well as the Fowler Museum in Los Angeles. This later exhibition was part of a travelling show that was the product of the MAKE ART/STOP AIDS project that has travelled the world and includes artists from Brazil, India, South Africa and the United States.

These examples of exhibitions curated on the theme of HIV and AIDS reveal the extent to which the Iziko South African National Gallery was a driving force behind them and how in many instances the exhibitions were the result of international partnerships. It is important to note that the 'AIDS art exhibitions' discussed in this section were shown in national institutions, such as the Iziko South African National Gallery, and not in commercial

galleries. It is also interesting to note that a number of ‘AIDS art exhibitions’ are international collaborations and have travelled to South Africa as part of a global tour.

3.3.2 Photographic exhibitions by solo artists

In addition to ‘AIDS art exhibitions’, a small number of South African photographers who produce work for the fine art context have exhibited work that responds to the epidemic in some way. David Goldblatt’s series *In the Time of AIDS* investigates the presence of the AIDS ribbon in the South African landscape. This work will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Santu Mofokeng has produced two series that touch on the HIV epidemic; *Chasing Shadows* and *Child-headed Households*. Chapter 7 is devoted to a close reading of Mofokeng’s work.



Figure 3.17 Sue Williamson. *From the Inside: Nosisa Ndela*. 2000.

Sue Williamson has also used photography to bridge the divide between gallery and public audiences in her series *From the Inside* which was originally commissioned for the International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000 and which also showed in the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg and in the Joao Ferreira Gallery in Cape Town in 2002 (Figure 3.17). A single image from this series was also included in *Artworks for AIDS* in 2000 at the Iziko South African National Gallery. Williamson’s series of photographs included black and white portraits of people living with HIV and coupled these images with a colour photograph documenting a graffitied message quoting the person. The statements made by

the individuals were positioned in public places of their choosing and also included their names. The pairing of the portraits with an urban landscape which includes the graffitied statements operates in a similar way to Miller's portraits and family group shots in that the individual is shown in relation to their context and community. However, the graffiti element in Williamson's work meant that the individuals' views were made visible in public spaces beyond the context of museum, gallery and ebook. Williamson's intention was to address the silence surrounding the issue, both by profiling HIV-positive South Africans and taking the message out into the streets where it would reach South Africans in the course of daily life.



Figure 3.18 Pieter Hugo. *Nyameka J Matiyana. The Bereaved*. 2005.

Pieter Hugo's series *The Bereaved* from 2005 consists of four images documenting young men who had died of AIDS-related illnesses in their coffins before they were transported to the Eastern Cape for burial (Figure 3.18). The images have been exhibited abroad and one belongs to the Iziko South African National Gallery collection (Schmidt, 2006). Despite the small number of images in the series their singularity within the South African context makes them a provocative response to the epidemic. Their unflinching portrayal of those who have

died has received criticism (Stultiens, 2012). The images are shocking and confrontational, but also deeply moving. The aesthetic quality of the images with the attention to lighting and colour, suggests a tenderness which frames the photographs as acts of memorialisation akin to the tradition of *momento mori*.²⁹

Hugo produced this series in response to learning of a close childhood friend's HIV-positive status (Hugo, personal interview, 2012 May 10). Up until this point Hugo had photographed HIV and AIDS on assignment for NGOs, but never had to confront it in a personal capacity. *The Bereaved* was an attempt to explore the issue in a personal way. Hugo initially started photographing funerals, but given the nature of 'AIDS funerals' he was often called upon to make speeches and felt uncomfortable because in his words:

I just felt like a phoney. I was interested in it from an artist's perspective and a preoccupation with detritus and mortality, more than being a political activist. If it helps your cause, great, but I just felt disingenuous standing there making speeches (Hugo, personal interview, 2012 May 10).

A less well-known series also produced by Hugo, entitled *Malawi 2003: Tuberculosis and guardian care*, was also exhibited at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in 2004. This series was originally commissioned by the WHO. One of the images (Figure 1.4) was discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to its publication within the WHO report (WHO, 2003). The people in the five images in the series are all identified as TB patients who were part of an initiative where a 'guardian', usually a family member, would ensure that they took their medication. The text accompanying the images explains the high rate of co-infection with HIV and TB. The horror of these images of people dying is unusual for a commercial gallery, which does not usually show work of this nature. The series was exhibited alongside two other series, *Rwanda 2004: Vestiges of a genocide* and portraits of people with albinism, which developed into the series *Looking Aside* (Michael Stevenson Gallery, 2004). This exhibition which included both commissioned and non-commissioned work is an interesting record of Hugo's transition from photojournalistic work (such as the WHO assignment) and his later work which is produced specifically for an art market, such as the series *Looking Aside*.

²⁹ *Memento mori* translates from the Latin into 'remember that you will die'. *Memento mori* images are symbolic reminders of the inevitability of death and were a popular theme in Victorian photography.

Not many South African photographers have had work that addresses the issue of the HIV epidemic exhibited within the fine art context. Various explanations for this have been put forward, including a possible exhaustion with addressing political and social issues in the years immediately after the end of apartheid and also an increasingly market-orientated art scene where it is possible that works addressing HIV are not perceived as sellable (Kauffman & Martin, 2004:5).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on photographs produced by South African photographers for local and international media, NGOs and aid organisations and fine art galleries. The absence of discussion of government campaigns is because very few state campaigns have employed photography. In the 1980s and 1990s, the government's response to the HIV epidemic was limited and early educational posters tended to use illustration (Crewe, 1992). Some of these posters appear in Gisèle Wulfsohn's photographs and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. In the 2000s, collaborations between NGOs and the government Department of Health saw an increase in the use of photography, such as the *Beyond Awareness Campaign* which was responsible for commissioning Wulfsohn to produce both the *Living Openly* (2000) and *Conversations* (2004-2007) projects. Apart from the national Department of Health, provincial departments have more recently worked directly with photographers, such as Eric Miller (Miller, personal communication, 2013 July 15).

Chapter 4

Gideon Mendel: A twenty year trajectory (1993-2013)

Gideon Mendel's contribution to documenting the HIV epidemic is considerable. Mendel has documented the subject since 1993 and although he is primarily known for his work in sub-Saharan Africa, he has also documented HIV and AIDS in Britain, North America, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia. While other research on Mendel's photographs of HIV and AIDS has focused on specific bodies of work (Squiers, 2005; Thomas, 2007; Thomas, 2009; de Kock, 2010; Nesbitt Hills, 2011) this chapter will provide a comprehensive account of his documentation of the epidemic to date. The approach to this chapter is informed by an important early assessment of Mendel's photographs of the HIV epidemic (Godby, 2003). In particular, I draw on the analysis of Mendel's use of specific contexts and partnerships in order to develop his photographic responses to HIV and AIDS and increase awareness of the issue (Godby, 2003). My intention is to show how Mendel has approached the issue in different ways over time depending on the nature of the project or story he was engaged with, the context in which the images were published in and the intention of the project. Over the years Mendel has responded to specific political and social contexts, policy changes and medical interventions and treatment options.

Many critiques of Mendel's photographs of the HIV epidemic summarise it in simple terms by contrasting his early work, where it is argued the African subject is presented as a passive victim, with later projects that were more collaborative and therefore empowering (Thomas, 2009:358; de Kock, 2010:50-51). While I too acknowledge this shift towards collaboration, these critiques misread the early photographs by assessing them outside of the historical moment in which they were produced. Attention needs to be paid to medical, political and social responses (or lack thereof) to the epidemic at the time the photographs were taken. Mendel's early work was primarily produced within an advocacy framework and fuelled by a sense of urgency to raise awareness in the global North of the scale of suffering caused by the HIV epidemic in Africa. It is also important to acknowledge the contexts in which the work was originally and then subsequently shown; in book form, as exhibition images and in print

and online media. The meaning of these images has shifted depending on where and how they have been presented.

This chapter aims to situate a reading of Mendel's images in relation to what was taking place in the evolution of both local and international responses to HIV and AIDS. I will also consider the contexts in which Mendel's images were published. It is significant that Mendel formed strategic and often long-lasting relationships with different organisations and print media publications. These relationships shaped his work in important ways, not only in the kinds of images which were produced but also in the reach of his photographs (Godby, 2003). This will be expanded upon in relation to specific examples in the chapter that follows.

4.1 Early days: photographing apartheid South Africa (1982-1990)

Mendel's documentation of the HIV epidemic is preceded by a series of events and experiences which informed his approach to photography and the directions his career has taken. Mendel was born in Johannesburg in 1959 to first generation Jewish parents who had escaped the holocaust (Denes & Mendel, 2001:40). His decision to study psychology and African history at the University of Cape Town was informed more by a need to avoid military service, rather than a clear sense of the career he wanted to pursue (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 28). During this period Mendel developed a keen interest in photography and film and was sympathetic with Leftist student politics. However it was his experience of teaching at a 'Coloured' school on completion of his studies in 1981 that had the most profound impact on his political development as he encountered state oppression first hand.

Mendel then left for Britain with the intention of studying photography but after six months he received a letter from a friend involved in anti-apartheid struggle politics who convinced him that it was more important to learn on the job back home. On his return to South Africa Mendel taught himself the basics of darkroom work before been offered a job at *The Star* newspaper in Johannesburg at the start of 1984 (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 28). In 1985 he joined Agence-France Presse (AFP) with the intention of reaching a wider audience outside of South Africa and establishing himself as a freelance international journalist (Godby, 2003:16). Although never a member of the photographic collective

Afrapix, Mendel was included in two important anti-apartheid struggle publications: *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (Tillman & Harris, 1989) and *South Africa: The Cordoned heart* (Badsha, 1986). His work from the 1980s was not only prolific but also powerful in its close documentation of clashes between police and civilians (Figure 4.1) and the profound inhumanity of the state (Figure 4.2). With his closeness to the action and capturing of state violence as it took place (Figure 4.1), Mendel's work from this period exhibits a number of classic characteristics of photojournalistic practice. The use of black and white film was typical of this time period. Mendel's strong compositions and ability to compose compelling images, seen in Figure 4.1, came to define his style and visual language. It is also worth noting his position on the side of the protesters which enabled him to document the scene from their perspective.



Figure 4.1 Gideon Mendel. Police attack youths early in the morning on the day of the Pollsmoor Prison March. Source: *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (Tillman & Harris, 1989).

Like many of his contemporaries documenting this violent period, Mendel experienced burn-out and in 1987 withdrew from covering conflict. With the assistance of a grant he documented the neighbourhood he lived in which resulted in the series *Living in Yeoville* (Godby, 2003:16). In 1990 Mendel moved to London and joined Network Photographers

where he was commissioned to cover stories in Africa. Mendel remains in London and it is from this position as a South African based abroad that he has engaged in documenting the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Living in the global North and photographing the epidemic first in the United Kingdom, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, gave Mendel a specific understanding of the challenges to representing the epidemic and also using images for advocacy purposes. Mendel was also positioned to build relationships with British media publications, international photo agencies and aid organisations and these platforms enabled him to profile the issue in ways other South African photographers were unable to do.



Figure 4.2 Gideon Mendel. A schoolboy is arrested during the protests against the 1987 white parliamentary elections in Athlone township, Cape Town, May 1987. Source: *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa* (Tillman & Harris, 1989).

4.2 Middlesex Hospital and the Matibi Mission Hospital (1993)

In 1993 Mendel was invited to contribute a photo essay to the *Positive Lives* exhibition organised by Network Photographers and the Terrence Higgins Trust³⁰ (Godby, 2003). In

³⁰ The Terrence Higgins Trust was founded in memory of Terrence Higgins who was one of the first people diagnosed with AIDS in Britain and who died in 1982. The Trust remains a leading organisation offering HIV and sexual health services.

response, Mendel chose to document patients receiving care for AIDS-related illnesses in Middlesex Hospital in Britain. This was Mendel's first engagement with the issue of HIV and AIDS. A few months later he documented a Zimbabwean mission hospital also taking care of AIDS sick people. Building on earlier writing on these two bodies of work (Godby, 2003), this section will compare and contrast these two experiences that ultimately served as a catalyst for Mendel's commitment to continue documenting the issue in sub-Saharan Africa.

When viewing these two early series by Mendel it is important to situate them in relation to other kinds of images in circulation at the time, as well as the absence of effective treatment for HIV infection in the early 1990s. This meant that even hospitals like Middlesex, which were offering progressive care and pioneering new ways of treating AIDS sick individuals, were in effect providing palliative care. Triple therapy, also known as Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART), revolutionised the treatment of HIV infection with the development of new classes of drugs in 1996 (Palmisano & Vella, 2011). And yet even before the advent of HAART, there was a gulf in the medical care offered in the global North, versus the South. This section aims to describe how Mendel's personal experience of this divide had a lasting impact on his approach to documenting the epidemic over the next twenty years.

Mendel's photographs taken at Middlesex Hospital in 1993 were markedly different to how people with HIV and AIDS had been represented up until this point. Mendel recalls how at the time there was a grim fascination with HIV and AIDS and reporting on the issue in Britain tended to be sensational (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27). As noted in Chapter 3, the first images of HIV-positive people produced in the 1980s tended to focus on physical suffering, social isolation and abandonment. By the time Network Photographers and The Terrence Higgins Trust organised the *Positive Lives* exhibition there was a growing awareness that these negative stereotypes needed to be challenged (Mayes & Stein, 1999:14-15).

The *Positive Lives* book includes a total of thirteen photo essays, most of which document the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS and family and friends. The essays address a range of related social issues, such as HIV in prisons, religious responses and grief and loss (Mayes

& Stein, 1999). The photographs and text aim to encourage viewers to engage with individual stories in order to humanise the disease. Mendel was interested in documenting the day-to-day lives of people who had developed AIDS-related illnesses and aimed to offer an insight into the realities of receiving care. Instead of showing AIDS sick people dying alone, Mendel's images document four young men and their partners, family and friends working together with hospital staff to improve the quality of their lives. The inclusion of the first names of the men (John, Ian, Steven and André) contributes to the depiction of them as individuals and the humanising way in which the narrative unfolds. Even within the contemporary context of the epidemic Mendel's essay entitled *The Wards* stands apart in its humanistic and compassionate documentation of HIV-positive individuals.

The way the series is photographed provides the viewer with an intimate insight into the patients being treated by hospital staff, as well as visits from partners, friends and family. Photographs of people embracing and holding hands refuted unfounded fears of HIV being passed on through casual contact (Figure 4.3). The images also foregrounded care and affection between gay men and their social support network (Figure 4.4), which countered the dominant media profiling of gay lifestyles as aberrant and sexually promiscuous.



Figure 4.3 Gideon Mendel. *The Wards*. John. 1993. Source: *Positive Lives* (Mayes & Stein, 1999).

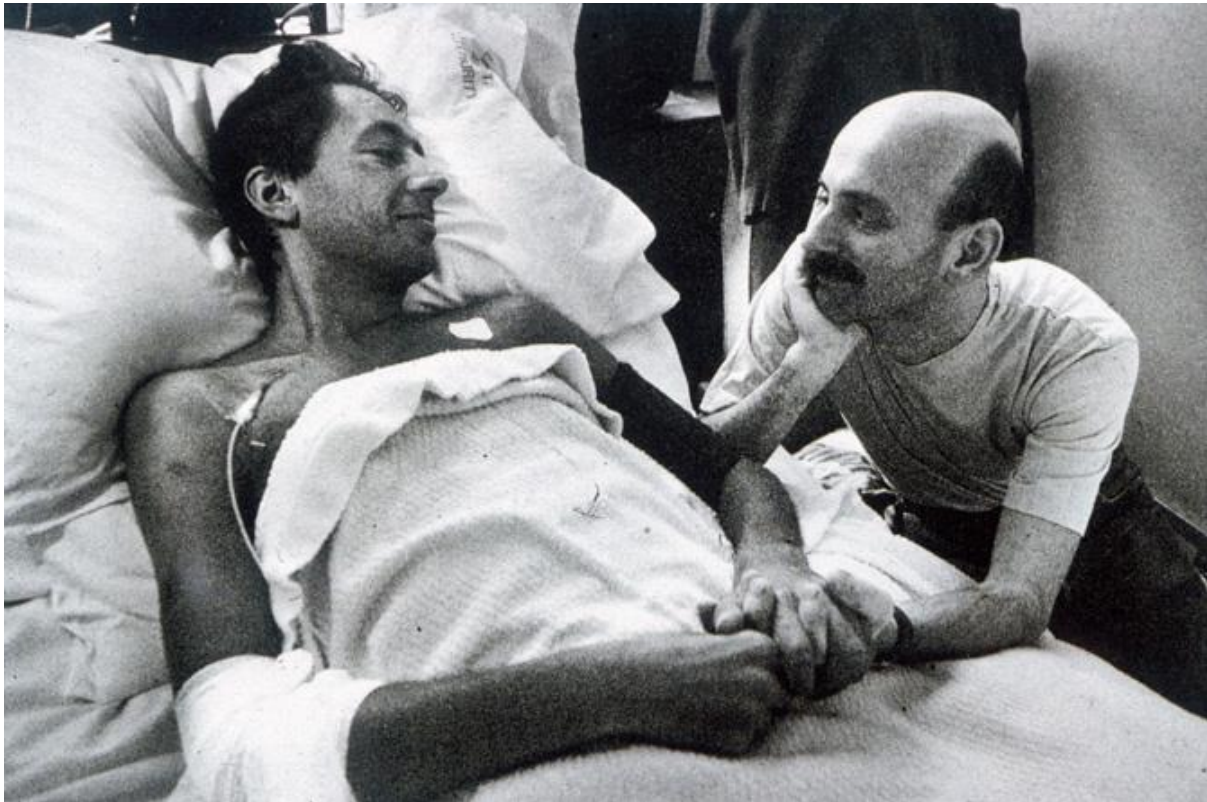


Figure 4.4 Gideon Mendel. *The Wards*. André. 1993. Source: *Positive Lives* (Mayes & Stein, 1999).

The scenes are homely with the patients mostly dressed in jeans and t-shirts or long sleeved shirts rather than medical gowns. Often the only reminder that the scene is taking place in a hospital is the institutional bed or curtain divider between patients. And yet some images do address the gritty reality of the treatment, such as the image of one patient having a painful procedure in order to enable him to administer his treatment at home through a tube placed in his chest. Mendel's images capture a high level of sophisticated and specialised medical care and attention. Mendel's essay 'reflects a society that has both the will and the capacity to care for all its citizens' (Godby, 2003:17).

A number of aesthetic decisions on Mendel's behalf meant that the images portrayed the disease in a way that foregrounded the care and love the men received. While the use of black and white film was informed by the technical challenges of photographing under fluorescent lighting, it contributed to the gentleness and intimacy of the images which were all taken using ambient light. Mendel explained his decision in the following way:

I guess I felt black and white was a bit more compassionate and emotional...whether that is personal or true I don't know, but I just felt more comfortable and...with the fluorescent lights I mean technically colour was quite hard to do in those kind of environments whereas black and white...just felt easier to be freer to be able to work without flash, to work without lighting, to work in a more unobtrusive manner (Mendel, personal interview, 2011 April 13).

The decision to work in black and white film without flash definitely did enable Mendel to work in such a way that it was easy for his subjects to ignore his presence. This is evidenced in the close framing of his images which focuses on the human interactions between those who were ill and their partners, family and friends as seen in Figure 4.3 and 4.4. This 'fly on the wall' approach is typical of traditional documentary photography and confirms the role of the photographer as 'witness'. The ability to document people in such a way is also often dependent on the photographer establishing good relationships with the subjects so that they feel completely at ease being photographed.

Apart from the normalising effect of Mendel's images, the series also highlighted some of the pioneering new approaches to treating patients at Middlesex hospital. This extended beyond medical treatments to include a radical altering of the traditional roles of patient, family, friends, partners and hospital staff. The patients were often very knowledgeable about their illness and participated in decisions about their treatment. Family and partners often stayed overnight in the hospital. Mendel's documenting of informal scenes of patients with their family and partners record a physical and emotional intimacy unseen before in images of HIV-positive people and rare for any patients. The care offered to the patients was also extended to the nursing staff. For instance, one of Mendel's photographs shows a nurse receiving Shiatsu massage as a form of stress relief.

The contrast between the care offered at Middlesex Hospital and the scenes Mendel captured a short while later at the Matibi Mission Hospital in Zimbabwe highlight one of the defining features of the global HIV epidemic during this period. Mendel's Matibi images reveal a poorly resourced hospital where even the provision of the most basic pain relief is absent. Families camped outside the hospital in order to prepare food to feed the sick (Figures 4.5). The conditions of poverty documented within the community suggest the long lasting social

impact of the epidemic where looking after the ill and burying the dead drained what meagre resources were at hand. Despite the differences in the circumstances of his subjects, Mendel employed a similar aesthetic approach to the Matibi images. The close cropping often emphasised the love and care extended by family members to those who were ill (Figure 4.5). The composition of this image focuses on the hands, and a small enamel container with a fish. The symbolic weight of the fish resonates with New Testament Christian iconography, but also reveals the meagre food supplies family could afford to bring to feed the ill. The fish was no doubt a prized food item and specially kept aside for the sick family member, exhibiting the care and concern of the family.



Figure 4.5 Gideon Mendel. Mission Hospital. Matibi, Zimbabwe. 1993.

Despite the publication of the images in *The Independent* newspaper in Britain in October 1993 (Godby, 2003), in a subsequent interview Mendel recounted how difficult it was to publish the story and that the editor was unhappy with the cover image because he feared it would result in a drop in sales (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). Another challenge posed by these images was their impact on British or Western perceptions of the

epidemic in Africa and the potential for these images to present the African subjects as passive:

From such images it is clear that Africa cannot cope with the scale, the costs, and the social consequences of the pandemic. But these images of HIV/AIDS differ from First World representations in other ways also. Unlike the Positive Lives project, which was published by English people, for English people, *AIDS: A challenge to African Health Care* was a project taken of an impoverished community by and for the First World media...[T]hese differences may constitute a formidable barrier to communities attempting to take responsibility for their own struggle against the disease (Godby, 2003:17).



Figure 4.6 Gideon Mendel. Mission Hospital. Matibi, Zimbabwe. 1993.

These images also fail to contextualise the crisis in African healthcare within a larger economic and political history. The global economic depression of the late 1970s together with African governments accepting structural adjustment programmes in exchange for loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) drastically limited health spending in African states (Iliffe, 2006:64). By the time Mendel was photographing the Matibi Mission Hospital

health care systems in many African countries, including Zimbabwe, were near collapse. Overworked local doctors had opted out of the public sector or had immigrated to more affluent countries (Hodes, 2007:13). Remaining doctors were often from European humanitarian organisations, as is confirmed in Mendel's photographs of the Matibi Mission Hospital where the doctor was Swiss (Figure 4.6).

In the same year as Mendel documented the Matibi Mission Hospital he was also sent to document the famine in Somalia where he had an experience that is said to have altered the nature of his interaction with African subjects going forward (Denes & Mendel, 2001:40). At a feeding station an aid worker took Mendel to a room where he was asked to photograph twelve children for whom nothing more could be done. The tragic circumstances of the children who had been left to die alone and his inability to communicate with them led to the realisation that any photographs he took would be profoundly dehumanising despite the humanitarian intentions of the organisation at the feeding station. While Denes identifies this as a turning point for Mendel in terms of how he approached photographing African subjects, I believe that Mendel's experience of photographing the mission hospital in Matibi after his work in Middlesex Hospital must also have had a profound effect on his approach to photographing the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa.

4.3 A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa (1993-2002)

The Matibi Mission Hospital essay was the start of a much larger investigation of the issue of HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. This section focuses on Mendel's work produced from 1993 onwards which culminated in the publication of the book *A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa* in 2001 (Mendel, 2001).³¹ During this period Mendel established himself as the pre-eminent photographer documenting the HIV epidemic in Africa. In 1996 he was granted the W. Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography for his engagement with HIV and AIDS in Africa and in 1997 he was awarded a first prize at the World Press Awards (Godby, 2003:17). The black and white images produced by Mendel in the 1990s not only brought him acclaim, but over time have also attracted criticism.

³¹ Many of the stories in the book had been brought together in 1998 and printed as a supplement also entitled *A Broken Landscape: HIV and AIDS in Africa* for the photography magazine *Reportage* (Godby, 2003:17).

A Broken Landscape was published in collaboration with Network Photographers and with funding from ActionAid which Mendel had worked with on several assignments. The book included images from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. The bulk of the stories in the book were produced as stand-alone photo essays for NGO clients, print media or in a personal capacity while on other assignments in the region. While many of the stories were published within organisations, and three were published in the British press, the book project aimed to make the images and the stories they told accessible to a much broader audience. The book is framed by an advocacy agenda which is made explicit on the jacket cover:

A Broken Landscape testifies to the extraordinary bravery and love which thrives in the most appalling of circumstances. It asks how humanity is allowing a treatable illness to ravage a continent, and it demands our response (Mendel, 2001).

With the decision to publish a book a structure was imposed on the content in order to create a new meta-narrative. The book is divided into three sections. Each section consists of a number of photo stories which are usually introduced with the subject's name, where they live and a first person account of some aspect of their experience. Many of the stories are focused on specific individuals and in some cases the narrative was developed over a period of months. The range of experience captured in the essays gives the reader a broad understanding of the challenges and responses to the HIV epidemic in the 1990s and early 2000s in sub-Saharan Africa. It also shows in excruciating detail the suffering caused by the disease at a time when it had been largely transformed into a manageable illness with antiretroviral treatment in the global North.

The first section focuses on HIV-positive individuals who are seriously ill. The horror of the physical wasting of the subjects is countered by the care they receive from family and friends. The text is critical in terms of communicating this message to the viewers. An example of this is the opening story of Joseph Gabriel:

I have been sick for 10 years now. I wake up in the morning and drink my tea. My brother washes me. When it is warm and dry like today I spend my days sitting outside my house under the shade my brother made. My mother or my brother carry

me here in the morning and I stay here until afternoon. I like listening to the radio – the music, the football and the news I enjoy...My friends pass by and tell me how their lives are going. They read the bible together with me. At the moment my life is rich. I have no pain...I have the love and care of my family (Mendel, 2001:14).



Figure 4.7 Gideon Mendel. Joseph Gabriel. Mwanza, Tanzania. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

Without the text, the overwhelming impression the images leave is of extreme suffering (Figure 4.7). While this story could be critiqued for confirming the stereotype of the ‘African AIDS victim’, the text together with the care captured in the photographs in the rest of the series, resists the reading of the images in this way. The image of an adult man being carried like a child by his mother echoes the Christian iconography of *The Pieta*, but also testifies to the visceral effects of the disease which causes extreme physical wasting (Figure 4.7).³² The symbolic weight of this image demands compassion from the viewer. The fact that Joseph Gabriel was taken care of at home reflected the reality for the vast majority of Africans infected with HIV in the 1990s and is evidenced in other stories that follow. Unable

³² This image was exhibited in a group show at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in 2003. This is a rare instance where one of Mendel’s HIV-related images was exhibited in a commercial gallery space.

to offer any treatment, or cope with the scale of the epidemic, hospitals would send patients home to be taken care of by their families until they died.



Figure 4.8 Gideon Mendel. Samkelisiwe Mkhwanazi. Ngwelezane, South Africa. Samkelisiwe is cared for by her mother Nesta. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

While many people were taken care of in the home, Mendel also records the impact of the epidemic on hospitals. One of the series is the Matibi Mission Hospital story which first appeared in *The Independent* newspaper, and was discussed in the section above. While not all the hospital scenes are bleak (Figure 4.8), the majority of the images taken in hospitals reveal the overwhelming number of patients needing care and the inability of the hospitals to cope with the epidemic (Figure 4.9). The burden of the epidemic on the hospitals is clearly articulated by Dr Maurice Bonongwe, director of the Government Hospital in Nkhotakota, Malawi:

Officially we have beds for 110 patients, but we now have about 130 patients and 250 outpatients a day. It's difficult to say accurately how many have died of AIDS because we have run out the reagent for testing and haven't been able to test...We lack equipment, we lack staff, we don't have medicines. We don't even have plaster

tape, so we have to use masking tape to attach drips or splints to patient's arms. We are overwhelmed in every aspect of the epidemic (Mendel 2001:50).



Figure 4.9 Gideon Mendel. Government Hospital. Nkhotakota, Malawi. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

Mendel's images in *A Broken Landscape* continue to employ the same visual language as the work he produced covering the anti-apartheid struggle and also his first essay focused on HIV and AIDS, *The Wards*. He continued to work using black and white film and his images are striking in the tonal range and the strong contrasts between highlights and deep shadow. In Figure 4.9, the use of strong diagonal lines leads the eye into the image. His compositions tend to focus on human emotions, such as Figure 4.8, where the crop emphasises the relationship between mother and daughter. This scene is comparable to Figure 4.4 that was taken in Middlesex Hospital and emphasises the similarity of Mendel's visual approach regardless of where in the world the images were taken.

The second section of the book continues with documenting funerals, which were also included in the first section. The testimonies in this section are hard hitting with accounts of the financially crippling consequences of deaths and funerals on already impoverished families and communities. The images also document the grim industry surrounding death

on such a large scale: corpses being prepared for burial, coffins being completed, mourners, graves dug side by side and multiple individuals being buried at once (Figures 4.10 and 4.11). Once again Mendel captures the drama of human emotion (Figure 4.11) or creates visual interest with the use of dramatic angles and cropping (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10 Gideon Mendel. Funerals. Copperbelt, Zambia. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

Other images record the work of home-based carers who travel to homes to take care of AIDS-sick individuals and their dependents (Mendel, 2001: 98-113). One of these series is set in Chikankata, Zambia, and first appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper in 2001 in an article entitled *The Lifesavers* which focused on responses by individuals and communities to the challenges of the HIV epidemic (Mendel & Denes, 2001). The gentleness and humanity captured in the images and accounts of the home-based carers offers some respite from the images of suffering and death, and yet the obvious illness and physical wasting of the patients signals their death in the near future (Figure 4.12). In this image, the composition draws the eye to the gentle touch of the home-based carer while simultaneously focusing on the exposed spine and shoulder blades of the ill woman. The compassion in the carer's face is also captured, while the identity of the patient is concealed to protect her from scrutiny.



Figure 4.11 Gideon Mendel. Nkhotakota, Malawi. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

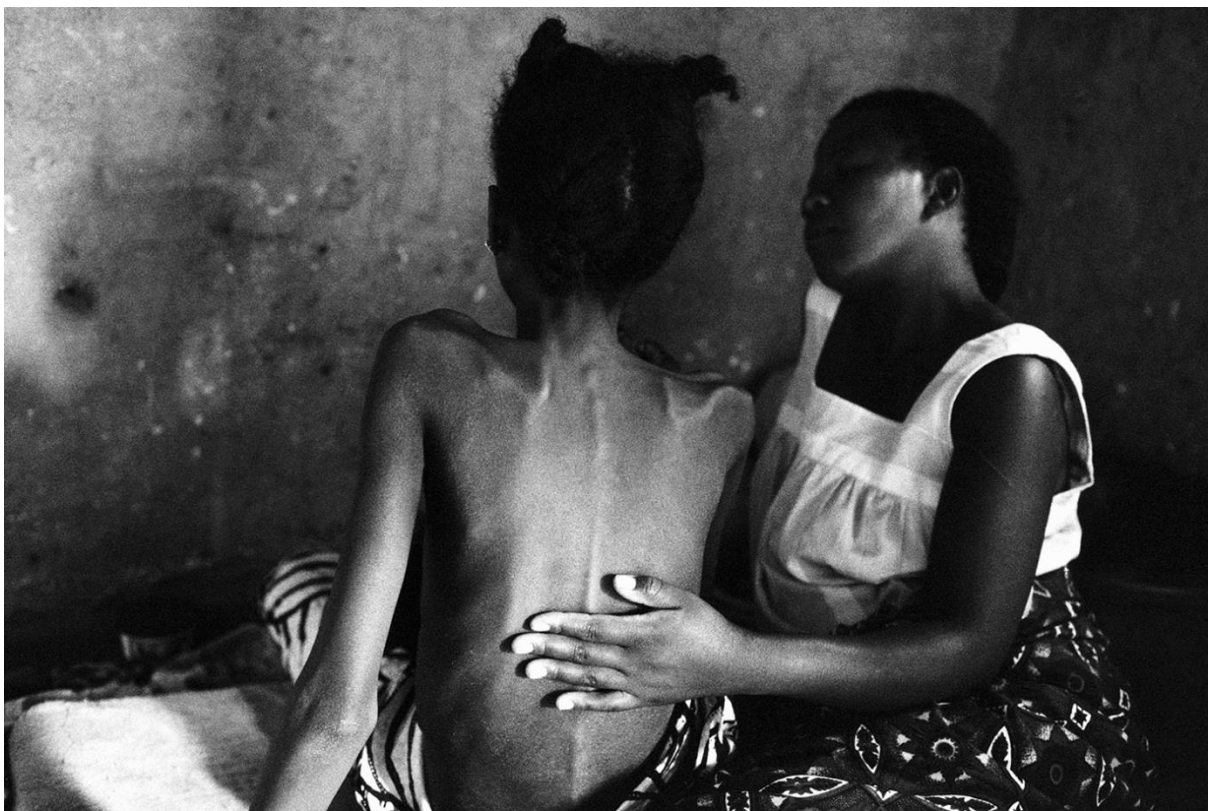


Figure 4.12 Gideon Mendel. Homecare. Ndola, Zambia. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.



Figure 4.13 Gideon Mendel. Orphans. Copperbelt, Zambia. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

The second section includes photographs that document the burden on families and communities of looking after children orphaned by the epidemic. In many instances elderly grandmothers are left with multiple grandchildren to care for and are unable to do so because of their own lack of resources (Figure 4.13). The low point of view of this image gives the family group a statuesque quality, but the details of the worn and dirty clothes, the basic structure of the house and the number of children emphasises the poverty of the circumstances. Some of the stories reveal children and young adults fending for themselves in the absence of parents. Subsequent critiques have argued that the press sought out images of ‘AIDS orphans’ because of the sensational and emotive nature of these stories, whereas in fact young people were mostly taken care of by extended family or other members of the community and were active in negotiating these relationships (Meintjes & Bray, 2005; Henderson, 2013:83). Despite these important critiques of images of ‘AIDS orphans’, it must also be recognised that the scale of the epidemic meant that these social networks were being stretched to the limit, and even though children were being taken care of by extended family, this remained an extremely difficult situation (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.14 Gideon Mendel. AIDS educators. Hlabisa, South Africa. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

The third section concludes the book with a focus on education and activism. This includes a wide range of initiatives such as support groups and education programmes at local clinics. A number of the images, such as the one above, emphasise condom demonstrations as a means of preventing the spread of the epidemic (Figure 4.14). Here the emphasis is on human interactions and once again composition and framing of the images create visual drama while also documenting the events. This is evident in Figure 4.14 where the crop focuses on the action in the foreground while recording the reactions of the audience. The way in which the camera meets the eyes of two individuals watching the demonstration confronts the viewer and creates the illusion of being in the moment the image was taken.

Another series focuses on Lonmin Mine in South Africa and documents the miners and the surrounding community, as well as sex workers providing education about sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. The larger socio-economic context implied by these images and the accompanying testimonies underscores the links between economic hardship and increased vulnerability to HIV infection. The image of miners in their dormitory accommodation (Figure 4.15) also highlights the ways apartheid era economic structures built

on migrant labour continued to put miners and other migrant labourers at risk of sexual disease. The image echoes photographs taken in the 1980s of the living conditions of miners (Figure 4.16).

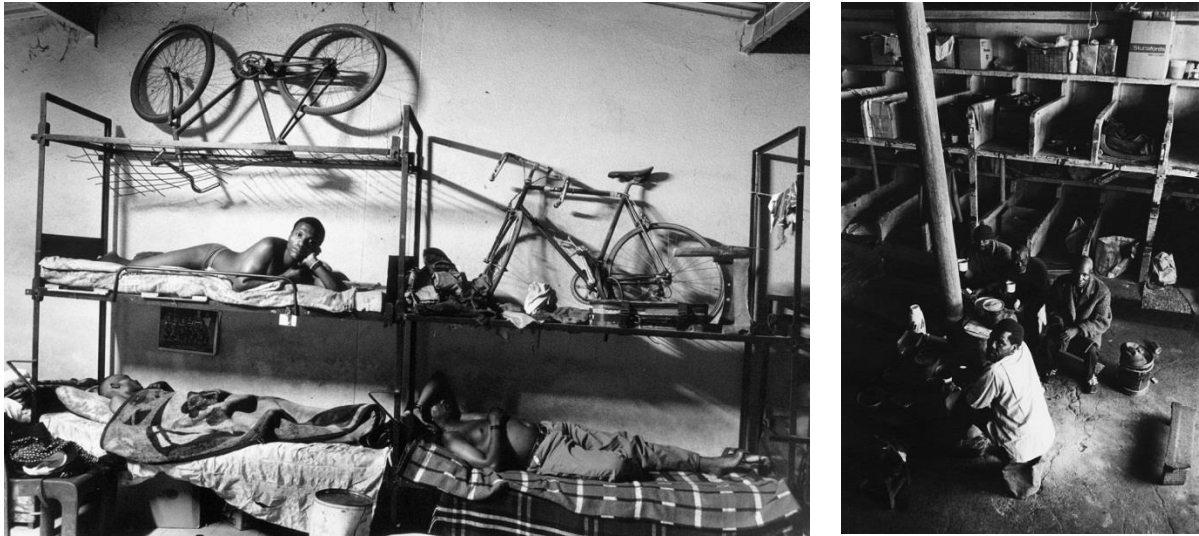


Figure 4.15 (left) Gideon Mendel. Miners in their dormitory accommodation. Lonmin Mine, Rustenberg, South Africa. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001. **Figure 4.16** (right) Ben MacLennan. Communal Stove and Concrete Beds. Source: *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* (Badsha 1986).

Other initiatives photographed by Mendel include AIDS education drama performances in Tanzania (Figure 4.17) and stories of individuals such as Florence Kumunhyu in Uganda who started an educational group (Figure 4.18). Another two stories document anti-AIDS clubs started by high school students in Uganda and Tanzania (Figure 4.19). These teenagers represent a challenge to more traditional cultural norms as is confirmed in the words of Susan Atuhura, the founder member of the Straight Talk Club ‘As teenagers we need people to guide us and teach us about things that can save our lives, yet many of our parents are too shy to tell us about sex and sexuality’ (Mendel, 2001:178). These various responses are specific to different regions and countries and are defined by individuals, rather than state policy or interventions. The intention of these images is to document responses of individuals and groups, who took the initiative to organise and respond to the impact of the HIV epidemic. These people represent African responses to the epidemic that are not linked to NGO and other aid organisations and thus represent an important aspect of self-determination.



Figure 4.17 Gideon Mendel. Angeningo Theatre. Pangani, Tanzania. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

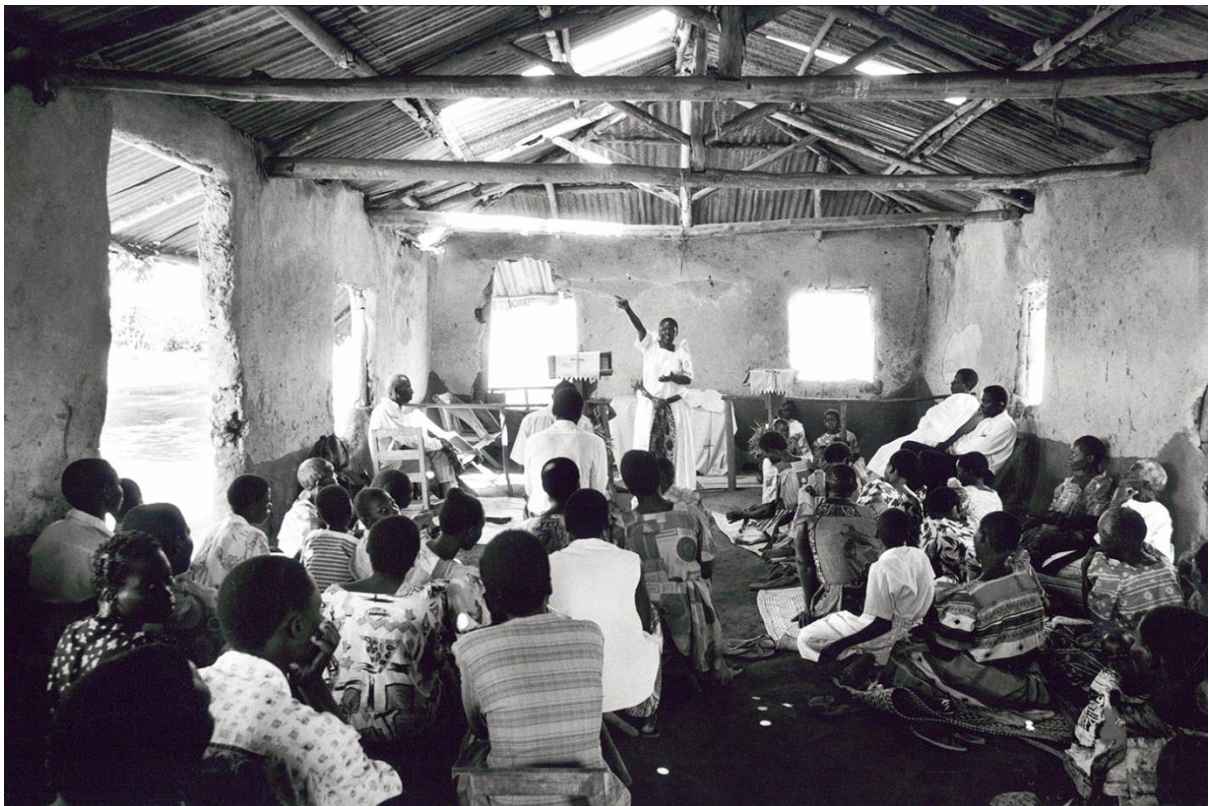


Figure 4.18 Gideon Mendel. Florence Kumuhyu. Iganga, Uganda. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.



Figure 4.19 Gideon Mendel. Anti-AIDS club. Lusaka, Zambia. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.



Figure 4.20 Gideon Mendel. The Treatment Action Campaign march at the International AIDS Conference 2000. Durban, South Africa. Source: *A Broken Landscape*. 2001.

One of the final images in the book documents a TAC march at the International AIDS conference in Durban in 2000 (Figure 4.20). This image strongly echoes the iconography of photographs of the anti-apartheid struggle and appears on the TAC's homepage. TAC's adoption of many struggle tactics, such as the toyi-toyi shown in this image, as well as Mendel's links to documenting the 1980s, makes this image particularly potent. The text that accompanies this image quotes the TAC chairman Zackie Achmat and describes the march in terms of its importance in changing international perceptions about AIDS in Africa. Achmat argues 'The image of AIDS in Africa is usually one of powerless people, emaciated and dying. What the march showed is that there are many of us who are healthy and fighting to stay healthy' (Mendel, 2001:194). In this way the book concludes with a vision for the future and the active role played by ordinary citizens in altering the course of the HIV epidemic in South Africa. It also points to the direction Mendel's work would take in the months surrounding the exhibition of *A Broken Landscape* in South Africa in 2001-2002.

4.3.1 Text, testimony and the representation of people living with HIV

An important aspect of *A Broken Landscape* is the use of text to frame the book project as a whole, as well as provide specific details to accompany each photo essay. The prologue to the book is written by Noerine Kaleeba, founder of The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) in Uganda and a significant leader, activist and spokesperson for HIV in Africa (Grebe, 2012). The afterword was produced by Reverend Gideon Byamugisha who was the first African priest to make his HIV-positive status known publically. Apart from these two texts, the book includes multiple shorter texts which are written as first person narratives and have been discussed above. This section will discuss the role of the text in more detail.

Mendel's use of testimony aimed to provide the subjects with a means of representing themselves alongside his photographs. In all instances, the text is credited to a specific person with the inclusion of first and second names to accompany the testimony. Mendel pioneered the use of first person narratives which have now become a common approach in social documentary projects. He arrived at this idea because of a sense of the inadequacy of images alone to provide insight into the greater context of the epidemic and also the personal experience of the subject (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). It is also worth recalling Mendel's experience in Somalia in 1993 and his concerns with the potential for

images of human suffering to be deeply dehumanising. Mendel alludes to well-known critiques which argue that documentary images speak for the subjects (Rosler, 1992; Solomon-Godeau, 1995) when he says ‘I found putting people’s words next to their pictures made a difference and helped...you know sometimes as photographers we operate in quite defensive ways’ (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

Elsewhere it has been argued that the use of the testimonies together with images demonstrates a more collaborative approach to documentary photographic practice (Josephy, 2002:9). And yet not everyone has viewed Mendel’s use of testimony in such a positive light. In her assessment of Mendel’s work, Thomas critiques ‘the ruse of testimony as guarantor of the authenticity of the photographed subject’ (Thomas, 2007:116). She goes on to argue that in later multimedia work, such as *The Harsh Divide*,³³ the use of testimony is solely a means of ‘providing signs of their humanness, which would, otherwise, not be apparent’ (Thomas, 2007:117). This assessment implies that Mendel’s images are dehumanising and that his use of testimony is a form of deceit which is connected to promoting his project. I find this argument cynical and not based on any evidence or explanation of what elements within the images are dehumanising. Furthermore, Thomas fails to consider the use of testimony as an early expression of Mendel’s move towards giving the subject agency, which culminates in the subjects documenting their own lives in the *Through Positive Eyes* project.

While Mendel’s investment in photographing HIV is informed both by advocacy and potentially more selfish, personal goals, his commitment to documenting HIV and AIDS far exceeds the parameters of a job. In the light of his sustained engagement with the issue and the ways in which Mendel continued to experiment with ways of representing his subjects that extended to voice recordings and other collaborative strategies, Thomas’s critique fails to evaluate the use of testimony within the time period the work first appeared in. Other photographers, such as Sue Williamson and Gisèle Wulfsohn,³⁴ were similarly experimenting

³³ *The Harsh Divide* was an experimental project where Mendel digitally stitched multiple images together to create a 360 degree image. The project was also published online where the images became interactive. By placing the computer mouse over the image the viewer was able to hear and read the testimonies of individuals in the image. *The Harsh Divide* was the title of four short multimedia films.

³⁴ Sue Williamson’s series *From the Inside* paired black and white portraits of the subjects with colour images documenting a statement on the issue of HIV/AIDS made by the subject graffitied onto a public space. Gisèle

with new ways of pairing text with their subjects as a way of enabling the subject a degree of self-representation. It is also useful to see Mendel's use of textual testimony as a stepping stone to other collaborative projects, which extended the idea of the subject representing themselves. In his work on HIV, after the publication and exhibition of *A Broken Landscape*, Mendel experimented with a number of different ways of telling the stories of people affected by the epidemic. Some were undeniably less successful than others in visual terms, but this does not diminish the intention of the work which was to continue to promote the work of individuals and groups involved in addressing the epidemic.

While the use of testimony and other forms of text have their limitations, it is significant that photographers such as Mendel, Wulfsohn and Williamson were invested in providing an insight into their subjects' opinions and experiences. The testimonies included in *A Broken Landscape* are not verbatim and were initially constructed from notes taken while photographing the subject. Later Mendel used a voice recorder to gather the subject's testimony (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). Despite the constructed nature of the text, the intention was to increase the viewer's understanding of the subject's life and present them as an individual within a specific social world. In this way the testimonies foreground the subjectivity of the individuals and they are not nameless victims.

Mendel has also used testimony in other projects not connected to HIV and AIDS, such as the floods in Pakistan in 2010. However, in this instance, an interview with Mendel revealed that he felt the testimonies failed to contribute to the meaning of the images because the extent of the destruction to the lives of the subjects was immediately apparent to the viewer (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). In the same interview, Mendel reflected that there was something particular to the issue of HIV and AIDS that gave the testimonies their impact:

I think it might have to do with psychology and stuff. With HIV and AIDS you are working with people who... have been forced by their engagement with their disease to deal with quite personal and quite big issues of life and death... maybe part of it has been because they have been through some kind of counselling process they have

Wulfsohn's *Living Openly* portraits were displayed with text explaining the details of the lives of the people in the images.

some kind of...psychological depth to their response to what they are going through and often their narratives are really, really interesting and quite profound and actually say more about the human condition (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

Mendel's assessment of the testimonies emphasises their humanising function and the way they often communicated more broadly about the human condition. The use of testimony is an important, if imperfect, tool to building greater understanding, and ultimately empathy, within the viewer who is far removed from the subject's world. It is also a means of resisting the stereotype of the 'African AIDS victim' because it emphasises the individual subject within their social context.

4.3.2 Negotiating NGOs and advocacy: challenges and rewards

As previously noted, the International AIDS Conference held in Durban in 2000 refocused the world's attention on the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. The early 2000s saw an increase in international journalism reporting on the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa with a strong emphasis on how the absence of antiretroviral treatment was resulting in widespread suffering and death. In 2001, James Nachtwey (discussed in Chapter 1) and Don McCullin produced images that documented the devastation and human loss caused by the epidemic. The fact that the same message that Mendel had first told years earlier in the 1990s needed to be retold to the international community suggests the limited life of images in the media and the extent to which little action had taken place in the interim. In the early 2000s the key message these photojournalists aimed to convey was the responsibility of the international community to intervene and reduce the costs of antiretroviral treatment for the developing world (Mendel & Toolis, 2000; McCullin, 2001; Nachtwey & McGeary, 2001). It was within this climate of renewed advocacy that Mendel published *A Broken Landscape* (Mendel, 2001).

Throughout the 1990s Mendel's work on HIV and AIDS was enabled by relationships he formed with NGOs providing support and care for people affected by the epidemic. It was through these organisations that Mendel was initially introduced to individuals and communities he photographed. Mendel's documentation during this period and in particular his ability to return to the same country and often the same places and people over a number

of months or years meant that he developed an understanding of the local issues in each region. This level of sustained engagement and his relationships with NGOs and aid organisations meant that he was constantly in touch with developments in care and treatment and approaches to education and prevention. However, in an interview Mendel revealed that he was not blind to other less beneficial aspects of this arrangement:

I mean it has been crucial to my work over the years and maybe also to some extent has compromised my work. You know...maybe I could be criticised...for doing corporate NGO public relations as opposed to being a real story teller (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

Mendel's self-awareness added an interesting dimension to the interview process and my analysis of his work because it strengthened the very real sense I had of Mendel's trajectory. His twenty year engagement with documenting the epidemic was shaped not only by breakthroughs in treatment and the nature of the relationships he forged, but also his responses to criticism of his work. Mendel was not alone in his reservations about the potential limitations of NGO work. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, other South African photographers who have worked for NGO clients confirmed that while not true of all organisations, there were instances when they felt their work had been severely compromised because of strict requirements. Some organisations even provided shot lists detailing the precise images they wanted (Hugo, personal interview, 2012 May 10), while others prescribed certain aspects such as a ban on images where the subject meets the viewer's eye (Weinberg, personal interview, 2012 February 24). As Fred Richten points out the dangers of these kinds of arrangements is that the photographer is seen as '...a possible collaborator, open to accusations of configuring poverty or any other social issue to make it more reader-friendly and to advance specific aims' (2009:89).

According to Mendel, his relationships with NGOs and aid organisations were varied (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). So while Mendel was commissioned to photograph many of the stories included in *A Broken Landscape*, he was often given creative freedom in terms of his approach to the assignments. Other commissions were more constrained with the demand for specific images. And yet Mendel would often 'piggyback' his own projects onto these assignments and photograph additional stories on the same trip.

There were also more collaborative relationships, such as his work with the TAC in 2001 and 2002. Mendel's relationship with the TAC undoubtedly benefitted both parties. The TAC welcomed Mendel because his documentation of their activism helped project their story onto the world stage and bring attention to their cause. At the same time, Mendel had access to one of the most powerful AIDS activist stories in the world.

Mendel's engagement with NGOs produced some of the most sustained and insightful photo essays on HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. And yet Mendel was not immune to having to contend with very real, emotional and moral questions about the relevance and role of his photography. The story of Mzokhona Malevu that appears as the longest essay in the book *A Broken Landscape* is testament to this (Mendel, 2001:68-86). Mendel photographed this young man in the final nine months of his life and both he and his family requested that Mendel document his funeral, which was intended to be an AIDS education funeral (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

Despite the potential advocacy function of documenting Malevu's story, in the same interview Mendel speaks about his struggle with the moral dilemma of whether or not he should have intervened instead of simply photographing the story (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2). At the time antiretroviral treatment was not available in South Africa and so it was only a matter of time before Malevu died. With his connections to organisations, such as ActionAid, Mendel could have potentially provided Malevu with antiretroviral therapy and prolonged his life. Mendel talks about his dilemma in the following way:

You know looking at that work now and thinking about those times...should I have even done that work? I mean he didn't have access to ARVs and I had access to his life...I mean obviously the story telling was important but I don't know, someone could be very critical of me for being an objective photographer in that situation and not playing more of a role. I don't know. What can you do with an individual when the hospitals are not providing ARVs or medication? (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

This demonstrates the attendant self-doubt and angst that accompanied Mendel's documentation of the HIV epidemic during this period and provides a useful insight into the personal cost of documenting human suffering. Despite Mendel's conviction in the ability of his photographs to raise awareness, he also experienced very real doubts that made him question his purpose as a photographer.

While it is impossible to quantify the impact of Mendel's photographs in relation to funding for AIDS programmes in Africa, correspondence with individuals employed by the organisations he worked for in this period, including UNAIDS, ActionAid and DFID, does go some way to confirming the contribution Mendel's images made, albeit from a biased perspective. Robin Gorna, who was heading up the DFID Global Team for AIDS, argues:

I don't think we could credit [Mendel] directly with changing the policy (the Secretary of State Hilary Benn was particularly struck by his direct discussions with leaders in Africa who wanted treatment for their people), but I am in no doubt that [his] photographs created the backdrop that allowed the policy change to happen. The policy environment has to change for politicians to take new decisions, and the scale of coverage of [Mendel's] images meant that they reached a broad range of UK citizens who influence how politicians make the choices they make (Gorna, personal communication, 2012 September 27).

A similar point about the role of photography in increasing awareness among the public, which in turn put pressure on politicians to make certain policy decisions, is also made by UNAIDS Director of Communications, Annemarie Hou:

[Mendel] has kept pace with the responses as results have happened – giving a more accurate picture of the state of the epidemic and its impact on people's lives. While devastation “sells” it can become a spiral to continue to only show despair—Gideon has been able get people to respond to what is actually happening; good and bad. His stories then are shared over and over to help show what is possible – from health care workers, people living with HIV to policy makers in-country and globally. I think it would not be too bold to say his work helped us reach 8 million people on treatment today (Hou, personal communication, 2012 September 12).

These two appraisals of the role of Mendel's documentation of the epidemic offer a very positive assessment of his work in terms of its advocacy function. While Mendel's working relationship with these two organisations means this assessment is far from objective or neutral it is still significant that these organisations evaluated the potential role his photography played in furthering their goals of providing treatment and support for people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. From their statements, it is clear that these two organisations viewed photography as an important communication and public education tool which informs policy.

4.3.3 The Exhibition of *A Broken Landscape* at the Iziko South African National Gallery (2001-2002)

In addition to the publication of the book *A Broken Landscape*, a selection of the images was also exhibited in Britain, followed by South Africa in December 2001-April 2002 (Godby, 2003). The Iziko South African National Gallery hosted the exhibition for close on five months and it then travelled to Museum Africa in Newtown, Johannesburg in June 2002. The exhibition format of Mendel's work developed into a radical documentary project that responded to what was happening in South Africa at the time (Godby, 2003). During the five months the show was in Cape Town Mendel constantly produced new work which was extremely experimental. Building on an earlier assessment of this exhibition (Godby, 2003), this section seeks to reveal how Mendel's approach to documenting HIV and AIDS took a very different direction at this point, fuelled by the unique political circumstances of the South African epidemic at the time.

The exhibition of *A Broken Landscape* was not the first time Mendel's images of HIV and AIDS had been exhibited in a gallery context in South Africa. In 1995, Mendel was instrumental in bringing the original 1993 *Positive Lives* exhibition, which had included his series *The Wards*, to the Iziko South African National Gallery (Godby, 2003:17). One of the conditions of bringing the *Positive Lives* show to Cape Town was the addition of a South African series in order to increase its relevance. Mendel produced a series of images taken in

Hlabisa in Kwazulu-Natal which was one of the worst affected areas at the time.³⁵ Prior to the 1995 exhibition, there was very limited public coverage of HIV and AIDS in South Africa (Godby, 2003:17).

For the 2001-2002 exhibition of *A Broken Landscape*, Mendel originally planned to be involved in the hanging and opening of the show and then return to London and continue his assignment-based work. However, on arrival in South Africa, Mendel experienced first-hand the TAC's activism surrounding the provision of antiretroviral treatment and decided to stay and document what emerged as a pivotal moment in the South African history of the epidemic. Despite the growing number of AIDS deaths, the South African government remained steadfast in its refusal to acknowledge the efficacy of antiretroviral treatment which was unavailable in the public healthcare sector and well beyond the reach of the vast majority of HIV-positive South Africans because of the cost. By late 2001, the courts had already ruled in favour of the TAC and colleagues who filed a court motion to compel the Health Minister to provide the antiretroviral drug Nevirapine in state hospitals to prevent the vertical transmission of the virus from mother to child. However, the government appealed against the verdict which further delayed the process with the court ruling in favour of TAC again in July 2002 (Nattrass, 2007:95-98). Mendel's arrival and the exhibition of his work coincided precisely with the six month period between the two court cases at the height of the struggle for the provision of antiretroviral treatment.

From the start, Mendel's exhibition was positioned as a platform for engaging the South African public in the political and social developments taking place regarding the provision of antiretroviral treatment (Godby, 2003:18). The exhibition was opened on World AIDS Day 2001 by TAC Chairperson, Zackie Achmat, accompanied by the TAC choir and other members of the activist community. Mendel became increasingly involved in documenting the TAC's awareness campaigns and other activities which resulted in a number of innovative visual interventions in the gallery space, as well as in the local media. This meant that in addition to Mendel's black and white photographs from *A Broken Landscape*, a portion of the exhibition became a changing exhibit where Mendel displayed his experimental photographic responses to what was taking place on the ground, as well as

³⁵ It is interesting to note that Graeme Williams also worked in the same area to produce the series of portraits discussed in Chapter 3.

inviting participatory events such as Memory Box workshops³⁶ (Godby, 2003:19). The engaged nature of this aspect of the exhibition transformed the gallery into an activist site, as well as a 'live documentary space' with regular updates of what was happening on the ground (Godby, 2003:18). In an interview, Mendel revealed that with the publication of *A Broken Landscape*, he was photographically exhausted and felt he either had to stop photographing HIV and AIDS or else had to do so in a very different way (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 2).

One of the programmes that Mendel became involved in documenting was a pilot study which provided antiretroviral treatment to a small number of people living in Khayelitsha, a poor township on the outskirts of Cape Town. In response to the government's resistance to the provision of antiretroviral treatment, MSF, the University of Cape Town and the Western Cape Provincial Health Department³⁷ started a pilot program to demonstrate not only the clinical efficacy of the drugs, but also that contrary to government argument at the time, people living in poor socio-economic circumstances could successfully adhere to the treatment regimen (Natrass, 2007). Mendel's collaboration with the TAC and MSF during this period altered his engagement with the epidemic and made a lasting impact on his photographic work. Mendel reflects on this period in the following way:

With the book just published I wanted to work in colour and do something different so I was shooting off lots of different ideas. So I had this idea of doing something that could be art and activism, and firstly I hit a very receptive nerve at that moment with what was happening in Khayelitsha with MSF and Treatment Action Campaign...there were protest marches...I was welcomed very warmly into that world (Mendel, personal interview, 2011 April 13).

During this period Mendel worked digitally or used colour slide film to produce series that were a radical departure from the traditional black and white images he had produced for *A Broken Landscape*. At this point Mendel moved away from the traditional documentary

³⁶ Memory boxes were pioneered in Uganda by HIV-positive mothers before the advent of antiretroviral treatment. As part of a support group activity, mothers would decorate cardboard boxes and then use the boxes to store keepsakes, birth certificates, photographs and other items that they wished to leave for their children.

³⁷ Although the National Health Department under ANC rule opposed the rollout of antiretroviral treatment at this point, the Western Cape was under the leadership of the Democratic Alliance and supported the pilot programme.

aesthetic that had characterised his work up until this point and which was evidenced in his anti-apartheid struggle work up until the completion of his *A Broken Landscape* project. Apart from no longer working in black and white, Mendel also increasingly choreographed his images and engaged in interactive portraits where the subject presented themselves for the camera. This is a complete antithesis of the ‘fly on the wall’ approach where the subjects appear unaware of his presence.



Figure 4.21 Gideon Mendel. An installation view of the ‘contact sheet’ images in the Iziko South African National Gallery. 2001-2002. Photographer: Michael Godby

One of Mendel’s colour experiments at the time involved producing large contact sheets³⁸ (Figure 4.21). Some of these contact sheets were genuine contact sheets, while others had been constructed by Mendel photographing in a particular sequence with the intention of displaying them within the contact sheet format (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 28). In this way a sequence of images was shot in order to narrate a story within the contact sheet. Traditionally contact sheets are used by photographers to edit their work and then choose which images from a roll of film they want to print. Contact sheets are never displayed in exhibitions and are seen as part of the photographer’s working process. The

³⁸ A contact sheet is a photographic print where an entire roll of developed film is cut into strips which are placed directly on a sheet of photographic paper and then exposed to light and developed. The result is a single image comprising multiple smaller images recorded on the film.

display of the contact sheets not only resulted in the development of an unusual aesthetic, but also communicated a sense of urgency by presenting images unedited.



Figure 4.22 Gideon Mendel. One of the 'frame portraits' where the subject chose to keep their identity hidden but included a bicycle to symbolise the healthy childhood of her daughter who had tested HIV-negative. The mother had received antiretroviral treatment to prevent transmission of HIV from mother-to-child.

Another series consisted of collaborative portraits with people living with HIV. The people that Mendel photographed were either affiliated to the TAC or were receiving antiretroviral treatment from the MSF pilot project (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 28). These portraits were created using a gaffer tape³⁹ frame stuck to a wall.⁴⁰ The subjects were then invited to present themselves in any way they wished within the border of the frame (Godby, 2003). These portraits often took unusual forms as some people chose not to reveal their identity. In place of a traditional head and shoulders shot, one person held up a bicycle, which although incomplete, symbolised the healthy and active childhood her child would

³⁹ Gaffer tape is a broad, industrial plastic tape typically used in the film industry and by photographers to secure equipment. It is also known as duct tape.

⁴⁰ Mendel had originally devised this technique prior to 2001 when commissioned by Oxfam and UNICEF to take portraits of an advocacy group in Mozambique, none of whom were comfortable in revealing their identities because of stigma.

example was the display of a letter addressed to the then president Thabo Mbeki appealing to him to alter government policy and commit to the provision of antiretroviral treatment. The letter was signed by multiple TAC activists and included portraits of them. A travelling version of the exhibition was also produced with photographs printed directly onto plasticised canvas which was displayed at the Khayelitsha library (Godby, 2003) (Figures 4.24). Some of the canvases were used in a TAC protest march surrounding the Nevirapine court case. Reflecting on this period and the impact it had on his approach to documenting the epidemic, Mendel argues:

The issues became a different kind of news story certainly in South Africa where you had this mobilisation and the return to the kind of rhetoric of struggle around the issue or HIV and AIDS...particularly you know when you had denialist leadership in government. It was all quite shocking stuff and from my side...I was definitely engaged and changed. I became less of a photojournalist and I hate to use the word, but an activist and more linked to organisations and saw myself as making work that...was telling people's stories but was also part of the fight for treatment (Mendel, personal interview, 2011 April 13).

Despite Mendel's professed hesitancy to label his work during this period as 'activist', he was of course very familiar with the discourse of activism and activist imagery having photographed the anti-apartheid struggle in his formative years. It is also clear that Mendel enjoyed the stimulation and pressure of working in this kind of a space and it did enable him to experiment with new approaches to the photographic medium which he perhaps would have been hesitant to employ in a more conservative environment. While not all these experimental approaches were necessarily visually resolved, this period did provide Mendel with the freedom to use his craft in different ways. It is doubtful if he would have continued to photograph HIV and AIDS beyond *A Broken Landscape* had the opportunity to document the TAC's story not presented itself.



Figure 4.24 Gideon Mendel. A photograph documenting the exhibition outside the Khayelitsha library. 2002. Photographer: Michael Godby.

Mendel's decision to stay in Cape Town after the exhibition opening involved taking personal risks. In the absence of funding or financial support, he moved his young family to Cape Town for the duration of his documentation and involvement in TAC and MSF activities. Even though Mendel did sell some of the material to *The Guardian*, in an interview he revealed that he did not come close to recouping the costs incurred during this period (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27). Apart from the financial risks Mendel took in order to commit himself to the documentation of this moment in the South African epidemic's history, his decision to continue to document HIV and AIDS was criticised by colleagues who felt his experimental work was not photographically as strong as his early black and white work (Mendel, 2008b). And yet the increased collaboration and move away from traditional forms of photography, which will be discussed in the section that follows, reflects not only Mendel's testing of the medium, but also changes in the media environment and in particular the influence of online reporting.

4.4 Ten years: *The Guardian* newspaper (2000-2010)

In 2000 Mendel entered into a ten year agreement with *The Guardian* newspaper where they undertook to publish an annual photo essay on the HIV epidemic in Africa on World AIDS Day. The photo essays and accompanying articles were published in *The Weekend* magazine supplement of *The Guardian*. This provided Mendel with a powerful platform for expanding the British public's understanding of the impact of the epidemic on sub-Saharan Africa. The relationship between public opinion and its impact on policy, especially in relation to the provision of antiretroviral treatment in sub-Saharan Africa, has been highlighted above. This section describes the different approaches Mendel experimented with during this period with the intention of demonstrating how these different forms responded not only to the challenge of finding new ways of telling the story of HIV and AIDS in Africa, but also reveal the impact of online media reporting on Mendel's practice.

An important aspect of the work that appeared within *The Guardian* was its publication both in print and online. This meant that a much broader international audience outside of Britain was also exposed to the content. In addition to the reach of the work, the amount of space given over to the images and the articles that accompanied them was generous and allowed for in-depth reporting. This was especially so in the first few years of the agreement where a journalist often accompanied Mendel on assignment. This ten year period coincided with major shifts in the media industry with the global economic downturn and the impact of the online environment, which resulted in substantial budget cuts and loss of media jobs. This meant that photographers were less likely to be commissioned and had to pitch to publications in order to have work published. In this increasingly competitive environment photographers also often had to provide their own text. This is apparent in Mendel's essays for *The Guardian* from 2004 onwards.

Another constraint to publishing work on the HIV epidemic within the media was the pervasive advertising displayed alongside the images and articles. Many readers were highly critical of the insensitivity of the advertising as is evidenced in a letter to the editor written in response to Mendel's first story published in December 2000:

Gideon Mendel's photographs of the impact of Aids in Malawi were both shocking and challenging (*While the World Looks Away*, December 2), but I could not help but be more appalled by their juxtaposition with the advertisements. On the right-hand page lies the dying Eliza, gaunt and naked, unable to afford the necessary drugs; on the left, a western woman, in almost identical repose, beside the latest 'wireless, stylish and advanced computing'. On the right, a mother gazes into space as her sixth child awaits death; on the left, a young man uses his mobile to book a 'cheap flight to the sun'...On the right, we imagine the stench of death at Nhkotakota District Hospital; on the left, 'the new fragrance' by Kenzo...Perhaps we should be grateful to Weekend for staving off the blindness of indifference in this unjust world. Ed Cox, *Levenshulme*, Manchester (Cox, 2000).

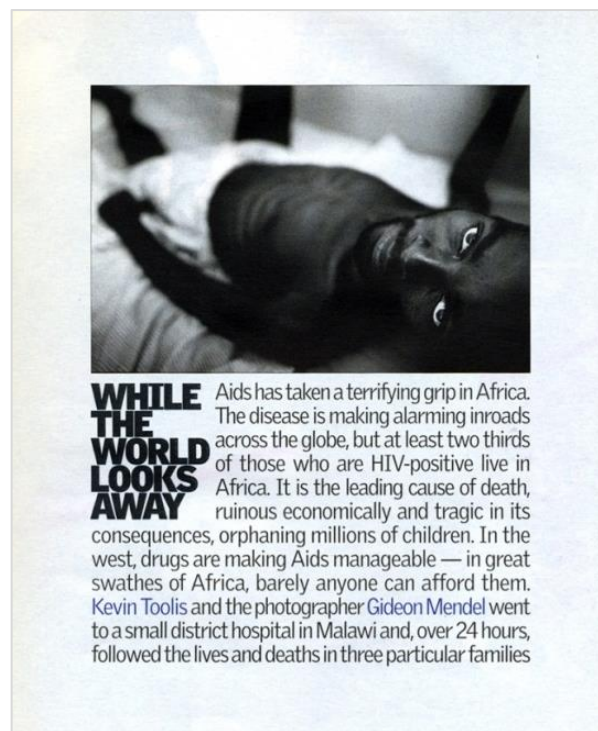
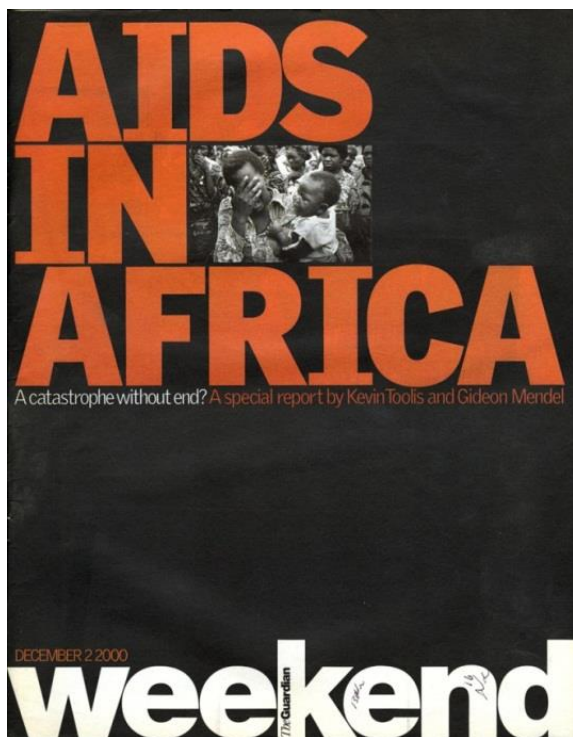


Figure 4.25 Gideon Mendel. 2000. The cover page of the Weekend supplement for *The Guardian's* first article on HIV and AIDS in Africa. Source: *The Guardian* **Figure 4.26** Gideon Mendel. 2000. The first page of the article as it appeared in the supplement. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.

Mendel's first article was an emotive call to arms revealed by the titles *AIDS in Africa: A Catastrophe without end?* and *While the World Looks Away* (Figure 4.25 and 4.26). The importance of the text in framing the reading of the images cannot be overstated. Without the article, which clearly articulated the intention of both photographer and journalist, Mendel's black and white images could easily have been read as confirming negative stereotypes of

‘African AIDS’ because of their focus on suffering and death. And yet as argued earlier, the recurrent critique of ‘victim’ photography does not always ring true, especially when photographers, including Dean Hutton, Fanie Jason and Gideon Mendel, have argued for the production of such images and the need to literally show the suffering because of the continued denial of the impact of the epidemic.

The opening paragraph of the article framed the epidemic in two ways for its British readership: firstly, as disproportionately affecting sub-Saharan Africa and secondly, as a disease that has largely been made manageable in the West with the advent of antiretroviral treatment:

AIDS has taken a terrifying grip in Africa. The disease is making alarming inroads across the globe, but at least two thirds of those who are HIV-positive live in Africa. It is the leading cause of death, ruinous economically and tragic in its consequences, orphaning millions of children. In the west, drugs are making Aids manageable - in great swathes of Africa, barely anyone can afford them (Mendel & Toolis, 2000:13).

The images were taken in Malawi where Mendel and journalist Kevin Toolis documented three families at Nkhokotota Government Hospital and surrounds over a twenty-four hour period. The article that accompanied the twenty-five images was over five thousand words long and in addition to providing an understanding of the broad context of the epidemic in the region, it also described the individual circumstances of the people photographed. In this way, the article presented the subjects as complex individuals affected by the epidemic in tragic ways. The scale of the epidemic, as well as the profound social and financial impact it had on families and broader communities was illustrated in stark ways. Many of the images were republished in the context of *A Broken Landscape*, but were much more comprehensively contextualised in the newspaper article.

The second article published in 2001 was entitled *The Life Savers* and provided a very different insight and shows how local individuals are positively addressing the impact of the epidemic in their communities (Mendel & Denes, 2001). The article filled eleven pages with images and text documenting a wide variety of responses in Uganda, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania including home-based care, peer education, youth groups and activism.

These images also appeared in *A Broken Landscape* and the same verbal testimonies that accompanied the images in the newspaper were also used in the book. In addition to these testimonies gathered from interviews with the subjects, journalist Melissa Denes also contributed an article to contextualise and situate the different stories within a larger narrative of African responses to the epidemic. The opening lines of the article confirm this objective:

For eight years, photographer Gideon Mendel has turned his camera on Africa's Aids epidemic. Not just on the sick, the dying and the grieving – the harrowing images with which we all have become familiar – but on the positive steps being taken to tackle the crisis and the people fighting for a healthier future (Mendel & Denes, 2001:39).

In this way, the article provided a strong counter-narrative to the dominant stereotype of passive Africans so heavily critiqued elsewhere (Treichler, 1999:101-106). These stories operated similarly within the context of *A Broken Landscape* where they all appeared in the concluding section of the book.



Figure 4.27 Gideon Mendel. 2002. The front page of *The Weekend* supplement in *The Guardian* newspaper profiling one of Mendel's 'frame portraits'. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.

The third article published in 2002 was entitled *Looking AIDS in the face: the South African people's fight for treatment* (Figure 4.27). This story reflects Mendel's transition to working

in colour when photographing HIV and draws on his experimental documentation of the TAC in 2002. The frame portraits, such as Figure 4.27, have been discussed above and were used in the creation of posters where the images were accompanied by textual personal accounts. The description of the fight for access to antiretroviral treatment as the ‘new struggle’ in South Africa was particularly evident in an image of a young girl holding her mother’s portrait at her graveside (Figure 4.28). This image echoes the photograph taken by David Goldblatt after the burial of the Cradock Four killed by security police in 1985 (Figure 4.29). While the similarity of these two images may well be complete coincidence, for people familiar with Goldblatt’s work, the later image would no doubt have an additional resonance. The way in which photographs evoke or suggest relationships with other images is one of the ways in which meaning is made and has been noted by photography critics (Sontag, 1977; Clarke, 1997).



Figure 4.28 Gideon Mendel. 2002. A photograph of Sarah Hlalele’s daughter holding her mother’s portrait at her graveside after the funeral. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.



Figure 4.29 David Goldblatt. A child gives the salute of the then banned African National Congress after the funeral of Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Sicelo Mhlauli and Sparrow Mkonto, the Cradock Four, who were assassinated on 27 June 1985 by members of the Security Police. Cradock, Eastern Cape. 20 July 1985. Source: *Intersection Intersected*. (Goldblatt, 2008)

The fourth *Guardian* article (2003) entitled *Where is our treatment?* remained focused on the fight for universal access to antiretroviral treatment. The article was published on the 18 October, a few months after the South African government had committed to introduce treatment for 500 000 people and draw up a national treatment plan (Mendel, 2003a:19). While the article made mention of this, it was focused on the larger question of universal access based on a human rights approach to the provision of healthcare for all. The photo essay profiled Mendel's experimentation with software that enabled him to create images comprising 28 individual images digitally stitched together to give the viewer a 360 degree view of the subject (Figure 4.30).



Figure 4.30 Gideon Mendel. 2003. A double-page spread displaying three 360 degree composite images. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.

These 360 degree images were a radical aesthetic departure for Mendel, especially considering his earlier traditional black and white work where the framing of each image was intensely considered. The very nature of a 360 degree view implies a more transparent approach to presenting the viewer with a story; it suggests that nothing is hidden and the viewer is able to absorb the entire scene. And yet the long, horizontal images do not easily lend themselves to publication in a newspaper and are not always aesthetically resolved. It appears that the concept behind the images is perhaps stronger than the resulting photographs.

When asked in an interview why he had chosen to use this format Mendel was candid about the pressure he was under to produce different kinds of images for the annual stories in *The Guardian* (Mendel, personal interview, 2010 December 10). He also acknowledged that his move to Corbis photographic agency was an additional contributing factor because he was encouraged to experiment with developing multimedia presentations of his work for internet viewing. Since the mid-1990s the drop in sales in the print media had seen a growing trend in newspapers migrating to online publishing. The online version of *Where is our treatment?* (Mendel, 2003a) was a multimedia presentation entitled *Salvation is Cheap* (Mendel, 2003b). Here the 360 degree images were interactive and the viewer was able to rotate the image

using the computer mouse. The viewer was also able to read text and hear an audio recording of the person's testimony which added a heightened sense of immediacy and authenticity. Four of the multimedia presentations were also broadcast on Channel 4 in Britain in December 2003 (with the title *The Harsh Divide*), a month after the South African government had finally committed to universal access to antiretroviral treatment.

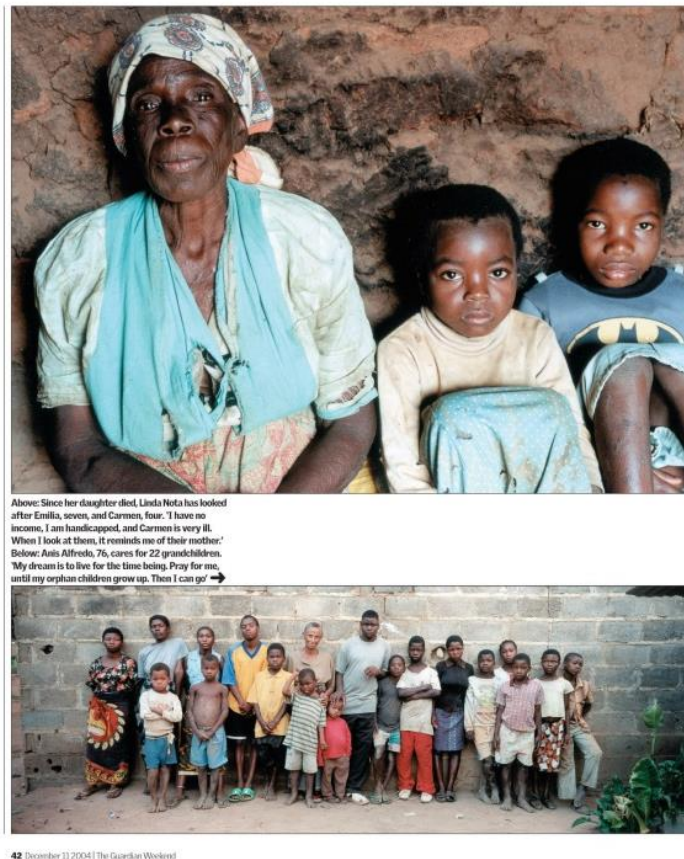


Figure 4.31 Gideon Mendel. 2004. A page from the essay on children whose parents had died of AIDS. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.

In 2004, Mendel moved away from his focus on South Africa and documented children orphaned by the epidemic and child-headed households in the Beira corridor in Mozambique (Figure 4.31). An accompanying article was written by Mendel but the emphasis was clearly on the six pages of images which were mostly group portraits (Mendel, 2004a). The images are presented as colour panoramic group portraits and are clearly choreographed. The compositions are straight on and tend towards the repetitive as each family is presented in a similar way and lack the dynamism and drama of the compositions he used in *A Broken Landscape*. This approach, like the frame portraits, differs from Mendel's early journalistic

black and white images which tended to capture action and adopt a ‘fly on the wall’ approach. Mendel was commissioned by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance to photograph the story and the images were also published on their website (Mendel, 2004b) in addition to appearing in *The Guardian*.

The sixth article (2005) returned to focus on South Africa and documented the lives of three HIV-positive people receiving treatment in a pilot project jointly managed by MSF, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the local health department in the Lusikisiki region of the former homeland of the Transkei. The article was entitled *An Answer in Africa* and clearly championed the provision of antiretroviral treatment (Mendel, 2005a). The story was carefully crafted to include a range of experiences and life stories. Zamo Mdingwe (aged 7) was cared for by his grandmother. Nofumaneko Yako (aged 15) was a school girl and Nomphilo Mazuza (aged 25) a mother of two boys.

Mendel made three trips to Lusikisiki over a two year period to produce the story. This continued engagement with his subjects enabled a much fuller and nuanced narrative compared to a once off encounter. For instance, the schoolgirl Nofumaneko was extremely weak with a low CD4 count when she started antiretroviral treatment and subsequently died. Mendel’s decision to include this story is significant because it offers an important balance in his reporting on Nomphilo Mazuza whose recovery is starkly captured in two portraits of her (Figure 4.32). Her physical recovery was displayed in an even more extreme way in the exhibition *Not Alone* at the Iziko Castle of Good Hope in November 2009-January 2010 where her skeletal body is contrasted with an image of her more than a year later with her two sons (Figures 4.33 and 4.34). All these stories were photographed in colour and adopted a more traditional documentary style with the capture of the subjects going about their daily routine (Figure 4.33). An exception is the portraits which are clearly posed and not candid (Figures 4.32 and 4.34).



Figure 4.32 Gideon Mendel. Two portraits of Nomp hilo Mazuza showing her physical recovery after starting antiretroviral treatment. 2005. Source: *The Guardian* newspaper.

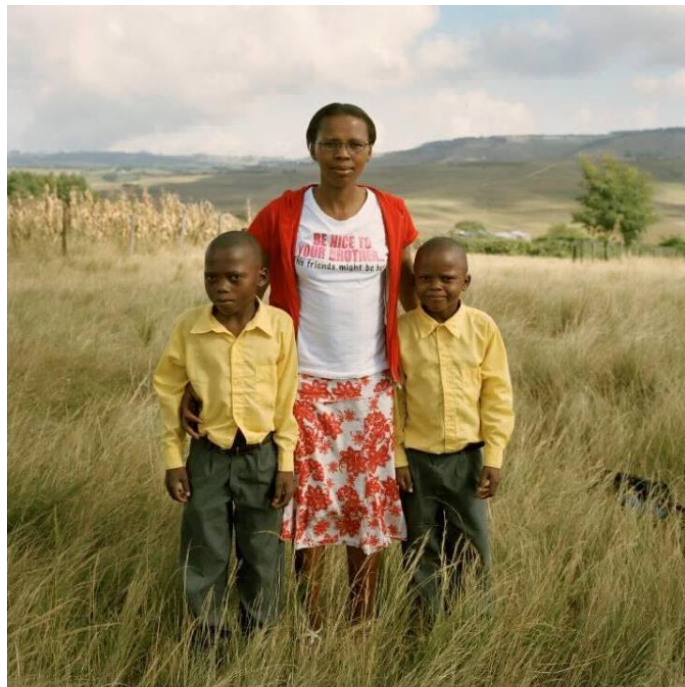


Figure 4.33 and Figure 4.34 Gideon Mendel. Two photographs of Nomp hilo Mazuza documenting her recovery since starting antiretroviral treatment. The images appeared next to each other at the exhibition *Not Alone* held at the Iziko Castle of Good Hope. 2009-2010.

The article *An Answer in Africa* appeared in different forms in three other media contexts. In September 2005 it was published in National Geographic with a new subject replacing Nomphilo's story (Mendel, 2005c). The images were also used in a 2006 MSF report on the provision of antiretroviral treatment in rural areas (MSF et al., 2006). Zamo's story was published in TAC's *Equal Treatment* magazine in the December 2007-January 2008 edition which focused on children and antiretroviral treatment (TAC, 2008). The publication of the same story in different contexts, with changes in the images and text, reveals how photographers often 'recycle' a project not only to help cover expenses incurred, but also increase the visibility of the work among diverse audiences. It also demonstrates how images can move between different contexts, such as the media, an NGO report and an NGO magazine.

Following the 2005 article, Mendel's relationship with *The Guardian* shifted somewhat with the editor of *The Weekend* section moving to the daily magazine section called *G2*. Together with other factors, such as the emphasis on online publication, this translated into less substantial articles from this point onwards. The 2006 article was a story about Memory Boxes in South Africa (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27). The following year focused on documenting a mother-to-child transmission prevention (MTCPTP) programme in Lesotho and was entitled *A Mother's Legacy* (Mendel, 2007). The story was commissioned by UNICEF⁴¹ and also appeared on the UNICEF website (Mendel & Nonet, 2008c). The project was primarily conceived of as a multimedia production by UNICEF and Mendel produced six short films comprising voice recording, video footage and stills.

When asked in an interview about the relationship between aid organisations and the publication of the same material in *The Guardian*, Mendel explained:

...UNICEF funded and organised the project on the understanding that it would have to live in *The Guardian*...so it gets tied into a bit of an unholy public relations deal. And increasingly that is the way things happen and one gets tied more and more into that and it is a bit compromising but you have to look at things holistically (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27).

⁴¹ Mendel also produced a multimedia presentation for OSISA in Lesotho which focused on the forced sterilisation of HIV-positive women (Mendel, n.d.)

This interview once again reveals Mendel's awareness of the compromises he faced, as well as the reality that as media budgets shrank, working with aid organisations was often the only way he was able to continue to work on HIV-related stories. At this point most of this work was multimedia and video. Mendel's early multimedia work was often choreographed and included voice overs from interviews combined with still and moving images of the subjects. For example, in 2009 Mendel produced a series of videos in collaboration with UNICEF called *Kenyan Voices* (Mendel, 2009b). In 2008 Mendel's HIV story was restricted to a single image in the printed newspaper because the war in Gaza broke out (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27). The online version, which was only uploaded in February 2009, included a slideshow of the images documenting the impact of HIV on the town of Chirundu which borders Zambia and Zimbabwe (Mendel, 2009a).

The agreement to profile a story on HIV in Africa each year in *The Guardian* came to an end in 2009. Mendel's final story as part of the ten year agreement was *Kenyan Voices* (Mendel, 2009b). In the ten years, an undeniable shift in the perceived importance of the issue is evidenced in the reduction of space given to the articles. While the change in editorship was a contributing factor, it also reflects a more general waning of interest in the international media on reporting on HIV in Africa (Moeller, 2000). The media industry also underwent a major transformation during this period with the reduction in budgets and increased emphasis on online publication and multimedia work. The demise of state-supported AIDS denialism in South Africa and the universal rollout of antiretroviral treatment in the mid-2000s also contributed to the perception that the challenge of HIV and AIDS in Africa was solved which made it harder for photographers to get commissioned or to publish work on the epidemic.

4.5 Through Positive Eyes (2007-present)

In February 2007 Mendel was involved in a collaborative project called *HIV-positive in Los Angeles* co-ordinated by the UCLA Art and Global Health Centre. The project brought together student photographers and writers and twelve HIV-positive people. The intention was to create a 'collective portrait' of HIV in LA as a way of increasing awareness and attempting to combat complacency. Mendel directed the project and produced portraits of the twelve HIV-positive subjects. On the homepage of the project's website Mendel's portraits introduce each subject and serve as a conduit to the text and images produced by the students

and a voice recording of the subject sharing their experiences. This collaborative approach became the blueprint for what grew into the *Through Positive Eyes* project where Mendel continues to work with the UCLA Art and Global Health Centre in different cities around the world.

In 2008 Mendel worked with fourteen HIV-positive individuals from the sexual rights advocacy group *Letra S* in Mexico City. Mendel took portraits of the people which were exhibited at the World AIDS Conference which was hosted by Mexico City that year and appeared online in *The Guardian* (Mendel 2008a). In addition to the portraits, an important part of the project was running a workshop with the participants to develop photographic and storytelling skills so that they could document their lives. This decision to enable the subject to document their story marked a defining moment in Mendel's approach to documenting HIV and follows similar principles to Photovoice⁴² techniques where people document their lives in order to bring about social change.



Figure 4.35 Gideon Mendel. Installation view of Mendel's portraits at the International World AIDS Conference in Mexico City in 2008. Photographer: Annabelle Wienand.

⁴² *Photovoice* is an organisation that builds skills in disadvantaged and marginalised communities to enable advocacy and bring about social change. As the name suggests, photography is used as a way of giving voice to individuals so that they can express themselves and share their experiences.

The display of Mendel's colour portraits, together with the subject's personal testimony in English and Spanish, at the Mexico conference emphasised the ordinariness of the people living with HIV (Figure 4.35). The environmental portraits capture the individuals in their homes or places of work. The details of the backgrounds provide the viewer with some insight into their lives and also their socio-economic position and occupations. The portraits were printed large when displayed in Mexico and were mostly life size which encouraged a closer relationship between the viewer and subject. The framing of the portraits are three-quarter length and frontally composed with the subject centred in the frame. This emphasises each individual within their space and gives them autonomy and stature. The subjects came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and included a university professor, a house wife, hairdresser, gym instructor and electrician among others. Similarly to Gisèle Wulfsohn's *Living Openly* series, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the representation of such diverse parts of society resists stereotypes and helps combat stigma.

The portraits were noticed by officials from the Brazilian Ministry of Health which lead to Mendel taking part in a similar collaboration in Rio de Janeiro in June 2009. As the *Through Positive Eyes* project grew, a website was created in order to provide an online resource that organisations could use as an education and counselling tool (Figure 4.36). The principle that HIV-positive people should tell their own stories rather than be the subject of photographic documentary projects is powerfully demonstrated in the text on the website's homepage which reads:

Through Positive Eyes gives photographic voice to people living with HIV in major cities around the world. It is based on the belief that HIV-positive people should pick up their own cameras and make their own artistic statements. In doing so, they create powerful tools for combatting stigma, which is one of the most formidable barriers in reducing the spread of AIDS today (Mendel & UCLA Art & Global Health Centre, 2012a).

Mendel's new role as Creative Director of the project is a notable departure from his early engagement with the issue of HIV, and yet even during *The Broken Landscape* work, Mendel wrestled with different ways of presenting his subject's experiences. Over the years Mendel's use of testimony printed as text alongside the images has evolved into voice recordings in the

multimedia work and in many ways *Through Positive Eyes* is the end point of this trajectory where still images, video, audio and voice recordings are all used to tell a fuller story. When asked about his role in the project, Mendel describes himself as a ‘frame maker’ where his skill is bringing the different components together in a coherent structure. He also describes his portraits as ‘doorways’ into the individuals’ lives (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27).



Figure 4.36 Gideon Mendel. The homepage of the *Through Positive Eyes* website. Each portrait appearing on the page can be clicked on to enable the viewer to read the person’s story and see their images. Source: www.throughpositiveeyes.org

Following on from Rio de Janeiro, the project travelled to Johannesburg in 2010 where Mendel and his colleagues worked with the organisation Positive Convention and received financial support from the PEPFAR and the Ford Foundation. The Johannesburg *Through Positive Eyes* also produced a calendar for 2012 where each month was devoted to an individual with one of their images printed alongside text telling their personal testimony and a small portrait taken by Mendel (Mendel & UCLA Art & Global Health Centre, 2012b). The calendar further spread the message of the project in a different format that would have most likely circulated among PEPFAR employees, but also other organisations and people they worked with. Many of Mendel’s portraits have subsequently been used in a display in

the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum demonstrating the reach of PEPFAR's role in providing support and treatment in different regions of the world (Figure 4.37).



Figure 4.37 Gideon Mendel. A detail of the world map comprising of individual portraits of people who received antiretroviral treatment from PEPFAR. Many of Mendel's portraits are included.

In April 2012, twelve of the original seventeen people who had contributed to the Johannesburg *Through Positive Eyes* project participated in an innovative and unusual follow-up workshop with actors from *Drama for Life*⁴³ and Themba Interactive which Mendel photographed (Figure 4.38). The goal of the workshop was to bring together photography and live performance to create and tell the stories of the HIV-positive participants. The intention was to address stigma and produce drama performances that could be used for advocacy purposes. The actors worked with the *Through Positive Lives* participants to create a drama production that was performed at the 2012 *Drama for Life Sex Actually* Festival in Johannesburg. The performances were performed again in Botswana in April 2013 (*Drama for Life*, 2013).

⁴³ *Drama for Life* is an academic programme based at the University of the Witwatersrand (Gauteng) and uses Applied Theatre and Drama, and Drama Therapy, to bring about social transformation through research, teaching and community engagement.



Figure 4.38 Gideon Mendel. 2012. A scene from one of the performances where the *Through Positive Eyes* participants worked with the actors in retelling stories from their lives.

In July 2012, on the occasion of the 14th International AIDS conference held in Washington, D.C., *Through Positive Eyes* engaged with HIV-positive individuals living in Washington city. For the Washington project, a film was made in addition to the material that appears on the website (portraits, images by the participants and interview recordings). The film was screened at the opening of the conference to an estimated 7000 delegates (Mendel, personal interview, 2012 September 27). The *Through Positive Eyes* project has increasingly presented short films, as is evidenced in the work from Mumbai, India, which took place in December 2012 (Figure 4.39). The films record the participants taking their photographs and explaining why they chose a particular approach and the meaning of the images.



Figure 4.39 Anthony, one of the Indian participants, chose to tell his story using paper cut-outs and a torch to create a shadow puppet theatre which he filmed. This image is a still from his film. Source: *Through Positive Eyes*. 2012.

In 2013 *Through Positive Eyes* worked in Bangkok, Thailand and the workshop was completed in mid-December. *Through Positive Eyes* is an important contribution to the visual history of the epidemic in the global reach of the project and the way it represents a wide variety of experience. One potential danger of this representation is that it could be seen to imply that the epidemic is experienced equally throughout the world, while the greatest burden falls on sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the number of people living with the disease. There is also the risk that the project may suggest that all the participants are affected in the same ways which is not true. Depending on their country, their socio-economic status and the degree of support they receive from their family, friends and communities, each individual faces different challenges. Despite these two challenges, *Through Positive Eyes* performs the important task of resisting early stereotypes and emphasising that the HIV epidemic affects people from varied walks of life across all continents.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter describes Gideon Mendel's long-term documentation of the HIV epidemic. Because of the length of time and the depth of Mendel's engagement with this work, it is possible to observe the ways in which his approach to photographing the subject changed. Mendel moved on from the traditional black and white photojournalistic approach of the work he did in the 1990s to experimenting with colour and then multimedia. Apart from experimentation with the different visual photographic formats and aesthetic approaches, Mendel's work also wrestles with the nature of the photographic medium itself.

As discussed in the Introduction, the tradition of black and white documentary photography is closely tied to ideas of objective reporting and while contemporary audiences are well-aware of the constructed nature of photographs, black and white images produced in this style tend to evoke ideas of authenticity and truth. Mendel's use of testimony in the 1990s pushed the boundaries of photojournalism and he was aware that he was challenging the conventions of the medium (Godby, 2003). The use of first person narrative in place of a journalistic caption is a significant shift and emphasises the individuality of the subject. The narratives accompanying the images enable the viewer (and in particular the viewer in the global North) to look beyond the stereotype of African suffering and gain fuller understanding of the impact of the disease.

Apart from testimony, Mendel also actively sought out stories and images that offered counter images to the stereotypes of African suffering. These images include photographs of family members or volunteers caring for the ill, as well as images of individuals and groups taking the initiative to start drama groups, provide education and in the instance of South Africa, lead protest marches. Many of Mendel's images in *A Broken Landscape* do indeed show extreme suffering, both the physical suffering of the ill and also the emotional suffering of those left behind. While Mendel believed it was important to show this suffering in South Africa and the global North with his exhibition *A Broken Landscape* (2001-2002) for advocacy purposes, he became increasingly aware of the problematic nature of images of suffering.

Mendel's experimentation with approaches to representing people living with HIV, such as the frame portraits, reveal the extent to which Mendel engaged with the limitations of the

medium and its conventions. His increasing collaboration with his subjects is perhaps evidence of uneasiness with photographic representation and the power of the photographer over his subject. Mendel's experimentation enabled him to find new ways of documenting and engaging with the issue, especially in the intense period of activism he documented in South African in early 2002. This was a unique moment in the history of the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and Mendel's close engagement with the TAC and MSF and working with members of these organisations had a profound impact on the kinds of images he produced and his intended audiences both locally and internationally.

He later experimented with format and multimedia in the work he did for *The Guardian*. Mendel's online work is the most collaborative work he has created, not only in terms of the relationship between photographer and subject, but also with the viewer/audience. With the *Through Positive Eyes* project, the subjects themselves produce the visual material presented to the viewers and Mendel's role is directing and shaping the way in which the material is presented. In this way Mendel has embraced varied roles over the years as he has engaged with the epidemic in order to fulfil an advocacy function or reach a wider audience.

Chapter 5

Gisèle Wulfohn: a portrait of HIV and AIDS (1987-2007)

Gisèle Wulfohn's photographs of HIV and AIDS have remained relatively unknown despite her significant contribution to a number of awareness and education campaigns. Wulfohn photographed the epidemic before there was major public interest in the issue within South Africa and continued to do so for close on twenty years. Her approach is distinctive in a number of ways, most notably in her use of portraiture and her documentation of subjects from varied racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in South Africa. This chapter tracks the development of the different projects Wulfohn embarked on and situates her photographs of HIV and AIDS in relation to her politically-informed work of the late 1980s, her focus on health and gender issues and the relationships she developed with specific NGOs.

5.1 News and media: *The Star*, *Style* and *Leadership*, 1979-1986

On completion of her studies in graphic design at the Johannesburg College of Art, Wulfohn worked at *The Star* newspaper from 1979 to 1983, first as a darkroom assistant and later as a photographer. During this period Wulfohn found reporting on hard news demanding and tended towards portraiture and lifestyle photography. Her work at *The Star* was followed by three years at *Style* magazine which presented its own challenges. Wulfohn was well aware of the contradictions of photographing fashion (Figure 5.1) and social events at a time when South Africa was on a political knife-edge. While working at *Style* magazine, Wulfohn was also photographing in Soweto and covering stories of everyday life under apartheid. Reflecting on this period, Wulfohn commented that 'it was a bit of a schizoid existence adapting from one situation to the other, but somehow I did it and many others did too' (Wulfohn in Weinberg, 2007). In 1986 Wulfohn was appointed the chief photographer at *Leadership* magazine, but within a year decided to work freelance.



Figure 5.1 Gisèle Wulfohn. An example of one of Wulfohn's fashion shoots for *Style* magazine. Clothing designers Shanie Boerstra and Jerome Argue, Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, 1985.⁴⁴

5.2 Afrapix and 'going freelance', 1987-1990

In the same year Wulfohn started to work to freelance, she joined Afrapix, the anti-apartheid photographic collective. At this point she was already photographing subject matter that revealed the inequalities of the apartheid state. This work was shot on black and white 35 mm film and informed by a traditional documentary style aesthetic. In an interview Wulfohn reflected on two influential moments in the development of her political awareness: one was travelling in Europe in 1979 and being exposed to banned literature, the other was a gift of Ernest Cole's famous book *House of Bondage* in the late 1970s.⁴⁵ Cole's

⁴⁴ This image can be read as potentially politically provocative and anti-apartheid with the male model performing what appears to be a 'Black power' salute in front of the Voortrekker Monument, which is an archetypal symbol of Afrikaner nationalism.

⁴⁵ *House of Bondage* (1967) was a banned book within South Africa at the time for obvious reasons. It recorded the everyday brutality of living as a black person under apartheid law where every aspect of life was controlled. Cole's images documented the social landscape of apartheid South Africa and revealed how the political system impoverished black communities with inferior provisions for their education, health and housing.

images made Wulfsohn more intensely aware of the inequalities of the society in which she lived (Wulfsohn in Weinberg, 2007).

Like a number of other woman photographers affiliated with Afrapix, including Lesley Lawson, Wendy Schwegmann and Gille de Vlieg, she preferred to document social issues that revealed how apartheid laws shaped the lives of black South Africans rather than focusing on township violence and clashes between protesters and police. Examples of the personal projects that Wulfsohn undertook at the time included stories on the taxi industry, adult literacy and domestic workers (*The Road to Then and Now*, 2008). With the domestic workers project, Wulfsohn worked with Paul Weinberg and together they had an exhibition of the work. While the image below confirms the iconic images of a ‘madam’ and ‘maid’ (Figure 5.2), other images in the series offer a less stereotypical representation and reveal some of the ambiguities in the relationship between domestic worker and employer, such as the bond formed with children in the home.



Figure 5.2 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Lookout Beach, Plettenberg Bay, 1986. Other images in the series show domestic workers in suburban homes.

It is interesting to note that Lesley Lawson also focused on women's issues and did extensive projects with women domestic workers, office cleaners and factory workers (*Images in Struggle*, 1990). Lawson later became involved in working with NGOs that were involved in HIV and AIDS education and authored training materials and books (Lawson, 2008). One of the book projects authored by Lawson included a number of Wulfsohn's images from a range of different projects, such as *Puppets Against AIDS* which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (Lawson, 1997).



Figure 5.3 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Long clinic queues typified the lack of resources and staff in black health care facilities. c. 1980s.

During this period Wulfsohn focused extensively on documenting women's issues which were often related to reproductive rights and health care. This took a particularly political angle with the photographing of township clinics and documenting the disparities in health care under the apartheid system where all services were segregated and inferior care was provided for 'non-white' citizens. Many of these images echo Ernest Cole's earlier documentation of similar issues as demonstrated by the image of long clinic queues (Figure 5.3). The low angle of this composition enabled Wulfsohn to capture the length of the queue,

but also established a tension between photographer/viewer and the subjects. Two of the people waiting meet the photographer's eye and the central figure with crossed arms, challenges the photographer/viewer with his gaze and body language.



Figure 5.4 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Checking blood pressure at a mobile clinic. c. 1980s. **Figure 5.5** Gisèle Wulfsohn. An anti-natal check-up at a rural clinic in the Northern Province. c. 1986-89.

Other images taken around this time include Wulfsohn's documentation of rural and mobile clinics (Figure 5.4 and 5.5). Both these images adopt a 'fly on the wall' approach where the subjects do not reveal any awareness of the photographer's close presence. This aesthetic is typical of documentary and photojournalism in that the photographer is close to the action but does not appear to alter what is taking place. The apparent invisibility of the photographer emphasises the idea that what is captured is the 'truth' and yet both these images could well have been choreographed while recording a medical check-up.

In contrast to her fashion and other commercial work for magazines such as *Style* and *Leadership*, which was mostly shot on colour medium format transparency film⁴⁶, Wulfsohn's documentary style projects were photographed using black and white 35mm film. The use of black and white film evoked the history of documentary photography (as discussed in the Introduction) and was also a practical decision because of the ease of development and printing. Wulfsohn developed and printed her own black and white work during this period.

Figure 5.5 shows an ante-natal check-up in a rural clinic in the Northern Province. On the wall are two AIDS awareness posters; the one calling on women to unite against AIDS and the other encouraging condom usage. Retrospectively, these posters are revealed to be hopelessly inadequate in enabling people, especially women, to prevent HIV infection. Studies from the 1990s and 2000s reveal the limited amount of power women have in their sexual relationships (Dunkle et al., 2004). Wulfsohn's engagement with broader issues related to gender equality and reproductive rights is also demonstrated in images documenting campaigns for the legalisation of abortion, plays about teenage pregnancy in a Sowetan high school (Figure 5.6) and protests against rape and sexual violence (Figures 5.7).

⁴⁶ During this time period the use of medium format colour transparency film was industry standard for magazine work and other publications. Transparency film captures the image in positive, instead of negative format.

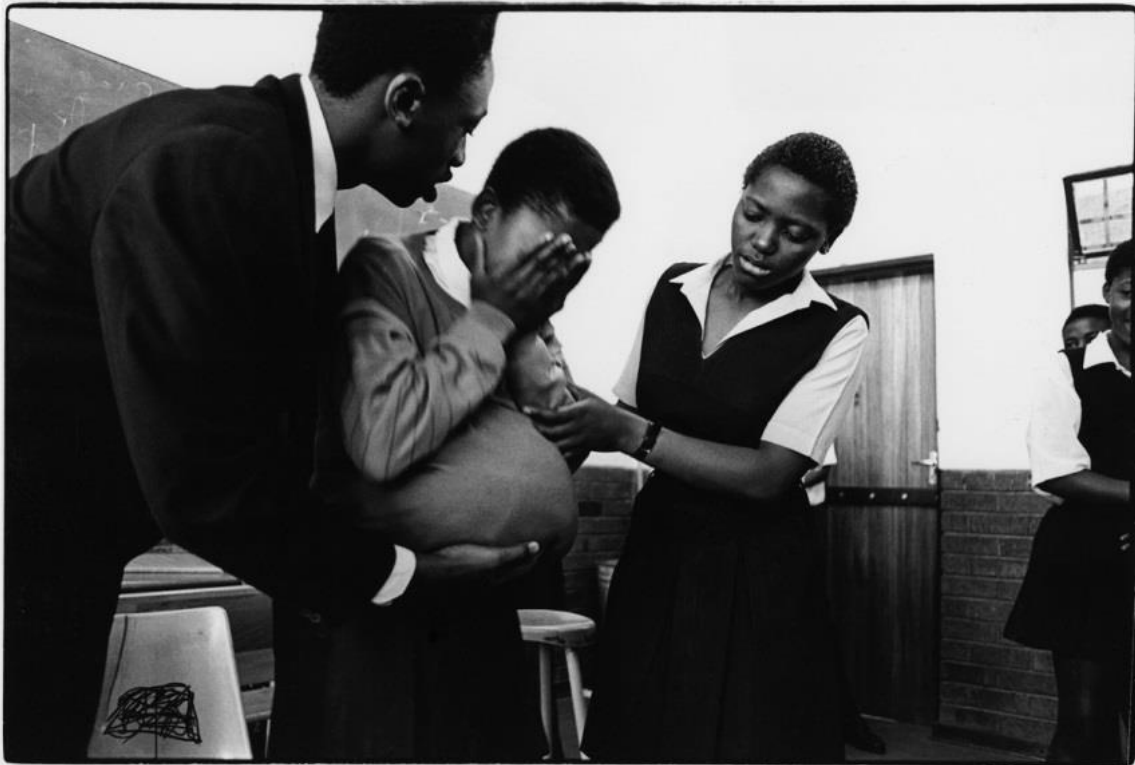


Figure 5.6 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Students from a Soweto school role-playing teenage pregnancy. c.1980s. Source: *The South African Women's Health Book* (The Women's Health Project, 1996:237).



Figure 5.7 Gisèle Wulfsohn. c.1980s. This image of a protest against rape echoes images of political uprising in the 1980s, as well as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) protests in the early 2000s.

Wulfsohn also documented the Defiance Campaign of August 1989 when The National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) together with other organisations lead a protest against segregated health services. The protest encouraged people to seek care at their nearest hospital and clinic regardless of where or not it was a ‘whites only’ facility. Wulfsohn’s images of the Defiance Campaign show white medical staff providing care to black patients in various hospital settings (Figures 5.8 and 5.9). The campaign was part of larger protest action against segregated facilities and received international media coverage (Parkin, 1989; Crary, 1989).

Similarly to the images described above, these photographs also capture the action as it unfolds and there is no apparent awareness of the photographer’s presence. The compositions focus on human interactions and activity. In Figure 5.8 the viewer’s attention is directed to the doctor’s hand resting on the patient’s shoulder and his concerned gaze. This evokes an image of a compassionate doctor going beyond the call of duty and in many ways is in contrast to the inhumanity of the racially segregated medical system that the protest aimed to expose.



Figure 5.8 Gisèle Wulfsohn. 1989. A doctor accompanies a patient in an ambulance to a whites-only hospital.



Figure 5.9 Gisèle Wulfsohn. 1989. Two nurses assist a black patient in a ‘whites only’ hospital.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s Wulfsohn pursued these projects on her own initiative but later collaborated with the Women’s Health Project in the 1990s. At different points she was involved as both a photographer and also a picture editor⁴⁷. After two years of workshops and meetings with multiple organisations and individuals, the Women’s Health Conference was held in 1994 which contributed to progressive policies put in place during this period (Goosen, personal interview, 2013 April 2). The conference culminated in the publication of *The South African Women’s Health Book* (The Women’s Health Project, 1996). *The South African Women’s Health Book* reflected the comprehensive scope of the conference which addressed diverse topics including women in the work place, child care, mental health, violence against women and lesbian sexual health.

Some images for the book project were sourced from existing work and others were specifically taken for the book. Wulfsohn’s documentation of women’s issues since the late 1980s perfectly positioned her to take on the role of picture editor. Many of her images were used in the book as is demonstrated by the traces of her editing process of writing chapter

⁴⁷ Wulfsohn also worked as a picture editor for the publications of the Centre for the Study of AIDS (CSA) at the University of Pretoria. Her work also appeared in some reports and most notably in a calendar for 2012.

numbers on the back of working prints⁴⁸. Co-editor of the book, Margaretha Goosen, articulated the importance of photographs in demonstrating not only respect for the women who collaborated in the project, but also a seriousness of intent to readers by ‘showing them real stuff’ in place of illustrations (Goosen, personal interview, 2013 April 2).

Throughout her career as a freelance photographer, Wulfsohn would pursue self-funded projects that interested her with the intention of potentially finding a way to sell the story or images at some point in the future. This way of working is typical of freelance photographers who often have to present concepts and even complete stories to clients in order to sell work. As Wulfsohn established herself as a freelance photographer she became known for her work on health and gender issues and therefore would be contacted by organisations that needed images on these topics. During her years at *Style* and *Leadership* magazines, Wulfsohn developed a strong portraiture portfolio and became known as an accomplished portrait photographer. This also informed the kind of freelance work she pursued and the commissions she received.

Wulfsohn’s prolific photographic engagement with health and gender issues in 1980s South Africa clearly frames her work in terms of her concerns with human rights. This is carried through into her work in the 1990s and also her engagement with HIV and AIDS which began in 1988. While Wulfsohn attributed her engagement with HIV and AIDS to her close relationship with an HIV-positive cousin who lived in the United States, and his challenge to her to ‘put a face to AIDS in South Africa’, it is vital to see her documentation of the issue within her broader interests in gender equality and health and human rights which dominated her work in the late 1980s and also the 1990s.

5.3 The end of apartheid and the early days of the HIV epidemic, 1990-1997

With the transition to democracy, Wulfsohn continued to photograph issues related to human rights with a focus on women. In 1990 Wulfsohn started photographing South African

⁴⁸ I have had access to Wulfsohn’s personal archive of work from this period, as well as her work held in the Visual Archives at the University of Cape Town. Having access to her working prints and original contact sheets and negatives enabled me to trace the movement of her images into different projects such as this book.

women anti-apartheid activists who had worked towards the establishment of a democratic South Africa. These portraits took the shape of a project called *Malibongwe: Let us Praise the Women* (Figure 5.10). Over the years, the portraits have been exhibited in a number of different contexts, such as the fifty-year commemoration of the Women's March in 2006 when they were displayed at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg (Ludman, 2012). The Legal Resources Centre also published a calendar using the images. Wulfsohn's skill as a portrait photographer is clearly revealed in this project. The portraits were usually taken in the subjects' homes and many of them were environmental portraits that captured the subject within a domestic space which revealed something of their life. Most of the portraits capture the subject looking directly at the camera and convey a strong sense of the strength of character of the women, many of them in their late 70s and 80s. The image of Ellen Kuzwayo is a good example of this frank and strong portrayal (Figure 5.10). The close crop of this image emphasises the subject's face and in particular her direct expression which highlights the dignity and power of the individual.

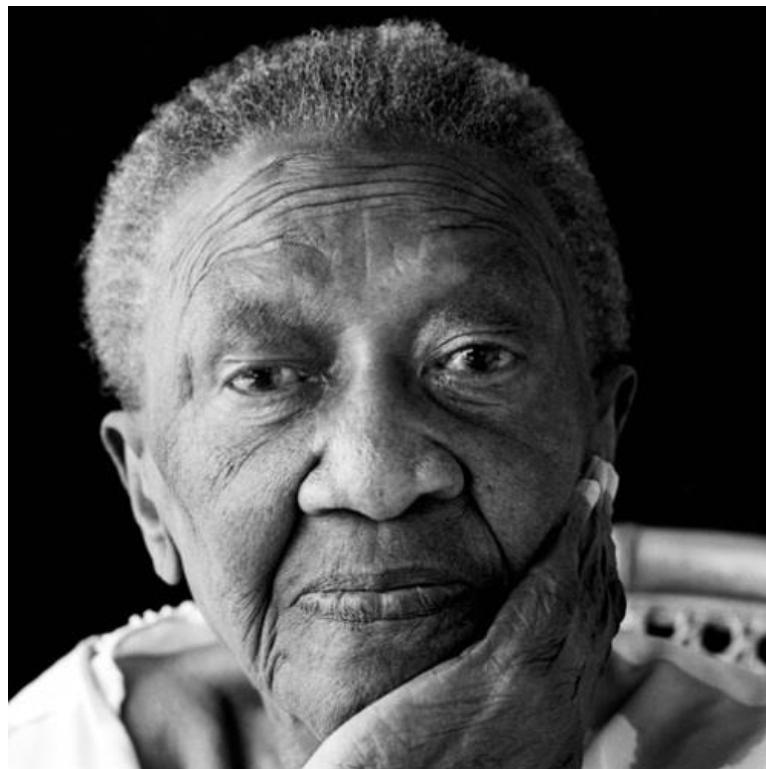


Figure 5.10 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Veteran anti-apartheid activist Ellen Khuzwayo (1914-2006), Soweto, 2002.

In 1994 Wulfsohn was one of four photographers commissioned by the Independent Electoral Commission to document the first democratic elections in South Africa. Through these two

examples we can see how Wulfsohn's work from the 1980s established her reputation as a socially and politically engaged photographer. And yet knowledge and appreciation of her work has remained largely confined to specific activist audiences in South Africa, and publications overseas which included *The Lancet*, *Mother Jones*, *The Economist*, *Marie Claire* and *Der Spiegel*.

At first Wulfsohn struggled to find people willing to be photographed in connection with HIV and AIDS because of the stigma associated with the disease. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there was very little official government response to the epidemic in this period and virtually no reporting on the issue in the popular press after the initial story of two HIV-positive flight attendants in 1983. In the 1990s there was limited state HIV education and *Khomanani*, the government's mass media and communications initiative was only launched in August 2001. State messaging around HIV and AIDS has also tended to avoid using photography and for this reason is largely absent from this thesis. One exception was the Department of Health's support of the *Beyond Awareness Campaign* which will be discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 5.11 Gisèle Wulfsohn. City Health Acting Troupe, Joubert Park Clinic, Johannesburg, April 1990. This image was part of a series recording performances both in waiting rooms and in public spaces outside of clinics.

One of the first HIV-related stories that Wulfsohn did was to photograph the AIDS education performances of the City Health Acting Troupe (CHAT) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This initiative was run by the Hillbrow Community AIDS Centre. The plays addressed broad AIDS education messages such as condom usage and the increased risk of poor decision making when under the influence of alcohol (Figure 5.11). The poster on the wall of the clinic warns of HIV infection through needle sharing despite the rarity of this mode of transmission in South Africa where unprotected heterosexual sex is the main way in which the virus is spread. This poster reveals the extent to which early messaging around HIV and AIDS in South Africa was often poorly conceived and ineffective in terms of reaching its target audience. In a similar way to the posters discussed above (Figure 5.5), early government attempts to address the epidemic were built on the premise that the epidemic could be addressed by individual behaviour change. This approach has been widely discredited with calls to situate vulnerability to HIV infection in relation to socio-economic, gender and health-related issues which clearly position the epidemic as a societal, rather than individual challenge (Dunkle et al., 2004; Iliffe, 2006; Hunter, 2007).



Figure 5.12 Gisèle Wulfsohn. c. 1990s. A puppet performance using hand puppets.

Through photographing CHAT performances, Wulfsohn also came into contact with other HIV education programmes organised by NGOs, such as *Puppets Against AIDS* which was produced by the *African Research and Educational Puppetry Programme: Theatre for Life* (AREPP). Their programme was established in 1987 and in 1988 they took to the road and performed widely in South African townships and other public spaces in both rural and urban areas (Grundlingh, 2009:253). The intention was bringing HIV education messages to audiences in the form of entertainment and interactive performance (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). These performances included large *papiermaché* puppet heads worn by actors (Figure 5.13), as well as other smaller hand puppets and masks (Figure 5.12).

The scale of the two metre tall puppets attracted crowds because of the theatrical quality of the puppets. The performances took place throughout the country and often included a marimba band and question-and-answer sessions with the audience after the performances followed by condom distribution (Friedman, 1991). A comic book addressing HIV prevention messages was also distributed for free at the performances (Figure 5.15). Wulfsohn's images of the performances of *Puppets Against AIDS* reveal the range of performances from shows outside clinics (Figure 5.13), street performance where the actors interacted with members of the public (Figure 5.14), to large scale performances on stages that drew large crowds (Figure 5.16).

Wulfsohn's documentation of the activities of *Puppets Against AIDS* employs the typical documentary style described above where the photographer captures scenes without appearing to influence what is taking place. Wulfsohn's images include both the actions of the actors and the reactions of the audiences. The compositions often contrast the actors and puppets in the foreground with the audience in the background which provides for visually interesting images while also capturing the impact and reach of the performances and the impact they had on their audiences (Figures 5.12, 5.13, 5.14 and 5.16).

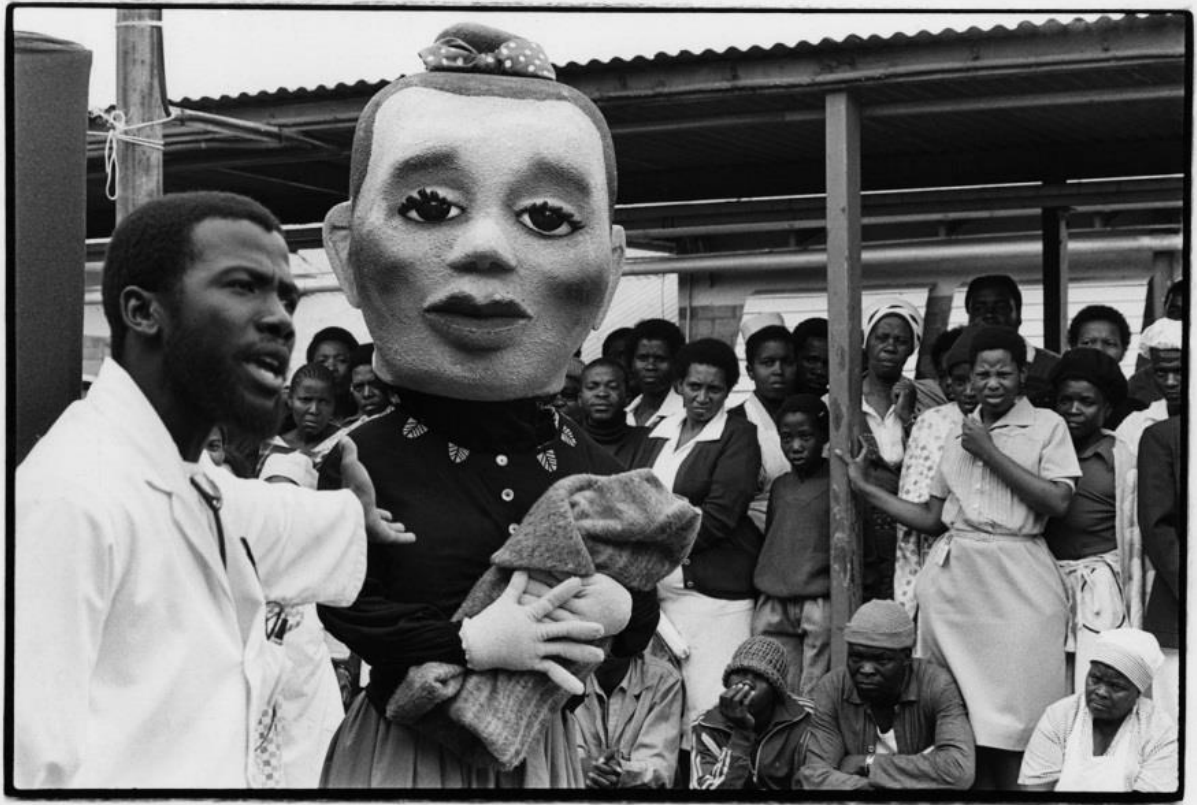


Figure 5.13 Gisèle Wulfsohn. c. early 1990s. A performance outside a clinic.



Figure 5.14 Gisèle Wulfsohn. *Puppets Against AIDS* performing in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, c. 1992. This photograph is among a number of her images that document performances in Johannesburg.



Figure 5.15 Gisèle Wulfsohn. c. early 1990s. Comic sheets handed out at street performances.



Figure 5.16 Gisèle Wulfsohn. c. early 1990s. A stage performance of Puppets Against AIDS which drew a large crowd.

Wulfsohn's relationship with *Puppets Against AIDS* continued for a number of years and in 1996 she participated in a pilot programme called *Puppets in Prison* that took place in Diepkloof Prison in Johannesburg. The intention of the pilot program was to run a series of workshops with inmates in the prison, which included making masks and puppets and developing a play that could be performed in the prison with an HIV educational message. Wulfsohn's images document these workshops and performances. They were intended to form part of the final report to the Department of Correctional Services which would help decide whether or not to extend the programme. The pilot was reportedly a great success, but the programme was not rolled out to other prisons (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). While the *Puppets in Prison* programme was not formally evaluated, AREPP did conduct other monitoring and evaluation of their work (Nell & Shapiro, 2005). One of the limitations of many early, small NGOs is that they operated on very small budgets with many people volunteering their services and so formal evaluation of their work was seldom a priority and they tended to rely on informal interviews to get a sense of the impact of their work.

While Wulfsohn was potentially the first South African photographer to engage with HIV and AIDS, starting in 1988 with her documentation of CHAT and *Puppets Against AIDS*, it is worth noting that a number of documentary photographers who were members of Afrapix also went on to produce HIV-related work post-1990 for NGO clients. These photographers include Lesley Lawson, Paul Weinberg, Eric Miller and Gideon Mendel. Their commitment to documenting political injustices under apartheid, which often translated into development issues, meant that continuing to explore social concerns was a natural trajectory for many anti-apartheid struggle photographers in post-apartheid South Africa.

In 1993 Wulfsohn was commissioned to document a project that worked with traditional healers from South Africa. The project was funded by USAID and was developed and run by the NGO Academy for Education Development (AED) (duPreez, personal communication, 2013, May 20). The project was built on the premise that traditional healers were highly regarded and many South Africans were more likely to consult them than clinics. The intention was to train traditional healers so that they would be knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS and be able to identify opportunistic infections, as well as encourage prevention measures with an emphasis on condom usage (Figure 5.17).

The first training workshop focused on thirty traditional healers who had been invited as representatives from the five main traditional healers' organisations in the country. They were trained as 'master trainers' with the intention that they in turn would train other healers in their region. The healers were given an 'Atlas of Skin Manifestations of HIV/AIDS in Africa' and other common opportunistic infections were also discussed within the workshops. While this approach may at first appear to be a top-down biomedical intervention, one of the project founders, Dr John-David duPreez, emphasised that 'We weren't trying to do a mini-medical school training with them, but wanted them to be aware of what they *might* be seeing in their daily practices' (duPreez, personal communication, 2013 May 20).

The project aimed to increase awareness of the disease among traditional healers with the view to them being able to better treat their patients and also encourage referral to clinics. Given the time frame in which this was happening, there was little clinics could offer patients other than treat their opportunistic infections. This project was unique in that it did result in some of the clinics incorporating the *sangomas* into their treatment of HIV and AIDS. These semi-experimental attachments of traditional healers to clinics apparently fostered cooperation in both directions and clinics acknowledged the role traditional healers played in bringing people to them who would otherwise never have approached a clinic (duPreez, personal communication, 2013 May 20).

This *sangoma* project was seminal in its engagement with traditional healers and the emphasis on collaboration instead of demonising traditional healers as charlatans or obstacles to HIV treatment. One of the most successful workshops brought together over a hundred traditional healers who travelled from all over South Africa to meet with the respected healer Ma Shikwambane. Wulfsohn's images were published in 1993 *Drum* magazine, *Leadership* magazine (Figure 5.19) and also appeared on a conference poster at the International AIDS Conference in Berlin in 1993 where the project was academically assessed (duPreez, personal communication, 2013 May 8). While Wulfsohn was originally commissioned to document the project, it was also subsequently published elsewhere.

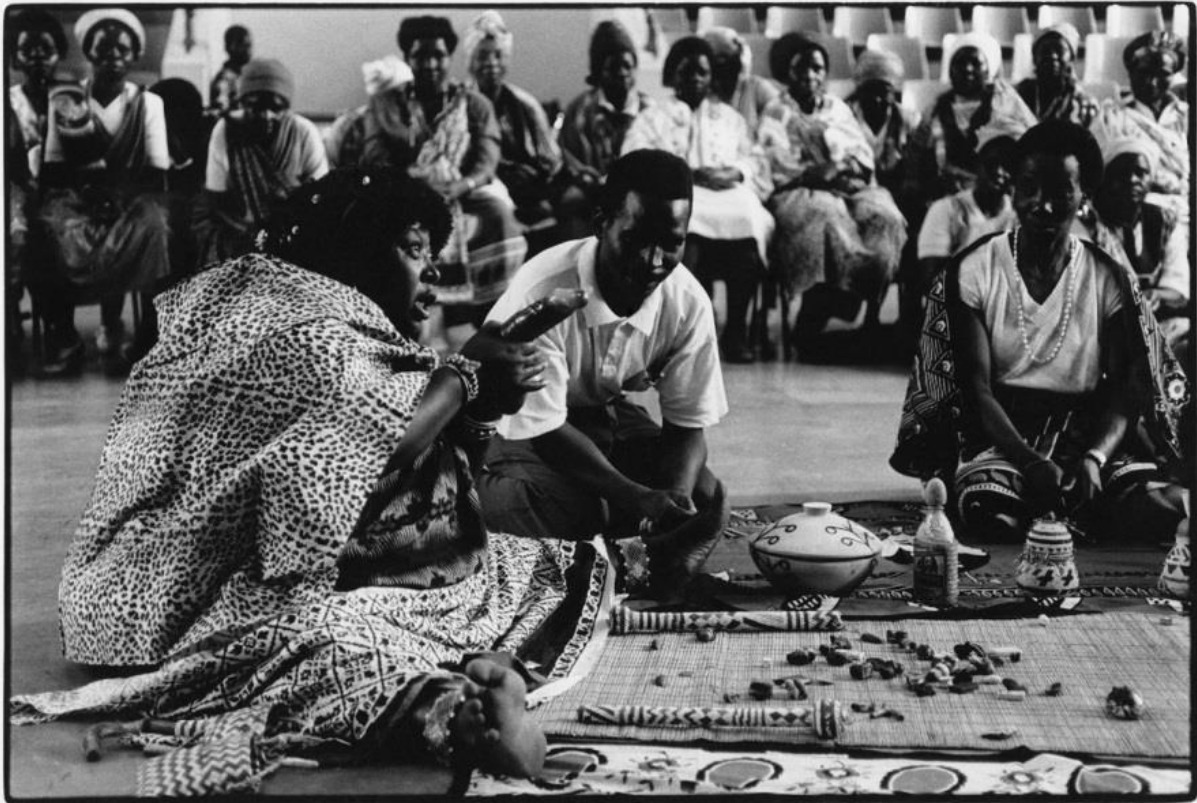


Figure 5.17 Gisèle Wulfsohn. 1993. A photograph of Ma Shikwambane demonstrating condom usage to traditional healers at a workshop.

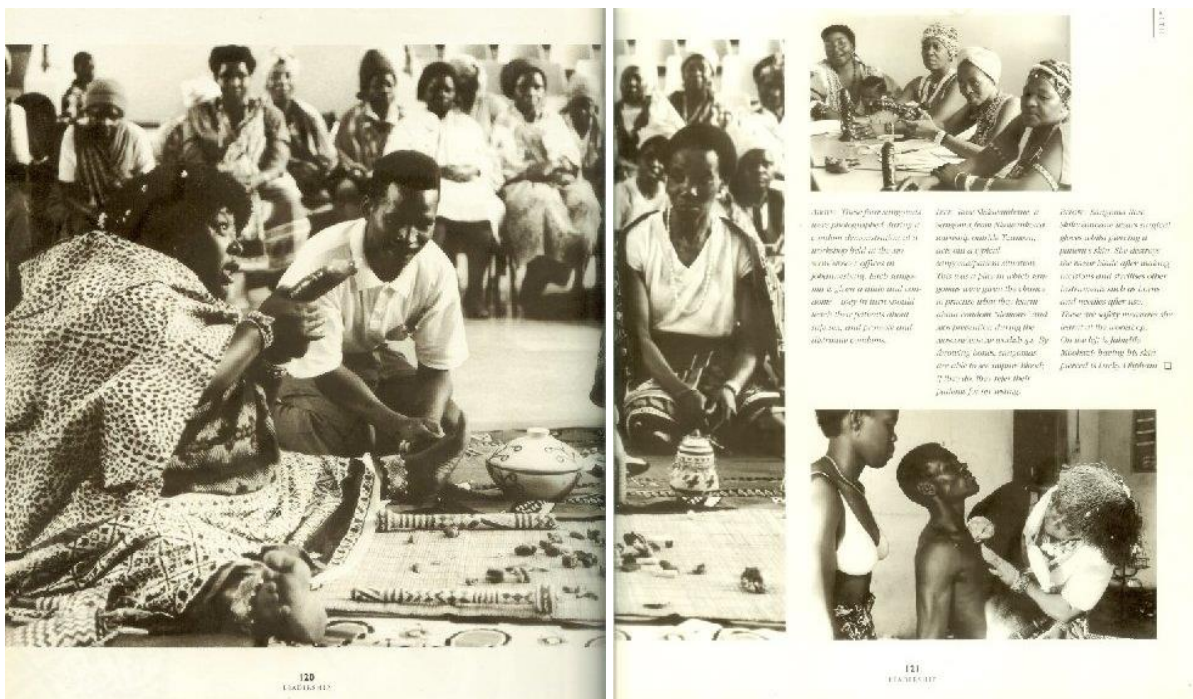


Figure 5.18 Gisèle Wulfsohn. 1993. Wulfsohn's photographs as they appeared in the article in *Leadership* magazine. Source: *Leadership* magazine

5.4 Johan van Rooy: one man's story, 1990-1992

In 1990 Wulfsohn visited a hospice called Sacred Heart House where HIV-positive people in the terminal stages of AIDS were cared for by a Catholic nun. Her intention was to produce a story on the hospice, but on hearing that another photographer, Graeme Williams⁴⁹, was also photographing the hospice she abandoned the idea. Through the Sacred Heart Hospice Wulfsohn met a man called Johan van Rooy who asked Wulfsohn to photograph him. Johan van Rooy was an HIV-positive man who had developed AIDS-related illnesses in August 1990 after knowing of his HIV-positive status since 1987. At first Van Rooy requested monthly meetings so that Wulfsohn could document his declining health in a series of portraits. As their friendship developed, Wulfsohn asked if she could document other aspects of his life, to which he agreed. What emerged was an increasingly intimate record of Van Rooy's life as an HIV-positive man, including medical check-ups, visits from family and ultimately his failing health.

This series was seminal in a number of ways. It appears to be the first documentation of the life of an HIV-positive South African. Van Rooy was also one of the first South Africans to make his status public in a period prior to the development of organisations, such as the TAC, which created a platform for public disclosure as part of an activist agenda and provided support to HIV-positive people. Van Rooy was keen to share his story and Wulfsohn approached a number of newspapers. She was turned down by all of them except for the *Vrye Weekblad* (Figure 5.19) where journalist Jacques Pauw, founder and assistant editor of the newspaper, came and interviewed Van Rooy. It is interesting to find that Van Rooy's own words were used in the final article published in April 1992, and not a story written by Pauw (Van Rooy, 1992). It is significant that this was the only newspaper willing to take on the story. The *Vrye Weekblad* was an anti-apartheid newspaper launched in 1988, which was forced to close down in 1994 because it was bankrupted by the legal costs of defending a report. The intention was for follow-up articles where readers could continue to read about Van Rooy's life, but this did not materialise, possibly because of the legal situation facing the newspaper.

⁴⁹ This series was described in Chapter 3.

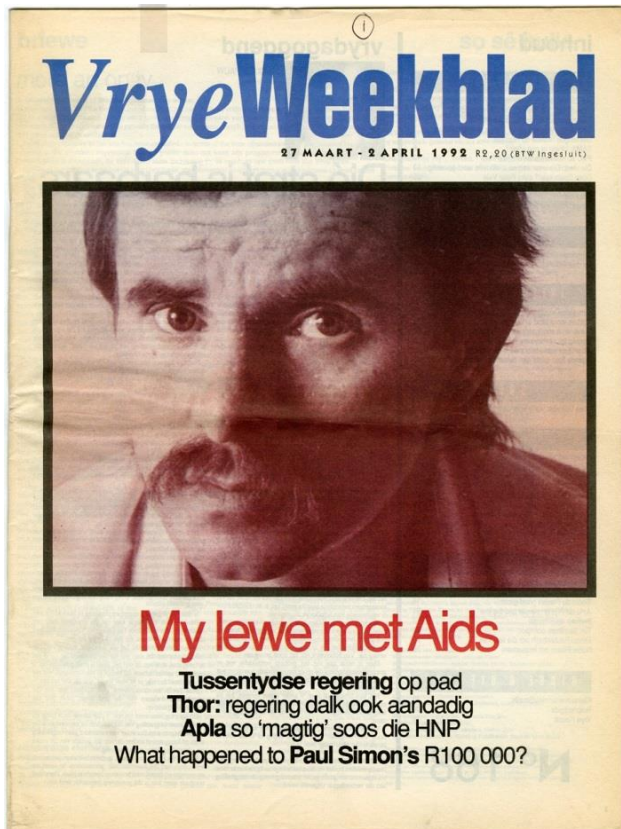


Figure 5.19 Wulfsohn's photograph of Johan van Rooy as it appeared on the front page of a supplement within the *Vrye Weekblad* in 1992. Source: The *Vrye Weekblad*, 27 March-2 April, 1992.

The images that appear in the *Vrye Weekblad* include portraits taken a year apart that clearly document the deterioration in Van Rooy's health, as well as an image of him talking to employees of the company Mobil (Figure 5.20). The story also provides an insight into Van Rooy's everyday life with photographs of him and his dogs (Figure 5.21), and a nurse examining him during a medical check-up (Figure 5.22). While these images may not seem remarkable to today's audience, given the exposure to similar types of photographs throughout the 2000s in the international and local media, at the time they must have been a revelation to a South African audience that knew very little about HIV and AIDS. The photographs of a white HIV-positive man would have potentially been familiar to viewers who had seen similar media images from the United States in the 1980s. And yet the photographs are not shocking, especially if compared to early stereotypical images that show the extreme physical wasting caused by AIDS that were often associated with reporting on AIDS in Africa.



Figure 5.20 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Johan van Rooy speaking to workers at Mobil. This image also appeared in the article in the *Vrye Weekblad* in 1992.

When looking at Wulfsohn's images as they appear within the *Vrye Weekblad*, they are clearly crafted to present Van Rooy in such a way that the audience would be sympathetic to him. A portrait of Van Rooy looking directly at the camera appeared on the cover of one section of the newspaper (Figure 5.19). The portrait is taken from above and this angle presents him as vulnerable, almost pleading. The inclusion of the image of Van Rooy with his dogs (Figure 5.21) is interesting when compared to other images of HIV-positive individuals in the early days of the epidemic taken in America and elsewhere. The photograph of Van Rooy with his dogs appears to support Treichler's argument about images of people living with HIV in the United States where the inclusion of pet animals presented the person as non-threatening and 'normalised' them at a time when their HIV status might have been seen as 'other' and 'deviant' (Treichler, 1999:80). The image of Van Rooy shows him relaxed and happy, despite the evidence of his illness with the drip cords visible on his throat and chest. In a similar way to her portraits of veteran woman activists (Figure 5.10), Wulfsohn's portraits of Van Rooy present him as a strong and courageous individual and emphasise his dignity, as well as his humanity.

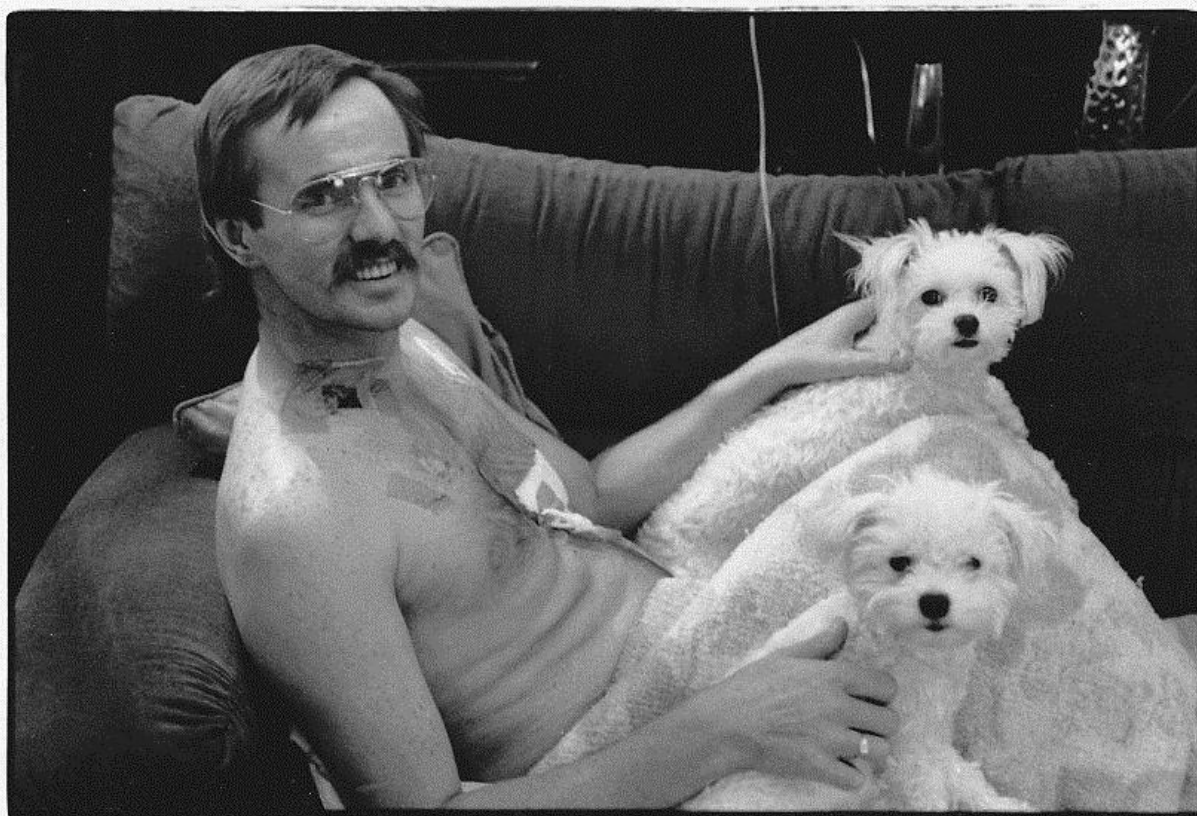


Figure 5.21 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Johan van Rooy, December 1991. This image reveals the extent to which Wulfsohn's relationship with Johan van Rooy had developed to the point where he was comfortable being photographed in a candid and relaxed way. The initial portraits of van Rooy were much more formal and reserved.

The images and text in the article present Van Rooy as a courageous man intent on publicising his story in order to increase understanding about the disease and acknowledge its presence in South African society. Van Rooy is presented not only as a 'likeable' individual, but through the text which is written in the first person he also comes across as down-to-earth and honest about his experience of living with HIV. And yet there are important absences in the images and text in the *Vrye Weekblad* article. Van Rooy was a homosexual man who had previously been married to a woman and had two children from his marriage. His long-term partner at the time was an Indian man. These details are revealed in Wulfsohn's other images that remain in her personal archive which I had access to but are not included in the newspaper article. Like most freelance photographers, Wulfsohn kept an archive of her photographs which included images which were unpublished. In some instances, entire stories were unpublished, but more commonly a few images were published while the rest remained in her archive.



Figure 5.22 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Van Rooy being attended to by a nurse during one of his health check-ups in 1991.

The exclusion of these facts is hardly surprising considering that Wulfsohn first photographed Van Rooy in 1991, the first year after the end of apartheid. Homosexuality was a criminal offence under apartheid law, as were sexual relations with a person of a different race. The details of Van Rooy's personal life would have shocked many conservative South Africans at the time. However, it is important to note that while Wulfsohn had photographed Van Rooy's two daughters by the time of the publication of the *Vrye Weekblad* article, it was only later that she documented his partner at his side in the hospital, and during the funeral service. The exclusion of Van Rooy's daughters from the published version of the story was most likely in order to protect them from public scrutiny.

Van Rooy was infected with HIV prior to the development of effective antiretroviral treatment. In June 1992 he became very ill and was bedridden. Van Rooy had asked Wulfsohn to document him dying and also his funeral (Figure 5.25). Many of Wulfsohn's images of Van Rooy in the final stages of his life (Figure 5.23) and also at his funeral echo images originating in the United States, such as the famous photograph of David Kirby by Therese Frare (Figure 5.24), as well as the images taken by Nan Goldin of her friends dying

of AIDS in the late 1980s in New York (Goldin, 1996) (Figure 5.26). When asked about these images, Wulfsohn responded that she could see the similarity but cannot remember even being aware of them at the time (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 July 15).

My intention in suggesting commonalities between Wulfsohn's work and images produced elsewhere is to reveal how her essay told a comparable story to that told in other parts of the world. I am not suggesting that Wulfsohn was influenced by these other images, but rather that around the world photographers felt compelled to document the impact of HIV and AIDS on people they knew. A number of HIV-positive people also wanted their stories and even deaths publicised in order to raise awareness of the HIV epidemic. Despite very different histories and experiences of the HIV epidemic in different parts of the world, certain kinds of images and documentary photo stories came to represent the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS. It is also worth noticing some of the similarities between Gideon Mendel's images from *The Wards* (Figure 4.4) and Wulfsohn's image Van Rooy's partner at his side in hospital (Figure 5.23). Once again the care and concern for those infected with HIV is highlighted, as well as tenderness and love in a same sex relationship.

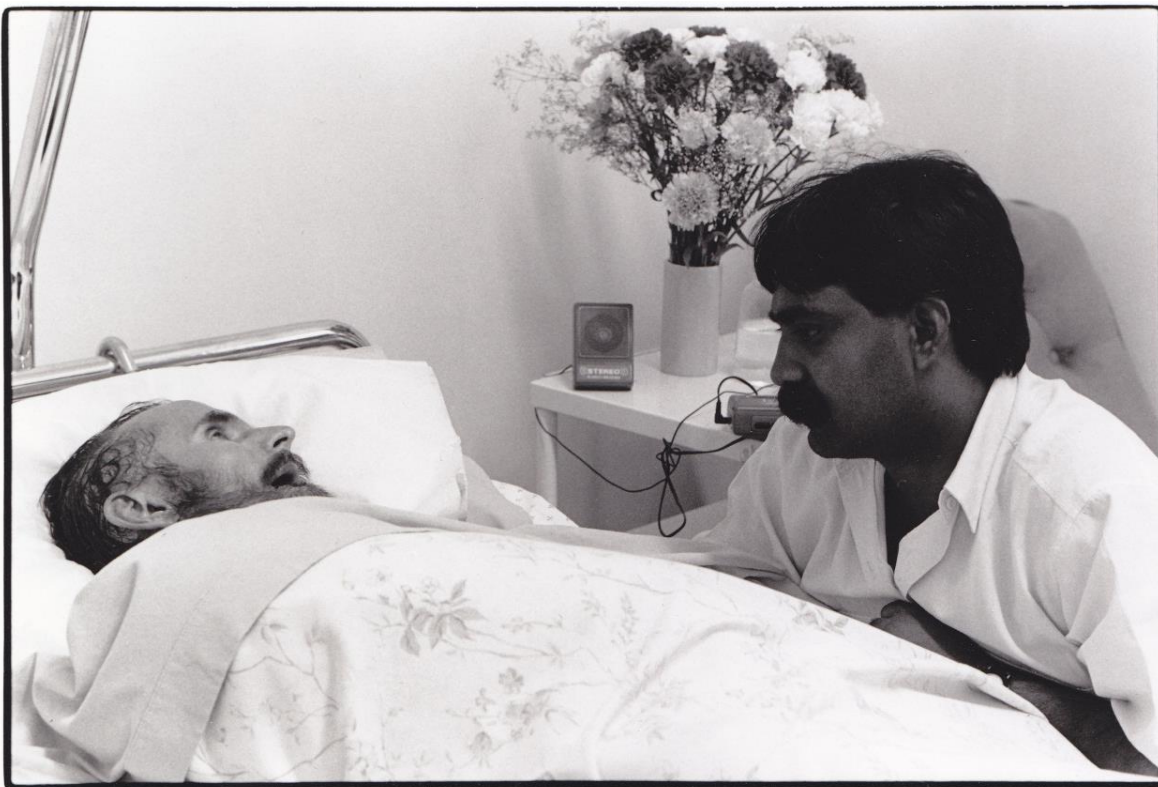


Figure 5.23 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Johan van Rooy visited by his partner in hospital. 1992.



Figure 5.24 Therese Frare. David Kirby. 1990. This Image was first published in *Life* magazine but was also subsequently used by the clothing company Benetton in a controversial advertising campaign in 1991.



Figure 5.25 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Johan van Rooy's partner at his casket. 1992.



Figure 5.26 Nan Goldin. Cookie at Vitterio's casket, NYC, September 16, 1989.

Wulfsohn's essay on Van Rooy may appear a simple documentary exercise in photographing the life and death of someone with HIV, but it was unique in South Africa at that time. It would be a number of years before similar images appeared in the South African media. The 1999 series of the televised show *Siyayinqoba Beat it!* is the earliest example of similar stories and public disclosure of HIV-positive status (Hodes, 2010: 639-659). The television series included guest appearances by Faghmeda Miller, Edwin Cameron and Nkosi Johnson, who were all photographed by Wulfsohn around the same time ("Siyayinqoba beat it!", 1999). Wulfsohn's photographs of Van Rooy, together with the portraits she went on to produce for the *Living Openly* series, which will be discussed shortly, are historically important because they document South Africans of different races and classes. Photographic engagement with HIV and AIDS in South Africa has tended to focus on socio-economically marginalised black communities feeding the perception that HIV and AIDS is a 'black' disease and that it only affects the poor.

While black South Africans carry the highest infection burden when compared with other race groups in the country (Shisana et al., 2009), Wulfsohn's images offer a broader and more complicated depiction of HIV and AIDS that is not necessarily captured by statistics. By seeking to photograph HIV-positive individuals of different races, sexual orientation, class and social backgrounds, Wulfsohn's images give a more varied account and, as a body of work, fundamentally challenge stereotypes about the disease. In addition, her adoption of portraiture as her primary approach to documenting people living with HIV and AIDS served

to humanise a disease that was so often reported in terms of numbers. The combination of her choice of subject and her extensive use of portraiture make Wulfsohn's contribution to representing the epidemic in South Africa distinctive.

5.5 The *Living Openly* project, mid-1990s to 2000

In the mid-1990s Wulfsohn was approached to take part in the *Beyond Awareness Campaign* organised by the South African HIV/AIDS and STD Directorate of the Department of Health. One of the partners of the *Beyond Awareness Campaign* was the non-profit organisation Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE). CADRE was responsible for researching and implementing the campaign's services, materials and projects. The main intention of the campaign was to increase active public responses and engagement with HIV by taking projects into communities, as well as by making information more easily available. The initiatives included the promotion of a national toll-free multilingual AIDS helpline, and provision of free education and workshop materials. Wulfsohn was involved in the Media Workers Project that brought together photographers and journalists with the purpose of addressing the lack of reporting on social action around HIV and AIDS. At the time media reporting showed only the sick and dying and rarely showed any response to the epidemic by individuals, communities or organisations (Parker et al., 2001).

Wulfsohn explained that 'the idea was to do so-called 'positive stories'. People didn't want to see death and dying of AIDS...' (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). Wulfsohn identified the kinds of stories they would research and report on. Examples included photographing volunteers at Cotlands⁵⁰ who would massage sick infants, families who adopted HIV-positive babies, and a community initiative called the Mohau Children's Centre⁵¹ that looked after abandoned HIV-positive children (Figure 5.27). These stories were then provided free of charge to different media publications and a database of the photographs and articles was created to encourage further publication of the materials

⁵⁰Cotlands is a non-profit organisation that fulfils a range of services for children who have been neglected, abused, abandoned, or who suffer from a life-threatening disease. Apart from its many other activities, Cotlands provides end-stage palliative care for children with AIDS.

⁵¹The Mohau Centre is based in Pretoria and provides care and support to orphaned, abused, abandoned, neglected and terminally ill children and their families who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

(Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). Wulfsohn's images from this period document the details and people involved in the projects she was photographing.

The photographers and the journalists had to generate their own ideas for the different stories and it was in this way that Wulfsohn came upon the concept for the *Living Openly* project. She explained that the impetus for the *Living Openly* project was Constitutional Court judge Edwin Cameron's public disclosure of his HIV-positive status. With Cameron's disclosure the idea came to her that there must be other people who had disclosed their status and were 'living openly' in their communities. Wulfsohn teamed up with journalist Susan Fox who was also working on the *Beyond Awareness Campaign*. Wulfsohn described how they travelled to different parts of South Africa 'in search of people' through NAPWA⁵² and other organisations that supported people living with HIV and AIDS. 'We would try and find people who were willing to go public and have their name and photographs published. And that was how the *Living Openly* project came about' (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4).



Figure 5.27 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Nurses taking care of an HIV-positive infant at the Mohau Centre in Pretoria.

⁵² The National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA) is a non-profit organisation that aims to support, educate and empower HIV-positive people in South Africa through support groups, training and advocacy.

The *Living Openly* project resulted in a soft cover publication with black and white photographs and text. The book presents portraits of individuals together with their testimonies based on interview transcripts. The book was distributed for free in clinics, libraries and other public places. The design and feel of the book was intended to encourage people to pick it up and take it home to their families (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). The opening pages explain how the project came about as a response to:

...discussions around media portrayals of people living with HIV/AIDS, and the understanding that so often these images were harsh and stereotyped. Where people were ill, they were portrayed in bed, emaciated and downcast. Where people were healthy, instead of their faces we saw their heads turned away, more often than not to protect their identities (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000).

The *Living Openly* images were thus made with the specific intention of countering existing sensational and negative media stereotypes, and combating the stigma associated with the disease. And yet Wulfsohn was not blind to an alternative view of the project as is evidenced by her comment:

I suppose [the] *Beyond Awareness [Campaign]* was propaganda, just showing positive stuff. But you know, I had this little thing that I used to say and that was, 'While life goes on, death goes on.' And you have got to balance the two, and that was my own little kind of answer. And I like that really, there are two sides to everything and people have AIDS fatigue you know (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4).

In this way Wulfsohn raises two important ideas. Firstly, she identifies the need to balance stories of the dead and dying with survival stories and accounts that focus on the strength of individuals and positive support from family and community in a context of an onslaught of negative reports of discrimination. Wulfsohn's mention of 'AIDS fatigue' evokes the idea of 'compassion fatigue' where it is argued that repeated exposure to images of suffering dulls an audience's ability to react. The origins of this thesis and the more recent critique of it (Campbell, 2013) have been discussed in detail in the Introduction. It is significant that the belief in 'compassion fatigue' was so widespread that photographers should comment on it in relation to their own work.

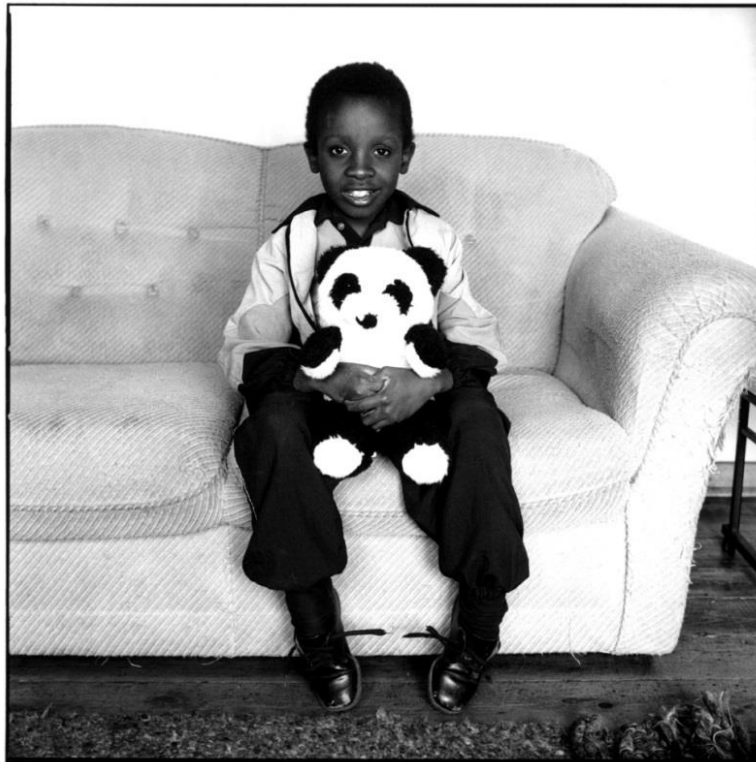


Figure 5.28 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Nkosi Johnson (1989-2001), HIV-positive, Melville, Johannesburg, 1999. Source: *Living Openly*. 2000.

In total thirty-two people appear in the *Living Openly* book. They include a range of ages and are representative, if somewhat self-consciously, of South African society in terms of race, language groups, gender and sexual orientation. They include famous personalities and activists, such as Nkosi Johnson (Figure 5.28), Zackie Achmat and Edwin Cameron,⁵³ as well as individuals unknown to the general public. Many of those included in the book later went on to become influential HIV spokespeople and activists, contributing to organisations offering training and education and involved in policy making. The range of South Africans represented in *Living Openly* aims to resist stereotypes that have dominated the HIV epidemic, such as seeing HIV and AIDS as a ‘gay disease’, or a ‘black disease’, or as the result of sexual promiscuity or immorality (Sontag, 1989:111-113; Treichler, 1999:113-114). By showing such a diverse selection of people living with HIV, *Living Openly* is subversive

⁵³ Nkosi Johnson was an HIV-positive boy infected through vertical transmission. He captured the public’s attention as a spokesperson during the period when the South African government resisted providing antiretroviral therapy in public clinics. Zackie Achmat was one of the founding members of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). He rose to prominence by refusing to take antiretroviral treatment until it was available in the public health care service. Edwin Cameron is a Constitutional Court Judge who was the first person in public office to openly disclose his HIV-positive status.

of the very process of shaping and reinforcing stereotypes: there are simply too many and too various a collection of images to associate the disease with a single type.

On reading the testimonies in *Living Openly*, it is evident that the emphasis is on disclosure as a strategy for increasing awareness of the disease and resisting discrimination by encouraging people to acknowledge that HIV and AIDS affects people throughout the country. It is important to note that within the context of the *Living Openly* project, the individuals engaged with public disclosure by making their status known to anyone who saw the book, the television show⁵⁴ or exhibition. The testimonies directly addressed the stigma of the disease and revealed the responses the participants had when disclosing their HIV status to family and friends. While many of the testimonies record positive outcomes from disclosing, a number of them are also ambivalent because of the discrimination people had endured. The interviews were conducted in 1999 and early 2000 when antiretroviral treatment was not available in South African public healthcare. All the participants faced an uncertain future. Their situation is very different to that of today, when it is common knowledge that if you are diagnosed, antiretroviral treatment is available and is successful in slowing the progression of the virus and thus prolonging life.

In a pre-treatment South Africa, disclosure was arguably riskier and placed the participant in a more vulnerable position because they faced an uncertain future in terms of their health. There was potentially more fear of HIV and AIDS prior to treatment because at the time it was seen as a certain, and often lingering and painful, death. And yet studies have shown that despite the media reporting of extremely negative and violent consequences to the disclosure of HIV-positive status, in a pre-treatment South African context the majority of people reported receiving support from family and friends on disclosing their status (Almeleh, 2004).

In evaluating *Living Openly* fourteen years after it was first published, it is clearly framed within the idealism of the post-1994 'rainbow nation'. By seeking out such a diverse range of people affected by the virus, the book could be critiqued for suggesting that HIV and AIDS affect all South Africans equally. The disparity in socio-economic situations, as well as access to health care, meant that some South Africans were better, or less well, equipped to

⁵⁴ The *Beyond Awareness Campaign* also produced a 50 minute documentary also entitled *Living Openly* which was broadcast on national television.

cope with HIV infection. This would have been particularly pronounced in the early 2000s, before there was access to antiretroviral treatment in the public health care system in South Africa and only those with personal financial means could afford treatment.

Only one testimony in *Living Openly* addresses these issues, Edwin Cameron talks of the personal and political motivation for his public disclosure by mentioning the murder of Gugu Dlamini who was killed by members of her community for disclosing her HIV-positive status. Cameron contrasts this with his own circumstances and the support he was given by friends and colleagues when he decided to openly disclose. He also makes mention of the social and economic security he enjoyed because of his job and crucially, his access to antiretroviral therapy at a time when it was not available in the public health care system. His testimony alone alerts the reader to the differences in life circumstances between the different participants in the book. The importance of Cameron's disclosure cannot be underestimated, not only because of his high-profile position, but also because he was the first South African in public office to do so. Indeed, he remains the only high-profile public office holder in Africa to disclose his HIV status. This flew in the face of the state's AIDS denialism and bizarre claims from President Thabo Mbeki that he did not know anyone who was HIV-positive.

However, the gains of the book arguably outweigh its shortcomings, especially given the time period in which it was produced. For instance, it is important that many of the testimonies adopt a frank approach to how the subjects talk about themselves and how they have come to terms with their diagnosis. The honesty in what they say, as well as the tone and turn of phrase in the text, represents the subjects as believable people who would be familiar to the intended South African readership. For example, one of the participant testimonies reads as follows:

You eliminate the gossip factor because if they suspect you are HIV-positive, they will gossip about you. You worry all the time about what everybody thinks, whereas if you talk about it, they cannot gossip because you've already told them. To keep it in, you contribute to your own death because you're so worried about what everyone will think. But there are consequences sometimes, I mean it wasn't nice losing contact with members of my family (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000:63).

The image and the text humanise the subjects by presenting them in an honest and straightforward way. In short, they are portrayed as people ‘just like us’ and thus the images work to resist the stereotypes that have usually divided people into ‘us’ and ‘them’ according to perceived differences, such as race, sexuality and behaviour. In contrast to earlier education campaigns about HIV and AIDS that had presented the disease as a faceless threat, *Living Openly* was ground-breaking in terms of not only showing South Africans with the disease, but also directly addressing discrimination and fears people had about it.

While the text provides information about the subjects and their experiences of living with HIV, the photographs perform a vital role in that they provide the viewer with an actual image of the subject. The reason this is important is because many of the misconceptions and prejudices about HIV and AIDS function visually. For example, one of the ways HIV is connected to the visual is judging whether or not a person looks like the ‘kind’ of person who could be at risk of HIV infection (Uys et al., 2005). This implies a moral judgement of the person based on how they behave or dress, or simply how they look. Alternatively, people are often judged as HIV-positive if they look ill or are thin. One of the early challenges of HIV education programs was to explain the differences between HIV infection and AIDS, where the former means a person is infected with the virus while the latter means they are experiencing illnesses caused by the weakening of their immune system. A further challenge was to communicate that anyone is at risk of HIV infection, regardless of class, race, religion and sexuality. These misperceptions are tied to visual judgements.

One of the intentions of the book was to show how existing stereotypes dangerously affected people’s perceptions of their risk of HIV infection. For example, Jaco Fouché explains ‘At the stage I was diagnosed it was thought that white people don’t get HIV’ (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000:63) (Figure 5.29). Fouché’s testimony also tackles other misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted when he talks about the concerns that people had over him working in the army kitchen and possibly cutting himself and infecting those who ate the food.⁵⁵ In this way, the book engages with the misperceptions that the readership would be familiar with

⁵⁵ While it is possible for someone to be infected by coming into contact with blood, it is highly unlikely that transmission could occur through food, unless the person had cuts or sores in their mouth and there was a large quantity of blood in the food. These kinds of ‘scare stories’ about unusual ways HIV can be transmitted detract from the fact that in South Africa the most common mode of transmission is unprotected heterosexual sex.

and provides information to counter these myths. It also reveals how these myths differed from community to community. And so while Fouché as a white South African was led to believe that HIV was a ‘black disease’, another black participant Adeline Mangcu (Figure 5.30) explains, ‘The way it was presented to us, we thought it was definitely not a black thing. We heard about gay men getting it...’ (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000:21). In this way we can see how different groups have always blamed others for the disease.

The portrait of Jaco Fouché shows him with his wife Antoinette (Figure 5.29). The image shows the HIV-positive couple holding hands and without the text the photograph could be read as a portrait of any young couple. The couple also appeared in the televised series *Siyayinqoba Beat it!* and in many ways represented a segment of the South African population (white and heterosexual) not associated with HIV and AIDS. Importantly, the text addresses the issue of HIV infection within a relationship where Antoinette says, ‘After Jaco told me he was HIV-positive, I went for testing as well. We don’t know if maybe I contracted it from him. I don’t think so because I had other relationships before him’ (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000:63).

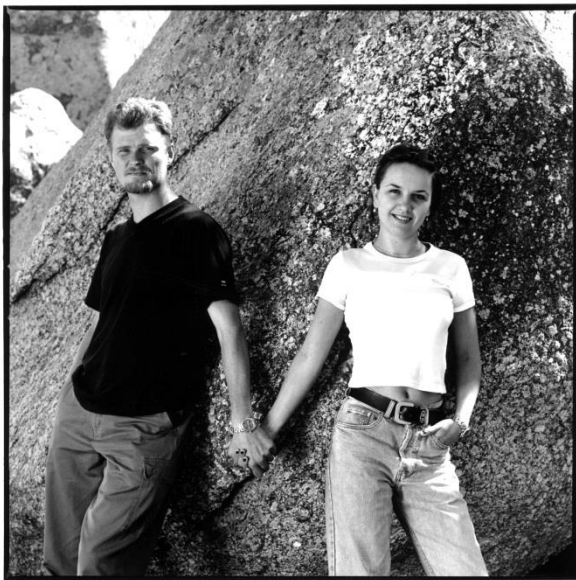


Figure 5.29 Gisèle Wulfsohn. Jaco and Antoinette Fouché **Figure 5.30** Gisèle Wulfsohn. Adeline Mangcu. Both images are from the series *Living Openly*. 2000.

The *Living Openly* series was photographed using black and white 35mm film and similarly to Wulfsohn’s *Malibongwe* project, the portraits are environmental portraits. While all the

portraits depict the subjects facing the camera and meeting the viewer's eyes, there is variation in terms of angle and composition. Wulfsohn's flair as a portraitist is revealed in her ability to put the subject's at ease and capture them in a relaxed and dignified way. The portraits are honest and gentle and capture the subjects in a positive light, yet also emphasise their 'ordinariness'. This reflects a desire to represent these individuals as courageous, yet average South Africans.

Another important aspect of the photographs in *Living Openly* is that the individuals' faces and identities are revealed. This performs a very important function in depicting HIV-positive people in a powerful way that counters the shame and stigma that was normally associated with images of HIV and AIDS at this time. Early representations of HIV-positive people typically hid their identity and so they were photographed backlit, turned away, or from the back (Treichler, 1999:77; Hodes, 2007). These kinds of images communicate a very strong sense of fear and shame and the potential for violent discrimination. The difference in how the *Living Openly* portraits represent people is particularly well illustrated by comparing these portraits with another image taken by Wulfsohn as part of a different project on HIV-positive domestic workers she did in 2004 called *At Home with HIV* (Figure 5.31).

The series *At Home with HIV* was published in *Marie Claire* magazine (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). In this image the woman's head is cut out of the photograph in order to hide her identity. Wulfsohn's lasting memory of this project was of how fearful the HIV-positive domestic workers were of having their identities revealed. Wulfsohn had to compose the photographs in such a way that the subjects' heads were excluded from the image. Some of the women also insisted on being photographed away from their place of employment because they feared that if someone saw the image and recognised the house, they would be able to identify them (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). And yet, the easy identification of the employer in this instance suggests that this domestic worker's primary concern was disclosure within her community. In this way we can see the extreme fear that people had over their identities being revealed, even four years after the publication of *Living Openly* and at a time when antiretroviral treatment was available in public clinics, although the roll-out only began in April 2004.



Figure 5.31 Wulfsohn's portrait of an HIV-positive domestic worker, her employer and her employer's son, 2004. This image was part of the *At Home with HIV* series.

Apart from general misperceptions and prejudices about HIV and AIDS, *Living Openly* also addressed issues specific to particular groups. For example, Faghmeda Miller's story reveals the unique issues she faced when she was diagnosed because of the shame associated with HIV in her Muslim community (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000:11). She explains how she was unable to find a single other HIV-positive Muslim to share her experiences with and how, despite the support she got from the Christian support group she attended, she longed for support from her own people. Miller (Figure 4.32) went on to become a well-known activist and appeared on radio and also in the televised show *Siyayinqoba Beat it!*. Miller also founded the organisation Positive Muslims in 2000 which offers support groups and other services.



Figure 4.32 Gisèle Wulfohn. Faghmeda Miller. Source: *Living Openly*. 2000.

In evaluating Wulfohn's contribution to challenging dominant stereotypes of HIV-positive people through her photography, much of my analysis of *Living Openly* has focused on the text and the inclusion of different individuals and their stories within the project. These elements were an important part of her project, especially because the original concept was Wulfohn's and, together with Susan Fox, she found the individuals and photographed them. The conceptualisation of the project and the choice of subjects to photograph, are as important as the photographs themselves. All these elements, including the text, contribute to the meaning of the project. Wulfohn's engagement with the greater issues surrounding the representation of people living with HIV is critical to reading her images.

Apart from appearing in the book, the *Living Openly* images were also exhibited at the BAT Centre⁵⁶ during the International World AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000. The images were then made available by CADRE as a travelling 'pop-up' exhibition which was easy to install and transport. The exhibition was intended to travel to community halls and other places, which unlike galleries, are not equipped to hang exhibitions and images. Another way

⁵⁶ The BAT Centre is an arts and culture community centre in Durban with performance venues, gallery space and a visual art studio.

that Wulfsohn's images came to be viewed by a range of audiences was the printing of posters, which are relatively cheap to produce and easy to transport and distribute in a range of contexts. The participants from *Living Openly* were also part of a documentary film that was screened on national television (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4).

Making the materials available to a broad range of South Africans was an important aspect of the project for Wulfsohn. Her response to being asked where she liked seeing her work displayed the most was:

You know, I like the idea of a booklet that goes into clinics because then someone will take it home and then other people will read it. Just going beyond the walls of a gallery for me is very important because I mean not many people go to galleries. There are a select number that do but you have got to make it accessible to the broader communities (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4).

And yet it must be noted that the gallery has been used in other instances to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS, most notably by Gideon Mendel as was discussed in Chapter 4. When the print run of *Living Openly* ran out, Wulfsohn was approached by CADRE to contact the participants to update the printed version. Wulfsohn traced as many of the original participants as she could. Some had started antiretroviral treatment, some had died and others had become involved in HIV-related work through their experiences of living with the disease.

5.6 *Conversations: HIV and the Family* project, 2004-2007

While a second imprint of *Living Openly* was not realised, a new project called *Conversations: HIV and the Family* took shape and was carried out in 2004 and 2005 (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007). Like the *Living Openly* project, *Conversations* also developed training resources, including a book and photographic display of the project that is available from CADRE. The book was published in 2006 and reprinted with a revised introduction in 2007. In total twelve families took part in the project. The book is comprised of twelve sections, one on each family. The project set out to work with a broad understanding of what a family is, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. This meant

that the families include friends, care-givers, grandparents and others. In many instances, families take care of other extended family members and have also taken in children who have been abandoned or who have been orphaned. In this way the images challenge the conventional Western idea of the nuclear family and mirror the kinds of families most South Africans actually come from (Russell, 2003:5-47).

Each section opens with a group portrait of the family. This is followed by members of the family, including the children, talking about their experiences. The text is written in the first person and is based on interviews conducted by Betsi Pendry. Other photographs of the family going about their daily lives are also included. Like *Living Openly*, the images in *Conversations* work very closely with the text and the two elements inform each other. The portraits are titled with the names of the people to help the reader match the individuals to their text. The titles also enable the viewer to work out the relationships between the different family members.

The overall concept behind the project was to share the personal experiences of South African families and how they have been affected by HIV. The book was intended to reach a wide South African audience and inspire other families to accept and talk about HIV and how it affected their lives. Like *Living Openly*, the selection of South Africans from different race groups, cultures, religions, sexual orientations and regions, aimed to be representative of the country (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4). In a similar way to *Living Openly*, this publication also aimed to demonstrate that regardless of socio-economic background, HIV has an impact on many South African families. The limitations of this framing have been discussed earlier in terms of the socio-economic differences between different families which have a direct impact on the ability to cope with the impact of HIV and AIDS on a family. By showing such a range of different families, the authors hoped that South Africans from different backgrounds would be able to relate to at least one of the families.

Unlike the first publication, the people involved in *Conversations* were not all HIV-positive. Although it is not made explicit, it is understood that many of the people pictured are not HIV-positive, such as the Motsoeneng children who survived their parents who had died of AIDS-related illnesses. In *Conversations*, the family is affected by the diagnosis and, at times, the death of family members, but they are not necessarily infected themselves. In the

mid-2000s public health messaging emphasised that all South Africans are affected by HIV and AIDS, even if they are not infected.

The *Conversations* book opens with photographs of the five-session workshop that all the families attended as part of the project. The workshop was based on social therapy methodology and used drama and other visual arts as a way of getting the participants to engage with each other and to share their experiences. The intention of the workshop was to bring different families together so that they could be part of a larger community of people who they shared experiences with, and in this way found support and comfort in knowing that they were not alone in what they were experiencing.

This project took place at a time when support groups were not well established in many parts of the country. It is interesting to note that support groups became an increasingly common feature with the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare sector in April 2004. This project took place during the early years of antiretroviral treatment and many of the interviews reveal the lack of counselling and social support experienced by the participants (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:23-25). The new introduction to *Conversations* in 2007 also clearly documents the increased access to antiretroviral treatment with a number of the participants being on treatment and also a number of the children being protected from vertical transmission.



Figure 5.33 Gisèle Wulfohn. Back, from left to right: Thando Shange (son of Regina’s late son, 4), Noxolo Shange (Regina’s granddaughter, 14), Lihle Shange (Regina’s granddaughter, 2), Sibusiso Shange (Regina’s grandson, 15). Front, from left to right: Regina Moloi (Audrey’s sister, 58), Audrey Moloi (Regina’s sister 51). Source: *Conversations*. 2007.

Conversations came about at a time when the social impact of the epidemic started to become apparent in South Africa. It was noted that unlike many other diseases, the effects of HIV and AIDS were not limited to those infected with the virus. This was particularly so because HIV and AIDS disproportionately affect adults who are not only breadwinners for families, but are also parents. As people started to die from AIDS-related illnesses, it was the young and the old who remained behind. This resulted in grandmothers often becoming responsible for the care of grandchildren, sometimes many – as seen in the case of the Shange family (Figure 5.33) (Wulfohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:19-21). Eric Miller has more recently photographed similar stories of grandmothers looking after extended families (Miller et al., 2012).

Another consequence of the epidemic was the emergence of child-headed households where children had no family to go to and so stayed together as a family once their parents had died. This social phenomenon has been documented by a number of South African photographers

including Wulfohn, Mendel and Mofokeng. As noted in Chapter 4, there are very few child-headed household documented in South African surveys and there is the critique that these are the kind of stories sought out by journalists and photographers when this is not the norm. The vast majority of children who are orphaned are cared for by extended families (Meintjes & Bray, 2005). This critique of the representation of 'AIDS orphans' has already been discussed in Chapter 4.

The story of the Mtsi family in *Conversations* documents how one woman started a crèche which became a care centre for HIV-positive and abused children (Wulfohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:26-29). Seipati Mtsi and her mother and daughters care for the children at what has become known as Little Angels Life Care Centre in Orange Farm. This story shows how individuals in communities have responded to the epidemic and taken steps to provide support and care for those affected by HIV and AIDS. In this instance, one family has gone beyond caring 'for their own' and have started looking after those whom no-one else is caring for and who are without any financial or state assistance. However, since *Little Angels* was first reported on in the media, they have received donations and assistance from companies and individuals.

In addition to a group portrait of each family, Wulfohn also documented informal moments of the family going about their everyday tasks. The more formal and choreographed visual language of the group portraits is contrasted with the candid, more typically documentary style of the photographs of the family going about their daily routine. These two different aesthetics bring together two strands of Wulfohn's photographic practice - portraiture and documentary. The documentary images serve an important purpose in that they demonstrate the nature of the relationships and the different roles played by members of the family in taking care of each other. These images also capture everyday tasks like bathing, doing laundry and preparing and sharing meals which encourage the viewer to relate to the subjects.

The Wippenaar family is a large extended family that shares a home in Steenberg, Cape Town (Wulfohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:11). Jounoos Wippenaar is HIV-positive and lives with his sister's family. Their stories reveal a range of opinions and responses to HIV in the family. These perceptions echo commonly held views and in the context of the book, they are challenged and brought out into the open. For example, Jounoos's niece, Soraya says 'It

was a big shock when Jounoos told us he had HIV. This AIDS thing has been happening all over for a long time, but I never thought it would come to our family' (Wulfohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:11).



Figure 5.34 Wulfohn's portrait of the Greyling family. Apart from these more formal portraits of the families, Wulfohn also captured more relaxed moments. Source: *Conversations*. 2007.

Christo Greyling appeared in *Living Openly* and in *Conversations* he is joined by his wife and daughter. The photographs focus on the normalcy of having a family and the evident joy raising a child has brought to the couple (Figure 5.34). Since he was first involved in *Living Openly*, he and his HIV-negative wife have had a daughter and are expecting a second child. The emphasis of their story as a family is their decision to have children despite the potential risk of infecting Liesl with HIV. Christo, a Christian pastor, talks frankly about how they took steps to ensure that the risks were minimised.⁵⁷ In this way, their story provides information for other sero-discordant families who find themselves in a similar situation of wanting to have children. Christo also addresses the issue of stigma around HIV when he discusses his experiences of disclosing his status to his congregation and his concerns about

⁵⁷ Antiretroviral therapy can reduce the amount of HIV in the body until it is 'undetectable' in a viral load test which greatly reduces the risk of infecting an HIV-negative partner. The couple also used condoms at all times except for when the ovulation cycle was such that it was possible to fertilise an egg.

the hypocrisy of accepting his status because of how he was infected, while judging those who had been infected sexually or from behaviour deemed to be deviant and immoral. He later left the church in order to develop an AIDS education programme:

There was so much stigma connected to HIV that I was asked to prove that I was infected from a blood transfusion and not from something else. I also had to prepare a press statement for the church. I realised that my congregation was able to accept me, but not 'those others' (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:15).

The *Conversations* book purposely features a diverse selection of different South African families affected by HIV and AIDS. It includes families with child-headed households and those in foster care (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:27&43). There are also large extended families, such as the Mabena, Wippenaar, Mofokeng and Ngwenyama families (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:11&51). There are families from different cultures, races and parts of the country. There are single-parent families, such as the Mazibuko family (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:23). There is the Markland/Sabbagha family where a male homosexual couple live with the one man's daughter (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:39). There are families where there are still challenges in accepting HIV and AIDS, such as the Abrahams family. Then there is the Greyling family with an HIV-positive Afrikaans minister and his HIV-negative wife (Wulfsohn, Pendry & Bodenstein, 2007:39).

This wide selection results in an inclusion of nearly every challenge facing families in South Africa, including issues such as disclosure, substance abuse and HIV, sero-discordant couples, children and HIV, preventing vertical transmission from mother to child, poverty, child-headed households, abandoned children and abuse. In this way, *Conversations* is crafted not only as an educational tool, but also as a way of revealing the full extent of the effects of HIV and AIDS on society and the social conditions and challenges that people face regardless of HIV status. The project addresses the larger impact of HIV on South African society and the many challenges facing the country including the wide range of socio-economic and historical challenges which existed before the epidemic, but which now feed into and exacerbate it (Nattrass, 2007:5).

One of the critiques of NGO work around HIV is that because of state AIDS denialism and the fight for the provision of antiretroviral treatment in public health care, treatment has been given an exaggerated importance in terms of ways of addressing the epidemic. There is a criticism of what some have termed ‘ARV evangelism’ where treatment is projected as the ultimate solution to the epidemic and other challenges facing individuals and communities, such as unemployment and poverty, are overlooked. While treatment is addressed within some of the families, it does not dominate the narratives.

Importantly, the *Conversations* book also includes stories of individuals who are not ‘role models’ in terms of the public health messages of ‘open disclosure’, condom usage and so on. For example, the stories of the Abrahams, Shange and Raphasha families address how individuals have been unable to accept their HIV-positive status, or have resisted being tested, or have not told their sexual partner of their status or battle with condom usage. In this way, a very real sense of the challenges of how HIV shapes peoples’ lives is addressed. However, the issues of traditional healing practices and witchcraft within the context of the HIV epidemic is completely absent from the book. Elsewhere it has been argued that acknowledging and working with these alternative paradigms is an essential part of addressing the impact of the HIV epidemic in South Africa (Ashforth 2002; Ashforth & Nattrass, 2005; Wreford, Hippler & Esser, 2006; Wreford, 2008b). This had already been discussed in Chapter 2.

Wulfsohn’s relationship with CADRE produced two comprehensive bodies of work, *Living Openly* and *Conversations: HIV and the Family*. While *Living Openly* was originally Wulfsohn’s idea, her relationship with CADRE enabled her to devote time and energy to the project and in this way her tie to the NGO was beneficial. When asked if there were times if she felt her work was compromised by her relationships with NGOs, Wulfsohn responded that the nature of the relationships she had developed with the NGOs she worked with had not limited her creative freedom and that she had never been told to work in a particular way (Wulfsohn, personal interview, 2011 July 15). In a similar way to Gideon Mendel, Wulfsohn was able to foster relationships with specific NGOs that benefitted her and enabled her to produce the kind of work she was interested in.

Gisèle Wulfohn was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2005 while working on the *Conversations* project. Despite a bleak prognosis that she would survive for only a few months, Wulfohn lived for another six years. She passed away in December 2011. In her discussion of her illness, Wulfohn often referred to the strength and perseverance she derived from her work with people living with HIV and AIDS. In particular, she commented on the need to be open about illness, and attributed her continued health to the acceptance of her condition and to her decision to talk openly and frankly about it (Wulfohn, personal interview, 2011 May 4).

During the 2000s Wulfohn was also actively documenting a range of other HIV-related stories. These included the Salvation Army Masiye Camp for children orphaned by the epidemic in Zimbabwe (2000) which provided psycho-social support and life skills training, as well as community education and traditional healers in Khutsong. Wulfohn photographed the Perinatal HIV Research Unit at Baragwanath Hospital in 2001. In the same year she documented the protests against patents on antiretroviral treatment mentioned in Chapter 1. Wulfohn also documented the impact of the epidemic on the mining sector and responses by trade unions and mining management in Carltonville (2001) and Harmony Gold Mine in Virginia in the Free State province (1999). All these projects are evidence of the wide-ranging nature of Wulfohn's engagement with responses to the HIV epidemic.

5.7 Conclusion

Wulfohn documented HIV and AIDS in South Africa for close on twenty years. In this time she arguably provides one of the most extensive visual records of the history of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. The only other photographer to have documented the epidemic for such an extended time during this period is Gideon Mendel. Wulfohn's photographs of the HIV epidemic differ from Mendel's, particularly her use of portraiture. While Wulfohn produced more candid images documenting activities, her portraits of HIV-positive people and their families define her approach. While photographed using available light, Wulfohn's portraits are choreographed and suggest studio portraiture conventions. Wulfohn's portraits reflect the diverse racial, socio-economic and cultural demographics of the South Africans. Her work is singular in this regard and thus powerfully subverts stereotypes of HIV and AIDS as an exclusively 'black' or 'poor' disease.

Wulfsohn's documentation of Johan van Rooy was the first story of public HIV disclosure in the South African media. It was also ground-breaking in terms of its approach and the intimacy of the images which ran counter to dominant dehumanising modes of representing AIDS patients at the time. This series stands out because of the sensitivity and gentleness of the images and was a first for the South African context. It is comparable to Mendel's profoundly moving series *The Wards* which was produced in 1993 in Middlesex Hospital in Britain (Mayes & Stein 1999).

Wulfsohn's portraits that appear in *Living Openly* and *Conversations* were seminal in their representation of HIV-positive individuals as ordinary South Africans and have continued to appear in HIV-related publications such as the calendar produced in 2012 by the Centre for the Study of AIDS (CSA) at the University of Pretoria (CSA, 2012). These portraits also serve as an important record of men, women and children who challenged perceptions of HIV and AIDS. Many of these people are not acknowledged in other histories of the epidemic and in this way Wulfsohn's photographs offer a distinctive account. Wulfsohn's portraits can be compared to her portrayal of veteran women activists and in a sense go beyond a humanistic approach and suggest an honorific tradition.

Wulfsohn's quiet and modest approach to documenting HIV and AIDS, as well as the low profile forms of publication she favoured, such as posters and booklets distributed in clinics, meant that her work was rarely known outside of these community circles. Despite the obvious aesthetic merits of her work, Wulfsohn appeared to favour the ability of the images to fulfil a social and educational function over their visual appeal. The variety and complexity of the stories she told has resulted in a unique archive of the epidemic in South Africa.

Chapter 6

David Goldblatt: the landscape of the HIV epidemic (2003-2008)

David Goldblatt's engagement with HIV and AIDS avoids direct representation of the disease and the human suffering caused by it. The distinguishing feature of his approach to photographing the epidemic is his focus on the AIDS ribbon found in the South African landscape. With the exception of two portraits discussed in this chapter, people do not feature as the main subject matter and where they do appear, they are part of the landscape along with the recurring motif of the AIDS ribbon. The absence of the human figure sets Goldblatt apart from other South African photographers who have documented the HIV epidemic.

The origins of the red AIDS ribbon can be traced to a group of New York based artists who formed a group called Visual AIDS in 1988 and responded to the wearing of a yellow ribbon during the Gulf War as a sign of American nationalism (Watney, 2000:175-179). The intention of the red ribbon was to draw attention to the poor funding directed at HIV and AIDS in comparison to the cost of the Gulf War.⁵⁸ Since then the AIDS ribbon has been used to promote the idea that HIV is a global issue and has largely been understood as a sign of solidarity with those infected and affected by the epidemic.

Goldblatt's documentation of the red AIDS ribbon consists of a series of eleven images entitled *In the Time of AIDS*. This relatively small series falls within the larger *Intersections* project which consists mostly of landscapes, the documentation of memorials within the landscape and another series comprising portraits of 'municipal people' responsible for governance in small towns. *In the Time of AIDS* has strong conceptual and aesthetic links to the larger *Intersections* body of work which is evidenced in the way the series has been exhibited and published. Four of the images from *In the Time of AIDS* appear within the publication *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005) and two are included in *Intersections Intersected*

⁵⁸ Goldblatt was interested to learn of this origin of the AIDS ribbon and was unaware of it at the time of photographing the series. His interpretation and engagement with potential meanings of the symbol will be addressed in this chapter.

(Goldblatt, 2008). *In the Time of AIDS* has only once been exhibited on its own (Stolz, 2009).

Despite the relatively small number of photographs in the series *In the Time of AIDS*, the singularity of Goldblatt's approach to engaging with the HIV epidemic offers an important contribution to South African photography of HIV and AIDS. The absence of the human figure distinguishes Goldblatt's images from the work of all other South African photographers who have documented the epidemic and who are featured in this thesis. While Goldblatt's approach to HIV may be different from how other photographers have engaged with the issue, it is entirely in keeping with the ethos and process of his later work.⁵⁹ This is encapsulated in an interview on the series *In the Time of AIDS* where Goldblatt comments:

The moment in the kind of photography that I do is stretchable. I seldom work in a situation where the actions of people are critical to the photograph. The photographs that I do are generally speaking much more static if you like. There are often people in them but they are not critically related to what I am doing (Goldblatt in *Masupasela*, 2007).

The absence of the human figure in his series *In the Time of AIDS* raises a number of important questions about what the HIV epidemic has come to mean in the South African context. By noting the proliferation of the AIDS ribbon in the landscape and documenting this phenomenon, Goldblatt encourages the viewer to contemplate the impact of the epidemic on the country and also consider how fellow South Africans have experienced and responded to HIV and AIDS.

6.1 The portrait of Victoria Cobokana

Before looking at the series *In the Time of AIDS*, I will start with a discussion of an image that precedes it by about four years and was Goldblatt's first photograph of the issue to enter the public domain (Figure 6.1). Without reading the title, the image is simply a photograph of a woman and her children. The alignment of a circular window behind her head,

⁵⁹ In order to arrive at this conclusion I have studied a number of publications on Goldblatt's work (Goldblatt, 1975, 1982, 1989, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009).

suggestive of a halo, transforms the image into the potent Christian symbol of the Madonna and child. And yet this African Madonna has two children, not one,⁶⁰ and on close investigation a broom that intrudes in the left hand side of the image suggests that she had been interrupted.



Figure 6.1 David Goldblatt. Victoria Cobokana, housekeeper, in her employer's dining room with her son Sifiso and daughter Onica, Johannesburg, June 1999. Victoria died of AIDS December 13, 1999, Sifiso died of AIDS January 12, 2000, Onica died of AIDS May 2000.

On reading the title of the image we learn that Victoria Cobokana is a housekeeper. We also find out that she died shortly after the photograph was taken, along with her two children who were also HIV-positive. Apart from photographs Goldblatt took of AIDS activist Zackie Achmat for *The New Yorker* magazine in 2003, this image is the only instance where Goldblatt photographed an HIV-positive person (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). But unlike when Goldblatt photographed Achmat, the photograph of Victoria Cobokana was not taken with an HIV story in mind. At the time of taking the image Goldblatt did not know her HIV status and the image was taken for a completely different project. Goldblatt was

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that some historical paintings of the Madonna and child do show her with two children. Apart from the Christ child, Saint John the Baptist is also sometimes included.

working with journalist Charlene Smith on a story for the Institute for Democracy in Africa (IDASA) and they were looking for a story of an ordinary South African who had been a victim of crime. Smith commented that her housekeeper had recently been robbed and so they went to Smith's house and photographed her (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). The image of Cobokana was taken in 1999 at a time when antiretroviral treatment was not available in the public health care system in South Africa.

The image was donated by Goldblatt when he was asked to contribute to the exhibition *Artworks for AIDS*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the exhibition consisted of artworks that addressed the theme of HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa and Goldblatt's image was among four photographs included in the show.⁶¹ In addition to the exhibition being shown at the gallery it was also exhibited at the XIII International AIDS Conference which was hosted in Durban in July 2000 (Martin, 2004:127). Goldblatt's photograph of Cobokana has also been more recently added to the ArtAIDS collection and exhibited in Barcelona as part of the *You are not alone* travelling exhibition in 2011 (ArtAIDS Foundation, 2011).

Within the context of the *Artworks for AIDS* exhibition at the Durban conference, Goldblatt's photograph not only provided a vignette into the tragedy of one family but also spoke to a much larger scale of loss. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gisèle Wulfsohn and Sue Williamson also exhibited portraits in response to the epidemic at the XIII International AIDS Conference in 2000. Gisèle Wulfsohn exhibited her recently completed *Living Openly* project consisting of black and white portraits of HIV-positive individuals which was discussed in Chapter 4 (Wulfsohn & Fox, 2000). Sue Williamson paired portraits of HIV-positive individuals with a photograph of a statement made by each of her subjects which was graffitied on a public space. In this way Williamson's project *From the Inside* functioned as both an art piece within the gallery and also as a public intervention in the streets. It is interesting to note how all these examples make use of portraiture in response to recording the impact of the HIV epidemic. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there were significant challenges to photographing HIV-positive individuals, especially in the pre-treatment era, because of the fear of discrimination. Unlike most of the people photographed by Williamson and Wulfsohn,

⁶¹ The other photographs in the exhibition include a photomontage by Jane Alexander, Penny Siopis's photograph of an infant wrapped in a red ribbon and an image from Sue Williamson's series of portraits of HIV-positive people, *From the Inside*.

Cobokana was not an activist or nor had she publically disclosed her HIV status. It was only with her death and those of her children, that her HIV status became publically known through this single image.

It is not known whether Victoria Cobokana knew her HIV status, or those of her children, at the time Goldblatt's photograph was taken. This is partly where the poignancy of the image lies with the viewer having the knowledge of their imminent deaths while looking at the portrait. The photograph also shows the reality of the demographic of those who are affected by HIV infection. Young women consistently have the highest percentage of the country's number of HIV-infected individuals (Shisana et al., 2009). But more importantly, the image of the mother and her children counters pervading stereotypes of HIV and AIDS that promote the idea that AIDS is a disease reserved for the socially and sexually deviant.

The reason I have described this image in such depth is because it made an important contribution to the photographic representation of HIV and AIDS in South Africa in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and because it is an anomaly for Goldblatt's engagement with the epidemic. In a similar way to other photographs of HIV-positive people, especially those produced in the early 2000s, it confirms the use of portraiture as a way of humanizing and normalizing HIV infection in a bid to reduce stigma and discrimination. The portrait genre confronts the challenges of revealing a person's identity at a point in time when the vast majority of HIV-positive people wished to remain anonymous because of fear of discrimination.

Given the climate of state denialism in South Africa in the early 2000s, photography from this period can be viewed as a potential activist tool for showing what was being hidden from view and dismissed by the authorities. This is most overtly demonstrated in Gideon Mendel's work in 2001-2002 which was described in Chapter 4. The idea of photography being used as a political tool is particularly important in relation to the early 2000s when civil society and NGOs clashed most openly with government on the issue of providing care and treatment for those infected with HIV. In the early 2000s photography performed the role of showing the country and the leadership at the time that the epidemic was real, that it affected a large and growing percentage of the population, that it was a generalized epidemic and that regardless of class, education or race, all South Africans were at risk of HIV infection. It was

within this context of photographic work that already existed in response to the HIV epidemic in South Africa in the early 2000s, that Goldblatt produced his series *In the Time of AIDS*.

Goldblatt has resisted the framing of his work in activist terms and has been wary of the use of his photography to pursue a political agenda (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 July 14). And yet despite Goldblatt's resistance to being framed as a 'struggle' photographer during apartheid, his work has always offered sharp and incisive critique of the political and social landscape of South Africa. This idea is eloquently argued by Dubow:

...for while Goldblatt has declined to use his camera overtly as an 'instrument of struggle' it has in fact been an analytical tool in which South African realities have indeed been confronted . That the nature of this confrontation has been oblique, rather than head-on, does not in any way detract from the clarity of his vision (Dubow, 1998:24).

In a similar way, his observations of the HIV epidemic and the mark it has made on the country are also inherently political. Goldblatt expressly did not want to engage with representing the human suffering caused by the epidemic, which would have been a more obvious political comment. Instead, he photographed the AIDS ribbon in the South African landscape which offered a less overt message, yet one that stimulates questions and encourages the viewer to think about the issue. An overt image of suffering tends to get a quick response and little reflection, whereas an ambiguous image can result in greater engagement and thought on behalf of the viewer.

6.2 *Intersections* (2005)

I will now consider the series *In the Time of AIDS* in relation to the larger body of work called *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005). Goldblatt explored a number of concurrent ideas which all appear within the series *Intersections* which he describes as ' a catchall term for the post-apartheid looking at South Africa that I pursued more or less from 2000 to 2010' (Goldblatt, personal communication, 2012 November 24). The initial concept behind the *Intersections* project was to photograph the precise points of intersection of lines of latitude and longitude as a way of exploring post-apartheid South Africa. One of the intentions or

challenges of this concept was the avoidance of the picturesque in the landscape. The idea was abandoned early because Goldblatt became frustrated with being restricted by a GPS point on a map and was often not compelled to photograph what he found at that particular place.

Despite Goldblatt's decision to interpret the idea of intersections more freely and photograph places he found interesting, it is important to remember the origins of the project which relied on a random process of selection. By relying on a GPS instrument to force him to look at places he may not have chosen to look at, Goldblatt encountered new themes and ideas, such as the presence of the AIDS ribbon. During this period Goldblatt became aware of the ribbon in the landscape and photographed it whenever he found it compelling. Given Goldblatt's concern with the 'particulars', or precise details of a given moment, it is unlikely that he was interested simply in photographing any AIDS ribbon, but rather specific ones that resonated with him at the time (Dodd, 2013).

It has been argued that the circulation of Goldblatt's photographs in books and exhibitions, and the texts that accompany them, are critical to understanding his intention of demanding public intellectual engagement with his photographic practice (Bester, 2010:153). I believe this is a valid observation and discuss *In the Time of AIDS* in relation to the publication and exhibition of both *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005), and also the later publication *Intersections Intersected* (Goldblatt, 2008). Goldblatt viewed the series *In the Time of AIDS* as part of the larger *Intersections* project (Goldblatt, personal communication, 2012 November 24). There were also not enough images in the series to form a substantial body of work that would warrant a separate publication.⁶² The series *In the Time of AIDS* can be compared to that of municipal workers which also appear within *Intersections*. And yet unlike the other themes explored within *Intersections*, *In the Time of AIDS* carries the title of the series within the caption of each image. This is a unique instance where Goldblatt uses text to hold together the concept of a series. One possible reason for this is to ensure that the viewer looks for the AIDS ribbon within the landscape because there is little to differentiate these landscapes formally or compositionally from those found in the *Intersections* series as a whole.

⁶² *In the Time of AIDS* was exhibited on its own without images from *Intersections* in Madrid in 2009 (Stolz, 2009). This is the only time it has been separated from *Intersections*.

It is worth briefly reflecting on how Goldblatt arrived at photographing landscape. Much of Goldblatt's early work was focused on documenting people, including *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975), *In Boksburg* (1982) and *Particulars* (1975) (Goldblatt, 1975; 1982; 2003). In contrast, *South Africa: The Structure of Things Then* (1998) marks a significant shift in Goldblatt's approach with its focus on the ways the country has been shaped by those who inhabit it, rather than photographing the people themselves (Goldblatt, 1998). The photographs in the *Structures* project were taken over a number of years between 1964 and 1993. Apart from a move away from looking at people, Goldblatt's use of the photographic medium itself also changed in the course of this project with his adoption of a 4x5 Sinar camera that enabled him to produce images with a wide tonal range and high resolution (Godby, 2001:421). Goldblatt himself acknowledged that the more cumbersome process of taking photographs with a 4x5 camera slowed him down and ultimately informed his 'contemplative approach' (Godby, 2001:413). This approach has come to define Goldblatt's later work and has informed his documentation of urban and rural South Africa, as is evident in *Intersections*.

The *Intersections* body of work was Goldblatt's first body of work to be started in the post-apartheid era. It was also his first project, apart from some work on blue asbestos mining in Australia, to be taken in colour⁶³. And yet this was not an unmediated move to colour because Goldblatt's palette is subdued and carefully controlled. Goldblatt has commented that the evolution of new digital printing techniques on non-plastic papers resulted in the ability to work within a controlled palette that he found much more inviting than the older technology where the colours and papers were not to his liking. So while Goldblatt still photographed on film, he would have the negatives scanned and then work closely with Tony Meintjies, a master of colour management and digital printing, to produce the final prints (Haworth-Booth, 2005:94-95). The palette is drained of colour and reveals an undramatic use of light. In many of the images the light falls evenly on the landscape and does not follow the prevailing photographic logic of photographing in the morning and evening when the light is gentler and warmer. By and large these are not warm and inviting landscapes; the light encourages scrutiny and consideration and not an emotional response to the beauty of

⁶³ This chapter focuses exclusively on Goldblatt's personal work, as opposed to commissioned photographic assignments. Throughout his career Goldblatt photographed in colour for commissioned work, but up until the asbestos mining project, he tended to photograph in black and white for his own personal work.

the land. Goldblatt's use of desaturated colour and his choice of time of day to photograph are two examples of how he resists the picturesque within his approach to photographing landscape.

Apart from the improvement in technology, it has also been argued that the move to colour was indicative of the new political dispensation in the country (Haworth-Booth 2005:94). And yet *Intersections* is not a celebratory project and the observation that '...it would also seem intended to communicate an informality, even chaos, in the new social order' offers an alternative reading of the use of colour (Godby, 2001:423). This informality translates into the framing of the photographs, as well as the unremarkable moments that are captured. This is not to say the images themselves have no value, but rather that they are 'anti-photographic' in the sense that they record commonplace, even banal scenes. And yet the cumulative effect of looking at these scenes conveys a candid and careful investigation of South Africa. Goldblatt's approach to landscape is purposefully 'anti-picturesque' and by forcing his viewers to look at these everyday landscapes, which on the surface appear to be unremarkable, Goldblatt elevates the everyday into something profound.

The fact that *Intersections* was originally planned as a catalogue to accompany the exhibition of the images is important because it confirms the loose nature of this publication (Bester, 2006:22). According to Michael Stevenson who was at the time Goldblatt's gallerist in Cape Town, and who wrote an accompanying essay in the *Intersections* book:

Although Goldblatt's colour work covers many different subjects, he views it all as part of his *Intersections* series, a concept that allows him to weave in anything that seems apposite to this interest in post-apartheid South Africa: cross-currents of ideas, values, ethics, postures, people and things (Stevenson, 2005:100).

This demonstrates how the concept of *Intersections* became a rubric for exploring diverse issues including informal trading on city streets, walled estates, farm murders, public monuments commemorating new heroes, personal memorials for road accident victims, municipal office bearers in a democratic South Africa and the impact of the HIV epidemic on the country.

And yet when looking through the book *Intersections* for the first time, one is surprised by the disparate themes and what could be seen as a lack of focus. At first glance these images appear to lack the quiet and concentrated analysis found in Goldblatt's earlier work. When looking more closely, and especially when comparing *In the Time of AIDS* with the rest of the series, it is clear that Goldblatt remains focused on looking closely at the country and the way it is shaped by the people who live here and the structures and symbols they place within the landscape, such as the AIDS ribbon. With repeated viewing, the commonplace nature of the subjects that are photographed starts to resonate and relationships between images become apparent. Furthermore, by photographing everyday scenes and unspectacular views, Goldblatt challenges the viewer to look at the details recorded in the images in an effort to understand what the image is about or why it was taken.

In an interview included in the *Intersections* book Goldblatt sums up his overarching concerns in the project in the following way: 'I find that as I go along with this project its reach is extending into, for me, new areas. Primary is the land, its division, possession, use, misuse. How we have shaped it and how it has shaped us.' (Goldblatt in Haworth-Booth, 2005:99). And yet, importantly, Goldblatt does not view man's marks or presence in the landscape as a violation. Even though he acknowledges that humanity may be destructive, things such as fences or roads are part of man's relationship to the earth and part of the process of the land shaping humanity and vice versa (Stevenson, 2005:108). In a similar way, the AIDS ribbon is connected to how people have responded to the epidemic by inserting the symbol in the landscape. Elsewhere it has been observed that the series suggests an inadequate state response and shows how the AIDS ribbon has been inscribed into the landscape (Godby, 2008:12).

The first image of the series *In the Time of AIDS* was taken almost accidentally. Goldblatt tells how he came across a painted inscription on a boulder in a remote part of the Richtersveld (Figure 6.2). The barren landscape appears ancient and suggests a time when human impact on the land was absent. The presence of the AIDS ribbon in this apparently remote setting is disconcerting and out of place. There is an element of shock that the disease has made its presence felt even in the remotest parts of the country. At first Goldblatt was not sure what the memorial marked, but he was clear that it marked a commemoration because of the initials 'BHJ' painted on the rock (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). It is

important to note that a significant theme explored in *Intersections* is the presence of memorials within the landscape and that this follows Goldblatt's documentation of commemorative structures, monuments and gravesites in *Structures*. A short while later, Goldblatt identified the stylized AIDS ribbon and then became aware of how pervasive it was in more urban and small town settings. This was the start of the series.



Figure 6.2 David Goldblatt. BHJ, Richtersveld, in the time of AIDS, Northern Cape. 25 December 2003. Source: *Intersections* (Goldblatt 2005).

When asked about the image that was the impetus for the rest of the series *In the Time of AIDS* Goldblatt comments:

...that affected me quite deeply because that somebody should take the trouble to go to this very remote place and commemorate the memory of somebody in this... if you like polluting way, but nevertheless memorably and significantly, I found very moving. And that then made me aware of the HIV ribbon in the landscape or in the land and so began a series of pictures where I became more and more aware of what is quite an obvious fact. It took me a while to realize it, that the HIV ribbon has become

like an outdated advertisement, a stale advertisement for an unwanted product. Nobody wants it. Nobody notices it. It is just there. It is meant to arouse consciousness. I doubt that it arouses consciousness except among people who are themselves HIV-positive (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9).

In the same interview, Goldblatt also talks more generally about his engagement with the issue of HIV and AIDS. He tells how through his involvement in taking the portrait of the Treatment Action Campaign's leader, Zackie Achmat, he became keenly aware of the issues connected to HIV and AIDS and also did some work for the TAC's *Equal Treatment* magazine. Goldblatt commented how despite this:

...nothing really satisfied me in the sense that I wasn't doing anything personal related to it at the time and so I was pleased that I had found that way of talking about it. Albeit that it is a relatively nondescript way of talking about it (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9).

The first image in the series *In the Time of AIDS* appears in the book *Intersections* and is entitled *BHJ, Richtersveld. In the time of AIDS, Northern Cape, 25 December 2003* (Figure 6.2). In typical Goldblatt style, the title is factual and explanatory. And yet not many photographers share the precise date of each image they take with their audience. Thanks to this practice, which is also found in *Structures*, it is possible to work out the sequence of images and trace not only Goldblatt's movement through the land but also the progression of his ideas and how this developed through the course of the project. It also helps see the close connections between *In the Time of AIDS* and *Intersections* and how often images for both series were taken on sequential days, or within a similar timeframe.

In the case of the *BHJ* image (Figure 6.2), a closely related image is *Track seen from S28° 13.051, E17° 07.288, Richtersveld National Park, Northern Cape. 24 December 2003*. This image is one of the few original images from the *Intersections* series which still retains the exact GPS points of an intersection. Taken one day earlier than the *BHJ* image, this image reveals just how remote the Richtersveld is. The track is the only clue to human habitation in the area. This illustrates how extraordinary it is that someone should decide to make a commemoration in such a remote place. One wonders if the person lived in the area or if they

chose a private place for commemorating the person who had died because of a fear of disclosing the cause of their death more publically.

Apart from the dates the images were taken, compositional devices and similar subject matter encourage the viewer to see relationships between images in the *Intersections* project. For example, the two images in *Figure 6.3* and *Figure 6.4* are of road intersections. In the first image, which is from *Intersections*, the eye is first drawn to the remains of a fire possibly built by people to keep warm while waiting on the side of the road for a lift. It is only with the prompting from the title that we look for the mother and child seated in the distance. The second image uses a similar device where the eye is once again first drawn to the foreground, whereas the real clue to the image lies further back in the AIDS ribbon mounted on a pole. In both images the use of gently sloping diagonal lines in the image draw the eye in and lead it to the main focus of the image: the mother and child and the AIDS ribbon.



Figure 6.3 David Goldblatt. Mother and child, Vorstershoop, North West Province. 1 June 2003. Source: *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005).



Figure 6.4 David Goldblatt. Entrance to Lategan's Truck Inn on the N1 in the time of AIDS, Laingsburg, Western Cape. 14 November 2004. Source: *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005).

The title to *Figure 6.4* also provides us with another piece of information; the photograph was taken in Laingsburg which is on the N1 highway, the major North-South trucking route in South Africa. It is well documented, almost to the point of cliché, that trucking routes are one of the modes of the transmission of HIV in Africa, together with war and migration (Ilfie, 2006). In this way, the AIDS ribbon mounted on a pole is a stark reminder of the increased risk of HIV infection for long distance truck drivers.

While compositional devices and timeframe encourage the comparison of images from the series *In the Time of AIDS* with others in the *Intersections* project, the shared concerns and the sustained exploration of the themes of death and memorialization in the landscape firmly connect the series *In the Time of AIDS* to the larger project. A few pages on from the *BHJ* image (Figure 6.5) is a photograph of a new grave entitled *In the new cemetery, Masilo Township, Theunissen, Free State, 29 August 2004* (Figure 6.5). While this image is not part of the *In the Time of AIDS* series, it has strong links to it in terms of the way the epidemic has

shaped the landscape. Although we can only speculate as to the cause of death, Goldblatt noted that the majority of graves in this cemetery recorded people dying at young ages which suggest that many of the deaths were caused by AIDS-related illnesses (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). The size of the graveyard and how few graves have headstones with the vast majority still piles of sand with hand written names also confirms that people are dying in large numbers and that many of the graves are new. This also points to the HIV epidemic as a cause of the deaths.



Figure 6.5. David Goldblatt. In the new cemetery, Masilo Township, Theunissen, Free State, 29 August 2004. Source: *Intersections* (Goldblatt, 2005).

This image appears to have special significance for Goldblatt because it is discussed in a number of interviews (Haworth-Booth, 2005; Stevenson, 2005). In the foreground of the photograph one's eye is drawn to a pink bottle planted on the top of the soil. The bottle contains body lotion and the word 'love' is legible. The presence of this word within the context of an epidemic which is sexually transmitted and the cause of death among the youth is poignant and ultimately deeply moving. We perhaps wonder who planted the lotion bottle

in the soil and what it meant to them, or to the deceased. We may consider the possible nature of their relationship. The way the image is framed isolates the grave from the rest of the burial ground and gives prominence to the bottle and the grave marker which prompts these questions. The dry landscape suggests a remote rural town and the power lines in the background indicate that the graveyard is on the outskirts of a township. The view of the graveyard is bleak, especially since the graveyard is large and almost all the graves appear recent. The absence of trees and the dryness of grass and the landscape as a whole evokes a sparse and impoverished atmosphere. This graveyard is tragically iconic of small town South Africa and a drive through the *platteland* reveals numerous such burial grounds on the outskirts of *dorps*. Goldblatt's photograph echoes many similar scenes I have witnessed driving through the Karoo to the place I was born and raised in the Eastern Cape.

A further detail in the image is the reverse side of the grave marker. Whether this decision was to protect identity from scrutiny or simply a compositional decision is not known. The marker is in fact a notice from what we can presume is a nearby mine. The sign reads 'You are reminded that under the provisions of section 25A of the diamond act no. 56 of 1986 as amended you are liable to be searched on or when departing from mine property/security area.' This is potentially a reminder of the economic disparities that mark the South African landscape and the role of mineral wealth and its connection to systems of migrant labour which have contributed to the spread of the epidemic (Hunter, 2007:690). A further irony is that diamonds are universally marketed as symbols of love and are often given in marriage engagement rings.

This photograph of the grave is followed two pages later, by two other kinds of memorials. One is painted on a rock where a fisherman was washed off and drowned and the other is a roadside memorial. The theme of memorialization and loss in the South African landscape is one of the dominant themes within the *Intersections* series. In a similar way to the documentation of roadside memorials and other plaques and commemorative structures in towns, Goldblatt's focus on the AIDS ribbon also explores the way in which death is present within the landscape and how we choose to remember those who have died.

The bulk of the images in *Intersections* are taken in remote, rural parts of the country including the northern cape, the Highveld, the Karoo and the Eastern Cape *platteland*

(Stevenson, 2005:102). In this way, the majority of the images are taken out of the urban city context and document largely empty and open landscapes and streets in small towns. Goldblatt first took images of Karoo landscapes in the late 1960s while working on a project that would later be published as *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, but at the time he considered an exploration of landscape to be self-indulgent given the political climate (Stevenson, 2005:102).

Although the reason for this focus on these parts of the country is primarily driven by Goldblatt's connection and interest in bare landscapes, those images connected to the series *In the Time of AIDS* resonate with an additional layer of meaning. While the news reporting and the focus on the struggle for antiretroviral treatment took place predominantly in the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, the small, rural towns in many ways still remain largely beyond the reach of reporting and often care. There were significant inequalities in access to antiretroviral treatment in different provinces during the period the images were taken in the early to mid-2000s, and even more recently the highest coverage of antiretroviral medication is found in the Western Cape and Northern Cape (Adam & Johnson, 2009:665). However it has been noted that this could also be explained by the relatively low HIV prevalence in these provinces (Adam & Johnson, 2009:665). Compared to the early 2000s, recent statistics paint a much more optimistic picture with the number of people starting treatment in 2010-2011 exceeding the National Strategic Plan (NSP) targets (Johnson, 2012:25).

I will now consider the aesthetics of Goldblatt's *Intersections* series. It has been argued that:

His subjects are instead often commonplace, sights seen when driving through the South African countryside. He makes them entirely his own by looking at the landscapes in the same way that he looks at people: he confronts it directly, never resorting to odd angles and optical effects (Stevenson, 2005:102).

The statement implies that Goldblatt's approach is neutral, or perhaps rather that his images do not manipulate what is in front of the lens. And yet while Goldblatt may not employ angles, dramatic cropping or other compositional tools that increase the drama in an image, he purposely makes use of depth of field to ensure that as much as possible of his image is in

focus. The use of a 4x5 negative enables Goldblatt to capture an extraordinary amount of detail and his images are in focus and sharp virtually throughout the entire image plane. Goldblatt explains his motivation for this decision in the following way:

I try as far as possible to have everything in the picture sharp from near to far. This allows viewers to choose what is of interest and to move their gaze to any other part of the image, rather than having me direct their interest by selectively sharpening only a part of it (Goldblatt in Stevenson, 2005:105).

When speaking to him about this point, Goldblatt confirmed that his intention is to provide his viewer with choice. But Goldblatt went further and said ‘And it creates a kind of neutrality I suppose. But I don’t pretend that I am neutral’ (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). In this way Goldblatt confirms his position of being engaged in a public dialogue with his audiences, and one where he takes positions and demands a similar level of engagement with his images. And yet despite his interest in speaking to an audience, Goldblatt’s primary impetus for taking photographs is to explore issues that he finds of personal interest (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 July 14).

When asked about his intended audience Goldblatt also commented that he seeks primarily to engage with a South African audience because of his extended engagement with issues that relate to this country. Another reason was his experience of trying to find an American publisher for *Some Afrikaners Photographed* in the 1960s and realizing that a foreigner is unable to appreciate nuances and read the image in the way a South African can (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 July 14). Goldblatt’s observation that his work is more easily accessible to a local audience is particularly interesting when considering that his work is extensively exhibited abroad now.

Knowing that the work is made with a local South African audience in mind it is worth considering if its reading shifts when exhibited abroad. It is difficult to assess whether an international audience would be able to situate the images within the South African experience of the epidemic; not only the extremely high prevalence and mortality rates but also the lack of action taken by the state at the time the images were taken. Goldblatt commented on the sad irony that the AIDS ribbons were small gestures that were pathetically

insufficient in addressing the prevention of the spread of the epidemic, but at the same time were sincere attempts on behalf of the municipalities in small towns to address the disease (Goldblatt, personal communication, 2012 November 12). It is doubtful that an international audience would interpret the presence of the AIDS ribbons in this way and the complexities of the series would largely be lost.

6.3 *Intersections Intersected* (2008)

Another publication related to *In the Time of AIDS* and *Intersections* is the publication of the book *Intersections Intersected* in 2008 (Goldblatt, 2008). This project saw the pairing of images from the *Intersections* project with older images from Goldblatt's archive. The cover image is drawn from *In the Time of AIDS* and is one of two images from the series to appear in this later publication (Goldblatt, 2008: 45 & 109).



Figure 6.7 David Goldblatt. At Kevin Kwanele's Takwaito Barber, Lansdowne Road. Khayelitsha, Cape Town in the time of AIDS. 16 May 2007. Source: *Intersections Intersected* (Goldblatt, 2008).

Whereas most of the images in the series *In the Time of AIDS* document official AIDS ribbons such as those appearing on a clinic notice board, the AIDS ribbon in this image is more privately created. It has been painted on the road sign in red paint. And from the colour of the paint we can see that the same person has also scrawled the expletive ‘fuck’ next to the ribbon. The intended meaning of this is unclear. It could be read as some form of protest or an expression of anger. Another point of interest is that an official version of the AIDS ribbon can be seen further back in the image, almost invisible in the busy background. This speaks to Goldblatt’s observation of how invisible the symbol has become in our surroundings, but also just how pervasive the presence of the epidemic is.

The unofficial nature of this AIDS ribbon makes it comparable to the initial *BHJ* image that started Goldblatt’s investigation (Figure 6.3). And yet unlike the first image, it is not a commemoration of an individual. Goldblatt also describes the circumstances of this later image. He was asked to be part of the television series *Masupasela* which aired on SABC in 2007 (*Masupasela*, 2007). The short documentary shows Goldblatt taking two photographs in Khayelitsha township, one of which is the image from the barber shop, and the other is of AIDS ribbons painted on the doors of public toilets. The documentary also includes an interview with Goldblatt where he comments on his perception of the AIDS ribbon in this context:

I was very interested in the images that you brought me to. It is the first time that I have seen them so emphatic in the township landscape. The ones on those lavatory doors were very bold and to me it indicated an awareness of AIDS among people in that area of Khayelitsha that was perhaps much stronger than I have seen elsewhere. And that one that was splashed onto a traffic sign or board too, that was a piece of graffiti but it was emphatic, not simply to be absorbed into the landscape but almost crying out to be seen (Goldblatt in *Masupasela*, 2007).

It is the personal nature of these AIDS ribbons and the way they were seemingly anonymously painted onto structures within the environment that makes them appear to have intention and purpose. Another reading of the meaning of the ribbons is provided in the documentary with an interview with a passerby who suggests the ribbons were created by the youth in the area and shows they have accepted their HIV-positive status (*Masupasela*, 2007).

I find both these readings unfulfilling and see the proliferation of these personal AIDS ribbons as linked to protest and frustration, rather than acceptance, especially the one accompanied with the expletive.

Another interesting point of engagement with this photograph is to see its relationship to the image that appears alongside it in the *Intersections Intersected* book (Goldblatt, 2008). The image it was paired with was a black and white image of the Cross Roads People's Park in Oukasie in Brits in the North West (1986). The contrast of the black and white image with the colour image alongside it, alerts the viewer to the time period in which the images were taken. While it is something of a cliché to argue that black and white historicises an image, in this instance it clearly does situate the image in the past, as well as referencing the tradition of documentary photography. Despite the differences in time period and colour, there are compositional similarities between the two images with diagonal lines drawing the eye into the image. Both images capture a small group of people.

The black and white image was taken in 1986 and according to the accompanying text the people's park was built as an act of protest during a period when the apartheid government was attempting to relocate the people of Oukasie (Goldblatt, 2008:109). The text also explains how similar parks appeared in townships across the country and that they usually contained symbolic artillery which was invariably pointed in the direction of the local police station. These parks are considered among the few physical structures that appeared at this time as symbolic expressions of popular resistance (Goldblatt, 2008:109). The date the image was taken situated it within the tense political time of the State of Emergency in South Africa. People's Parks such as this one were subsequently destroyed by the security forces between 1986 and 1989. This image first appeared in *The Structure of Things Then* (Goldblatt, 1998:80) before being published in *Intersections Intersected* (Goldblatt, 2008:108). The focal point of the image is the canon in the foreground which points diagonally towards the viewer. In the background, a group of young men observe the scene and the act of Goldblatt taking the photograph. In the middle, and to the right, a sign with an outline of the African continent reads 'Viva Africans' which is an overt reference to the anti-apartheid struggle, as is the canon itself.



Figure 6.8 David Goldblatt. The Cross Roads People's Park. Oukasi, Britz, North West, 22 November 1986. Source: *Intersections Intersected* (Goldblatt, 2008).

Both photographs of the People's Park and the AIDS ribbon document the use and creation of symbols in public spaces by citizens. The creation of a canon from found materials in the People's Park was symbolic of anti-apartheid resistance. The painting of the AIDS ribbon on a road sign together with the expletive can also be seen as a symbol of resistance and anger. The fact that the AIDS ribbon was painted by an individual and is not an 'official' ribbon speaks of agency and an active and personal response to the HIV epidemic. This is particularly pointed if we consider the slowness of the state response to the disease and the fierce fight for the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare system. In the context of extreme negligence by the state, the AIDS ribbon takes on new meanings that are specific to South Africa and ambiguously articulated by the individual who painted the AIDS ribbon on the sign.

6.4 Conclusion

Goldblatt's series *In the Time of AIDS* raises a number of questions about the meaning of the proliferation of the AIDS ribbon in the South African landscape which I would like to expand on. These meanings are not derived from particular statements made by Goldblatt himself, but are rather my interpretation of the images. As already discussed there is a distinction between those ribbons which form part of official state-supported programs and the more privately created ones, such as the *BHJ* commemoration and the ribbon painted on the road sign. In a similar way to other public service announcements, such as reminders to wear seatbelts when driving, the official AIDS ribbons are gestures which are largely ineffective and appear removed from the real challenges of addressing the epidemic. It is this form of the AIDS ribbon that matches Goldblatt's likening of the ribbon to an outdated advertisement for an unwanted product (Goldblatt, personal interview, 2011 June 9). In these instances, the AIDS ribbons are usually associated with state interventions such as Christmas lights, clinic notice boards and signage for support programmes (Goldblatt, 2005:52, 54 & 57). In contrast, the 'unofficial' or personally created AIDS ribbons offer an insight into the pain, loss and anger of individuals affected by the disease. While these ribbons are ultimately personal, they can also be seen as public and political statements since they disrupt the official use of the ribbon and are also found within public spaces rather than within the confines of people's homes or other private places.

As a series of images *In the Time of AIDS* operates on two levels, both of which offer a critique of the employment of the AIDS ribbon in the South African context. Firstly, there is the way in which both the official and personally created AIDS ribbons are seen and understood within the rural and town landscapes in which they appear. In these instances the photographs make us question how the people in the communities pictured relate to these ribbons. We may wonder if the ribbons are welcomed and seen as meaningful and part of positive community initiatives, or do they go unnoticed?

The second way in which the photographs operate is the way in which they are read as a series when grouped together and seen simultaneously. This experience of the series *In the Time of AIDS* is only possible to the viewer of Goldblatt's work in exhibition or book form and cannot be experienced by individuals in the spread-out communities where the photographs were originally taken. In this form the series reveals the full extent to which the

epidemic has reached into even the most remote parts of the country, as revealed by the *BHJ* image (Figure 6.2). The photographs resonate with the repetition of the AIDS ribbon found in the peripheries of the South African landscape. There is also an element of shock in the revelation that the HIV epidemic is felt everywhere within the country. The absence of people from *In the Time of AIDS* becomes increasingly uncanny as one looks through the images. One is forced to consider the landscape itself more carefully, and the ‘presence’ of people soon becomes apparent in the ways the land has been shaped by them.

It is this experience of the epidemic as pervasive and all-encompassing that interests me most. It reveals the extent to which it is impossible to escape the impact of the virus on the social landscape of South Africa. The spread of HIV has profoundly changed the world in terms of how sexuality and sexual relationships are experienced, but within the South African context the impact is far more profound. The high prevalence rates and the way in which the arrival of the virus in the country coincided with the demise of the apartheid system had an enormous impact on South African society. The post-apartheid generation came of age at a time when the epidemic had already infected many of their parents, many of whom experienced diminished health or died before the provision of antiretroviral treatment. They in turn now face the reality of HIV infection as they enter into their own sexual relationships. Many elderly people have found themselves in the position of having to care for grandchildren left behind after their parents have died. These disruptions of social expectations and support structures have happened within the context of widespread poverty and unemployment. Far from enjoying wealth and prosperity with the advent of democracy, most South Africans continue to struggle.

By focusing on the AIDS ribbon Goldblatt points to one of the greatest influences on the contemporary South African social landscape. Importantly HIV does not exist in isolation and is connected to multiple other social and political issues explored within *Intersections*. These challenges are diverse and often interconnected. They include the disparity in wealth, the precarious livelihoods that people depend on, the history of dispossession, the struggle to survive living off the land, the challenges of governance and the ways in which we remember the past and commemorate our dead. *In the Time of AIDS* is firmly connected to the concerns explored in *Intersections* and contributes to Goldblatt’s lifelong investigation and scrutiny of the physical, political and social landscape of South Africa.

Chapter 7

Santu Mofokeng: alternative ways of seeing (1996-2013)

Over the past thirty years Santu Mofokeng has developed a radical and alternative photographic documentation of South African life. He has come to occupy a prominent space in international and local photography worlds and is considered a major contemporary artist. His work is mainly devoted to scenes of everyday life, but he has also been concerned with representing landscape in relation to history, memory and trauma. More recently he has been concerned with the marks of environmental damage to the landscape and the desecration of spiritual sites. Throughout his life Mofokeng has also produced work that investigates spirituality, both as a part of black South African cultural and social experience, and in a more personal capacity. The inclusion of Mofokeng's work in this thesis is essential because it raises concerns that are central to understanding the challenges of photographing HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Chapter 2 suggested that state-supported AIDS denialism tended to silence other ways of understanding the epidemic because the immediate humanitarian emergency and rise of AIDS activism dominated discourse on the issue. I argued that the experience of personal loss and pain on such a large scale gave rise to a social crisis which was interpreted by many South Africans as a spiritual crisis. Mofokeng's work provides an opportunity to consider the spiritual and social challenges raised by the disease. Mofokeng has produced two photographic series which engage tangentially with the epidemic; *Chasing Shadows* and *Child-headed Households*. *Chasing Shadows* is also the title of his 2011 monograph, which was published to accompany his international retrospective exhibition also entitled *Chasing Shadows. Thirty Years of Photographic Essays* (Mofokeng, 2011). The book brings together a wide range of his photographic essays, together with interviews and academic texts.

The two series, *Chasing Shadows* and *Child-headed Households*, are the focus of this chapter but must first be contextualised by Mofokeng's approach to photography more generally. Since the 1980s Mofokeng has questioned the role of photography in communicating ideas about black South African experience. His concerns relate broadly to three issues: the one-

dimensional way in which anti-apartheid 'struggle photography' presented black township life, the differences between public/media images and how photographs are understood and used in township homes, and lastly, the absence of images that show black South Africans as what Mofokeng refers to as 'normal' (Mofokeng in *Images in Struggle*, 1990). These concerns have informed and shaped Mofokeng's approach to photography in both his choice, and avoidance, of specific subject matter and the development of his distinct aesthetic. This chapter will focus on the ways Mofokeng's photographic practice offers an important challenge to dominant ways of framing the experience of HIV and AIDS.

7.1 Beginnings (1956-1990)

Mofokeng's life story is well known because it is featured both in the autobiographical texts that he writes to accompany his images, and also in critical texts about his work. Mofokeng's use of text to frame his photographic projects is an integral component of his work and will be discussed in detail in the section that follows. Mofokeng was born in Soweto in 1956 and first came to photography as a street photographer during his high school years (Mofokeng, 1999:265-266). Mofokeng's years of taking commissioned photographs of people in his community gave him an insight into the expectations and conventions of the kinds of photographs valued by his township clients. These images were predominantly portraits and social photographs taken of special occasions and celebrations.

Despite coming top of his class, Mofokeng's aspiration of studying philosophy was curtailed by apartheid legislation and personal circumstances. After completing high school Mofokeng worked as a quality control tester in a pharmaceutical company for four years before taking a fifty per cent cut in salary to be a darkroom assistant for a newspaper (Mofokeng, 1999:268; Hayes, 2009:38). During his time as a darkroom assistant Mofokeng not only mastered photographic printing, but also had another experience that would come to shape his own photographic practice. It is an anecdote that has been recounted many times by Mofokeng and others writing about his work and involves overhearing a well-known white photojournalist enthuse 'There is nothing as beautiful as black skin and blood! It makes beautiful contrast' (Mofokeng, 1999:268; Mofokeng, 2001:27; Hayes, 2009:38). The callousness of this statement reveals a complete disregard for the humanity of black subjects and exposes the potential for photography to be complicit in this process. In recounting this

experience in the text accompanying his work, Mofokeng is reminding viewers that photography often contributes to representing the black body in spectacular, and dehumanising, ways. In response, Mofokeng works to create and expand an alternative image of the black body; one that resists the ‘voyeuristic desire for grotesque or debased images of the black body’ (Peffer, 2003:80).

After four years of working as a darkroom assistant at various newspapers in Johannesburg, Mofokeng took a job as an apprentice at an advertising company which produced pack shots for products. Mofokeng also acquired a camera and did freelance work on the side. During this period he was mentored by David Goldblatt but all this came to end when he was robbed of his camera and had to return to work as a darkroom assistant to make ends meet (Mofokeng, 1999:268). When Mofokeng joined the anti-apartheid Afrapix collective in 1985, he had no camera and no job. His affiliation with Afrapix enabled him to work independently as a photographer through access to a camera and film and later he became a staff photographer at the *New Nation* newspaper (Hayes, 2009:39). However, Mofokeng reflects that ‘Their confidence in me was in some ways misplaced, seeing that I was less interested in the ‘unrest’ than in the ordinary life in the townships’ (Mofokeng, 1999:268).

Despite covering political events such as rallies, protests, funerals and night vigils like his colleagues at Afrapix, Mofokeng struggled to succeed in the hard news environment (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Far from protecting him from violence, his supposed ‘insider’ status as a black photographer during this period nearly cost him his life on two occasions when people took him for a police informer. In one instance he narrowly escaped being ‘necklaced’⁶⁴ at a night vigil, and in another he was rescued from angry scab workers by his Afrapix colleague Paul Weinberg who refused to leave the strike scene without him (Hayes, 2009:39).

⁶⁴ ‘Necklacing’ became a common form of vigilante killing for accused police informers in the 1980s. It involved placing a tire over a person’s head, dousing them with fuel and igniting them.



Figure 7.1 Santu Mofokeng. *Police with Sjamboks, Plein Street.* c. 1986. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.2 Santu Mofokeng. *Inkhatha Rally, Jabulani Amphitheatre.* c. 1986. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Mofokeng's experience of documenting the violent anti-apartheid struggle and selling these images to the foreign press, made him question the way the photographs operated in the international image economy. In particular, Mofokeng became concerned with the way 'struggle photography' presented black South African life in a one-dimensional way. In the documentary film *Images in Struggle: South African Photographers Speak* (1990) that commemorated the role of 'struggle photography' in bringing injustice to light, Mofokeng offers a less than celebratory account of how he believed 'struggle' photographs came to operate in the global image economy:

You look at the photographs that have been made of the people, say, in the township... they are poor, they are angry, they are not normal, they are not 'people' in a sense, they are victims. If I make photographs that show a certain sector of the people, say the oppressed, in a way that makes them human, makes them 'normal', it might convince the other section, maybe more right-wing, if they look at the photograph and see that they are just people like us, they want the same things that we do (Mofokeng in *Images in Struggle*, 1990).

In this way Mofokeng motivates for the kinds of images he took of everyday life in Soweto and other townships. Mofokeng's critique of the iconography of popular resistance ruptures a dominant discourse of South African documentary photographic practice which emphasises the role of anti-apartheid photography in establishing a tradition committed to social issues (Newbury, 2009:1; Garb, 2011:12). While it is undeniable that the images produced by Afrapix that appeared in the international media in the 1980s did contribute to supporting the anti-apartheid movement abroad and thus ultimately helped bring an end to the racist government, Mofokeng's observations are important in alerting us to the potential unintended side-effects these images may have had.

In 1990, Mofokeng had his first solo show entitled *Like Shifting Sand* which included township scenes and rural landscapes. Mofokeng reflects on how a comment in the visitor's book caused him re-evaluate his approach to photography. The remark 'Making money from blacks' was signed by a person with the name 'Vusi', and in Mofokeng's mind signalled that his images were not being understood by black audiences in the way he had intended (Mofokeng, 1999:269). While Mofokeng's decision to photograph scenes of everyday life aimed to offer a counter narrative to the dominant images of townships as places of violent

struggle, his intention did not appear to resonate with all who lived in the townships. In Mofokeng's words:

...I was not paying enough attention to the narratives and aspirations of the people I was photographing. I had either forgotten, neglected or disregarded my early beginnings. I had simply graduated into being a professional photographer without first pondering the meaning of this switch (Mofokeng, 1999:269).

In 1992 Mofokeng submitted a proposal to the Mother Jones Award articulating the idea of contrasting personal images with public ones, which later took the form of the exhibition entitled *Distorting Mirror/Townships Imagined*. The exhibition was originally titled *Side by Side* (Mofokeng, 2011:74) and then later *The Private and the Public Images of Soweto* (Firstenberg, 2002:60). This exhibition was a watershed moment for Mofokeng. The project contrasted images Mofokeng had taken of township life for the media with images he made working as a street photographer taking commissioned images of people that they would choose to display within their homes and photo albums. According to Mofokeng 'This is how I began to explore the politics of representation' (Mofokeng, 1999:270). This series appears in the 2011 monograph *Chasing Shadows* in an adapted form, which includes 'private' images inside people's homes with 'public' images of events such as council meetings, street scenes and sports matches (Mofokeng, 2011:74-88).

Mofokeng's interest in the kinds of photographs valued by township residents also resulted in the seminal body of work *The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890-1950* (Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.4) that displayed photographs from personal albums. Since 1988, Mofokeng had been employed at the African Studies Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand to work on the Oral History Project. In addition to specific assignments, such as photographing the Bloemhof community, Mofokeng also used this post to explore his own personal projects. The *Black Photo Album* project involved Mofokeng finding and researching family portraits in personal albums. The portraits of working and middle-class black South Africans in Victorian dress were then re-photographed by Mofokeng. The images were first exhibited as a slide presentation in 1997 at the Second Johannesburg Biennale and have since travelled the world and been extensively published and written about (Mofokeng, 1996; 1999a; 2013; Enwezor, 1997; Garb, 2013).



Mosuetsa and Maria Letsipa with their daughter, Minkie Letsipa.

Silver bromide print

Photographer: Scholtz Studio, Lindley.
Orange River Colony c.1900s

Figures 7.3 and 7.4 Black and white slides, installation view. *The Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890-1950*.

© Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

These photographs present an important challenge to the history of the representation of the black subject in South Africa. The portraits revealed an entire class of people who had up until this point largely been written out of history by the apartheid state which tended to promote images of black South Africans as labour, or alternatively as rural tribes in the artificially created ‘homelands’. Mofokeng also makes a further connection when he argues:

When people speak about Mandela or John Dube, the first President of the ANC, you think these people are prodigies. They are elevated, they are just there, as if they come from non-existent communities (Mofokeng, 2011:16).

In this way, Mofokeng reveals how the *Black Photo Album* portraits offer an insight into a class of black South Africans who shaped the liberation struggle and the history of South Africa. These images resist historical stereotypes of black South African life and link to Mofokeng’s concerns with showing a ‘fuller’ and more complex image of black experience.

These ideas were evident in Mofokeng's earlier projects, such as *Distorting Mirror/Townships Imagined*. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Mofokeng developed an alternative representation of black life. This was in response to prior representations where 'What is left out of 'the frame' ignores the rich and full lives which are not regarded as 'absences' by the people in the townships' (Mofokeng, 2011:74). Mofokeng's reference to the way black life was often seen in terms of 'absence' recalls Mbembe's argument that African life is often framed as 'nothingness' (Mbembe, 2001:4).



Figure 7.5 Santu Mofokeng. *Shebeen, White City*. 1987. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Mofokeng's interest in the everyday, or 'quotidian' as he calls it, emphasises normality (Figure 7.5). In documenting the anti-dramatic and unspectacular moments, Mofokeng establishes a quietly insistent alternative to the ways in which the local and international media, as well as tourist books, choose to illustrate black South African life. Mofokeng confirms the deeply political nature of his work in the following discussion:

...imagine you are working as an African, in Africa. What do you do then? Sometimes you feel you are feeding the stereotype of what life is like in Africa, you are simplifying it because it is expected. Are you complicit in perpetuating the myth? Am I giving you what you want? These are the things you ask yourself (Mofokeng, 2011:98).

Mofokeng's assessment of the role of photography in perpetuating stereotypes of African life offers an important insight into his approach to photography as a whole and also directly speaks to the issue of photographing the HIV epidemic. The history of photographing the HIV epidemic in Africa was discussed in Chapter 3 and it is this largely dehumanising legacy of representing African people either as victims, or as the passive recipients of foreign aid that Mofokeng resists. Mofokeng has overtly avoided contributing to this visual discourse in his refusal to produce images of HIV and AIDS that conform to existing ideas about the disease, as well as existing ways of visualising it.

7.2 'Metaphorical biography' and the use of text

Mofokeng often describes his photographic practice, and in particular the series *Chasing Shadows*, as a 'metaphorical biography' (2011:108). While this can be understood in simple terms as a rubric for bringing together a series of images formed over more than a decade, it can also be seen in a broader, more encompassing sense where his photographs are a reflection of his lived experience. Mofokeng's 'metaphorical biography' is evident in his images, but perhaps even more so in the text that he writes to accompany his photographs. Unlike other photographers, Mofokeng goes well beyond the provision of titles or captions for his images and writes extensive texts that bounce ideas between image and text.

The texts weave together biographical detail, folklore, beliefs, stories and occasionally factual explanations for his reason for taking the photographs. The texts are poetic and beautifully written which further resists a singular understanding or approach to reading his images. Mofokeng has always written the text that accompanies his images in exhibitions of his work. It is a dominant feature in one of the first books published on his photography (Mofokeng, 2001) and continues to be an integral part of his work (Mofokeng, 2011). The text is a defining aspect of his work and because it is elusive and eclectic and draws on multiple

sources of ideas outside of photography, it demands a philosophical and contemplative approach to his work. In its refusal to present clarity (both visually and in the writing), Mofokeng's work offers an alternative way of looking at and thinking about black life in South Africa.

Mofokeng's writing came about because of two circumstances; his employment at the African Studies Institute and his resistance to how black experience was being written about at the time. Mofokeng describes how his experience of working at the university encouraged him to develop his interests and projects. He also reflects on how the research environment pushed him because it 'makes you feel insecure in whatever you are doing' (Mofokeng, 2011:13). The constant questioning of his work and conversations with other colleagues, together with having the time to read and research, enabled Mofokeng to develop his ideas about representation in relation to his own work. Mofokeng was always keenly aware of the relationship between image and text. Reflecting on his early years of photography he has argued '...I didn't like to feel like I was an illustrator...when you come to scrutinise the language you say 'No, no, this is not what my work is about.'" (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6). In another recent interview that appears in the book *Chasing Shadows* Mofokeng elaborates on the problems he had with the way black life was usually written about:

...I didn't like what was being written in that period. 'Black people are resilient, can you see?' You just wanted to puke sometimes. How patronising, how dishonest, disingenuous the writing was. And I decided I needed to...what's the word...to domesticate my work. This is what pushed me to write, it's not because I am a writer, writing doesn't come easy to me. It takes me a long time. But it was a desire to say, 'I take ownership of and am responsible for what I am doing...' unlike many people I have met who produce work and then entrust someone else to interpret it (Mofokeng, 2011:13).

Mofokeng's decision to 'domesticate' his work had profound consequences. I see his 'metaphorical biography' as a device in which to write black life into photographic history. In doing so his images offer a counter narrative to the colonial archive, 'struggle photography', the international media's sensationalism and stereotyped tourist images of 'tribal' life. Hayes has framed Mofokeng's practice as 'an Africanization and

deseccularization of politics and photography' (2009:44). 'Africanization' speaks of the way his images closely document and provide an insight into African life and an African way of being. Part of this affirmation is connected to Mofokeng's investigation of indigenous spirituality which Hayes calls 'deseccularization'. Over the years Mofokeng has inserted not only indigenous languages into his text, but also the details of indigenous belief systems. This is of critical importance when considering his approach to engaging with the HIV epidemic.

Mofokeng is candid about how he approaches his photography and the strategies he employs to create and control meaning. The following excerpts from an interview are revealing in terms of his approach to editing and sequencing work, his choice of black and white film over colour or digital technologies and also his writing:

If you think about the art, everyone is a photographer. My art is about making narratives...You can take any pictures, body of pictures together...what matters to me is what am I going to say? How are they going to play together? If I am denied that opportunity my face actually goes sour.

The reason I shoot black and white, also write, is because I want control (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6).

In this way Mofokeng identifies his need as a photographer to control as much of the creative process as possible. Despite the apparent 'looseness' of his images and the way some appear to have been almost casually snapped, these comments reveal an intensely conscious process of producing images and forming meaning through the sequencing of the images. It is also clear that for Mofokeng, the crafting of narrative extends beyond the act of taking the photographs and he evidently derives pleasure from the process of editing and sequencing work. In the same interview, Mofokeng also comments that:

The work is out there and being percolated...and understood in ways I never intended, sometimes to justify maybe ideas or theories I don't embrace or like. I always wanted to write in order to say 'If you are a researcher or writer you'll know why this work was actually made and what the thinking was behind it.' (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6).

Mofokeng challenges the authority of academics and critics of his work. Mofokeng's decision to write the text that accompanies his images ensures that he retains control over the way his images are presented to his viewers. And yet he is equally aware of, and in fact seeks, the ambiguity in images and that each person will interpret his work according to their own world view:

...in my work I am looking for ambiguity, ambivalence. I would like for you to look at the image and participate in it with whatever baggage you have when looking at it. It doesn't matter; you could be a 'lefty', a 'righty', whatever you bring. Ambiguity; whenever I think this is a good picture it is because I have it. So I don't believe that photographs necessarily stand for truth (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6).

Mofokeng's rejection of the idea that photographs record the truth is central to his photography. His move away from documentary practice is connected to both a lack of faith in the ability of images to reveal the 'truth' and therefore bring about change, and also a belief that photographs only record partial realities or 'truths'. Mofokeng's investigation of spirituality in many ways presents the ultimate challenge to photography's ability to capture the 'truth'.

7.3 'The threshing floor of faith': Mofokeng's photographs of spiritual experience

Mofokeng's interest in documenting religion and the spiritual world of black South Africans began with his 1986 series *Train Church* which documented commuters on the Johannesburg-Soweto line engaged in ecstatic religious ceremonies (Figure 7.6). This spiritual investigation continued in the series *Chasing Shadows*, which will be discussed shortly. It is also evident in his images of Shembe and Zionist gatherings in Johannesburg in the late 1990s and 2000s (Figure 7.7). This work is entitled *Lunarscape* (Mofokeng, 2011) and has also been referred to as *Appropriated Spaces* in earlier forms (Peffer, 2003:82). Mofokeng's engagement with the spiritual life of others, as well as an investigation of his own spirituality, is intimately connected to his larger humanising project.



Figure 7.6 Santu Mofokeng. *Exhortations, Johannesburg-Soweto Line*. 1986. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.7 Santu Mofokeng. *Doornfontein, Downtown*. 1997. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

In photographing religious ceremonies, Mofokeng is intent on expanding an understanding of black experience which includes the dualities of Christian and African belief systems that infuse everyday life for many South Africans. As discussed in Chapter 2, many South Africans move between Christian and African belief systems without any sense of contradiction or disharmony. The grafting of indigenous practices, such as the belief in the ancestors and animal sacrifice, onto Christianity is an integral part of Zionism. The Zionist, and other African Independent Churches, represents an Africanization of European Christianity and Mofokeng's images from the series *Train Church*, *Chasing Shadows* and *Liminal Spaces* document an intensely powerful and vibrant faith. There is little doubt that for the participants in these ceremonies, their faith is not a 'colonisation' of the spirit, but a liberation and full expression of their spirituality. And yet, Mofokeng does not fully share in this freedom:

I grew up on the threshing floor of faith. A faith that is both ritual and spiritual – a bizarre cocktail of beliefs that completely embraces pagan rituals as well as Christian beliefs. And while I feel reluctant to partake of this gossamer world, I can identify with it. It does not strike me as 'peculiar'. Yet, I still try to avoid being trapped in its hypnotic embrace, which seems to mock my carefully cultivated indifference and self-confidence. I feel ambivalent about my ambivalence, embarrassed at my embarrassment (Mofokeng, 2011:108).

Mofokeng's text reveals his uncomfortable relationship with his hybrid spiritual inheritance, but importantly resists framing it as 'peculiar'. In this way he insists on his biography as a 'normal' experience and an intrinsic part of black life. This is evident in many of his texts where he naturalises the fusion of Christian and indigenous beliefs. For instance, Mofokeng describes the birth and death of his younger brother in mystical terms.⁶⁵ His brother was not supposed to enter this world on account of his mother's womb being 'locked' and then later died despite the prediction made by traditional healers that Santu, his older brother, would die instead (Mofokeng, 2001:27). Again, in the account of his son been taken from his workplace by an unknown union member,⁶⁶ Mofokeng reveals his fears of witchcraft and that

⁶⁵ Mofokeng provides this account in the autobiographical text entitled *Lampposts* which accompanies his images in the first book published on his work (Mofokeng, 2001).

⁶⁶ This account is also drawn from the autobiographical text *Lampposts* (Mofokeng, 2001). Mofokeng describes how he took his son with him to work on a Saturday morning and left him in the newsroom while he went upstairs to photograph the NUM mineworkers strike. On his return his son was missing and last seen in

his son may have been abducted for the harvesting of body parts for muti⁶⁷ (Mofokeng, 2001:30). These accounts are not titillating accounts of ‘otherness’ but are a considered insertion of his personal experience of indigenous belief systems that are an integral part of the lives of many South Africans (Anderson, 2013).

Mofokeng’s use of text and ‘metaphorical biography’ in the presentation of his photography further expands his representation of black life. These devices, in a similar way to his photographing of everyday township life and his emphasis of the spiritual life of his subjects, resists the sensational ways in which black South African life was represented during apartheid, and continues to be portrayed in local and international media. Mofokeng is not setting himself up to speak for all black experience (Hayes, 2007:156). And yet through sharing his personal biography, Mofokeng is inserting a wedge into dominant ideas about black life as unremitting struggle. His photographic essays and the personal nature of his texts insist on an alternative way of conceiving of black South African experience and its relationship to the world. Mofokeng’s approach to HIV and AIDS is closely linked to these ideas as will be revealed in the sections that follow.

7.4 *Chasing Shadows*: the ambiguities of faith in relation to the HIV epidemic

This section will focus on the photographic series *Chasing Shadows* which has appeared in a number of exhibitions and books, including the 2011 monograph which goes by the same name and served as a catalogue for the exhibition also entitled *Chasing Shadows: Thirty Years of Photographic Essays*. The exhibition was a major retrospective of Mofokeng’s work and was exhibited internationally at the Jeu de Paume (Paris), Kunsthalle Bern (Switzerland), Bergen Kunsthall (Norway) and the Wits Art Gallery (Johannesburg). For the purposes of this discussion, and except when stated otherwise, I will focus on the series *Chasing Shadows* as it appears in the 2011 publication.

the company of a union member. It took Mofokeng until the following evening to be reunited with his son, who had indeed been taken by the union member for unknown reasons.

⁶⁷ Muti (also spelt muthi) is traditional medicine, often consisting of plant and animal products believed to have healing and other mystical powers.

The series in its 2011 edit consists of twenty-three photographs, most of which were taken in and surrounding the Motouleng and Mautse caves in the Free State province in South Africa. These caves attract a range of spiritual leaders including Zionist priests and healers, *sangomas* and other traditional healers and diviners. The bones of Mantsopa, adviser to King Moshoeshoe, are believed to be interred in the Motouleng caves. Pilgrims who visit the caves believe that ancestors reside in the depths of the caves and therefore the caves are considered sacred. Large numbers of people seek healing, advice and spiritual guidance at the caves, especially at specific times in the Christian calendar, such as Easter. Others have noted:

The site is therefore manifestly a sacred African place with a sacred African history. But it is the ceremonies, the processions, the chanting, the sacrifices and the worshipping that most fully define the character of the place. And it is the human activity, or traces of human activity, that are the subjects of Mofokeng's great photographs (Godby, 2011:98).

Mofokeng first conceived of photographing the Motouleng caves as a means of concluding the project *Train Church* (1986) which documented religious sermons, prayer and singing on the trains he caught from Soweto to Johannesburg every day to and from work (Mofokeng, 2011:94). Mofokeng started the series *Chasing Shadows* in 1996 when he first visited the Motouleng caves over the Easter weekend and then again a few months later. He subsequently visited the caves in 2000 and in 2004 with his ill brother, and again in 2005, 2006 and 2008.

The series includes photographs that record the expanse of the caves (Figure 7.8), as well as details of the activities and specific areas such as the offertory or shrine (Figure 7.9). In addition to being a holy place, where religious ceremonies, worship and prayer take place, other parts of the caves serve as shelter to the pilgrims and healers alike, many of whom stay at the caves for extended periods. Mofokeng also documents some surprisingly domestic scenes, such as laundry drying or pilgrims resting in secluded sleeping areas.



Figure 7.8 Santu Mofokeng. *Inside Motouleng Cave, Motouleng Cave, Clarens.* 1996. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.9 Santu Mofokeng. *Offertory/Shrine, Motouleng Cave, Clarens.* 1996. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Other images in the series include the landscape surrounding the caves (Figure 7.10 and 7.11) and describe both the extent of the area and also how it has been transformed by the new meanings it has acquired through religious faith. For example, the presence of flags and robed devotees transform the landscape into a sacred space (Figure 7.10). In other images, the spiritual significance of the place is less obvious and it is only in reading the title that the viewer is aware that the rock is an altar (Figure 7.11). And yet the images evoke a sense of mysticism or the presence of things which cannot be seen. The deep shadows in some of the images (Figures 7.8 and 7.9), reflections (Figure 7.10) and a flattening of perspective (Figure 7.11) accentuate the sense of things hidden. Others have similarly assessed the series in terms of how rituals and traditions transform places into sacred sites (Freschi, 2011:110). Others have commented on the relationship between people and land and have argued that religious occupation of spaces can be viewed as an alternative form of reclaiming land lost during the colonial and apartheid eras (Law-Viljoen, 2004).



Figure 7.10 Santu Mofokeng. *Christmas Church Service, Mautse Cave*. c. 2000. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.11 Santu Mofokeng. *Motouleng Landscape with Poplar Trees and Altar*. 2004. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Throughout the series, a sense of otherworldliness is captured in the photographs which are often blurred due to slow shutter speed, as well as other uncanny visual forms including what appear to be multiple exposures and a collapsing of distance between objects. These techniques favour ‘fictions’ and resist clarity (Hayes, 2009:34), which resonates with Mofokeng’s investigation of spiritual experience which is equally ambiguous. The world of the spirit is also connected to ideas surrounding the relationship between life and death and life after death. These ideas are central to Mofokeng’s representation of his brother’s search for healing from AIDS-related illnesses and are evident in the aesthetics and sequencing of the images of his brother within the larger series *Chasing Shadows*.

In different versions of the series, various images of Mofokeng’s brother are included or excluded. In the 2011 publication only two images of his brother appear. One is of his

brother walking ahead approaching the caves and the image entitled *Eyes Wide Shut*⁶⁸ (Figure 7.13), which will be discussed shortly. In other versions of the essay, an image of his brother being transported in a wheelbarrow is included, as well as images of his brother curled on the ground next to the path, and in the caves washed with holy ash and receiving counsel. In the 2007 exhibition *Invoice*, two domestic images of Ishmael at home with his wife and child were hung on a wall adjacent to the large image of *Eyes Wide Shut*. These domestic scenes were taken before Ishmael fell ill and show him in his role as father and husband (Figure 7.12).



Figure 7.12 Santu Mofokeng. *Ishmael, Karabo (son) and Mother, Happy Loatle at Home. White City Jabavu. 2000.* © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

The image of Ishmael entitled *Eyes Wide Shut* (Figure 7.13) is often displayed in relation to two other images. The first is an image of two goats, where alignment and foreshortening of depth, make it appear as if one goat is standing on top the other (Figure 7.14). The goats were sacral animals which emphasises ideas of sacrifice, death and spiritual redemption.

⁶⁸ The title *Eyes Wide Shut* alludes to a liminal state, or a state of duality. In the context of his brother's illness, it suggests that he is between this world and the next. The title also potentially suggests denial or the inability to 'see' fully or clearly. The title is also the title of Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film.

Animals are typically sacrificed to appease or celebrate the ancestors and restore or ensure continued harmony between the living and those who have passed on (Ngubane, 1977; du Toit, 1980). The second image is an image of a pale horse grazing in a forest (Figure 7.15). The horse's head is hidden from view because of the shadow and thus the animal appears headless; an eerie allusion to death's horseman. The emaciated state of the animal also suggests that it is old or ill and therefore close to death.



Figure 7.13 Santu Mofokeng. *Eyes-wide-shut, Motouleng Cave, Clarens*. 2004. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.14 Santu Mofokeng. Buddhist Retreat near Pietermaritzburg, Kwazulu Natal. 2003. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.15 Santu Mofokeng. Sacral Animals, Motouleng Cave, Clarens. 2004. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

These three images are all informed by a similar visual language where shadow, depth of field and blur evoke a sense of other worldliness and a state which can be described as 'between life and death'. In this way Mofokeng's images potentially allude to an understanding of HIV infection as a state between life and death as described by anthropologists (Niehaus, 2007; 2009; Henderson, 2013) . The association of these three images is a deliberate curatorial decision on behalf of Mofokeng, first evidenced in the 2007 exhibition *Invoice* which he curated. The image of the horse was taken near Ixopo and its insertion in the series *Chasing Shadows*, which is mostly photographed at Motouleng and Mautse caves, is evidence of Mofokeng's role as curator and his desire to create new meanings in the way he sequences and groups his images. Mofokeng appears to encourage the viewer to make connections between the three images and wants to frame his brother's illness in relation to ideas of the spiritual world and questions of ontology.

The sequencing of the twenty-three images in the series *Chasing Shadows*, as it appears in the publication by the same name, emphasises a sense of journey, pilgrimage and general coming and going at the Motouleng caves. The series alternates between images of the landscape or the caves themselves and images of devotees engaged in various ceremonies or rites. Some images were not taken at the caves; among them the photograph of the horse described above, an image of a 'wake' in Lesotho (Figure 7.16) and a portrait of a herbalist (Figure 7.17). The large bundle of foliage tethered to the herbalist's back merges with the background and suggests an affinity between the man and the environment in which he gathers the healing plants. The image of the wake records what appears to be a double exposure so the young boy appears transparent which suggests a ghost like or spiritual state. The three images have elements of illusion and evoke a sense of slippage between the 'reality' of this world and the 'unreality' of the spirit world.



Figure 7.16 Santu Mofokeng. *A 'Wake' in Lesotho*. 2008. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.17 Santu Mofokeng. *'Ngaka Nakana-hetla' (Herbalist), Lesotho*. 2006. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

In the text accompanying the series *Chasing Shadows*, Mofokeng further encourages a reading of the images in terms of mystical experience. He provides the viewer with the opportunity to think about, or perhaps even immerse oneself in the photographs and come closer to understanding the experience of African spirituality. Mofokeng explains a key component of African spiritual life in the text that accompanies the series:

The expression I take as a title for this exhibition, ‘Chasing Shadows’, has quixotic connotations in English, but in African languages its meaning is antithetical. ‘Shadow’ does not carry the same image or meaning as *seriti* or *is’thunzi*. The word in Sotho and Zulu is difficult to pin down to any single meaning. In everyday use *seriti* or *is’thunzi* can mean anything from aura, presence, dignity, confidence, power, spirit, essence, status and or wellbeing...One’s *seriti/is’thunzi* can be positive or negative and can exert a powerful influence. Having a good or bad *seriti/is’thunzi* depends on the caprice of enemies, witches, relatives both dead and living, friends and associations, and on circumstances or time. Having and defending one’s own *seriti/is’thunzi* from evil forces or attacking the *seriti/is’thunzi* of one’s perceived enemies preoccupies and torments many African people (Mofokeng, 2011:108).

The closing sentences reveal ambivalence towards the concept of *seriti/is’thunzi* and potentially negative implications of this belief system on African people. In addressing the associations of witchcraft and the torment of the social and familial mistrust it can cause (Ashforth, 2002), Mofokeng suggests that despite the allure of the transcendent possibilities of faith captured in some of his images, there is also a darker side to these beliefs. The complexity of beliefs in witchcraft, and in particular the implication this has for people living with HIV and AIDS has already been addressed in Chapter 2.

Mofokeng’s documentation of his brother’s search for healing provides an achingly intimate insight into the potentially tragic consequences of faith. Mofokeng recounts the circumstances of his brother’s illness and reveals that he had tried to take his brother to a clinic, but his brother had resisted on account of his training as a *sangoma* and in his words ‘Western medicine doesn’t work for people like us’ (Mofokeng, 2011:96). Instead, his brother requested that he be taken to the Motouleng caves to seek healing there. At this point, Mofokeng had already been taking photographs in the caves for close on ten years. His account of the trip with his brother to the caves Mofokeng reveals that he first took his

brother to a medical doctor in order to ensure he could travel and yet his brother was so weak on arrival, he had to be pushed the final stretch in a wheelbarrow (Mofokeng, 2011:96). After consulting healers his brother emerged from the cave walking and appeared to have been strengthened by the spiritual experience and yet despite this reprieve he died a short while later.

This account details the potentially tragic consequences of the inability of the biomedical discourse surrounding HIV to reach some, possibly many, South Africans in ways that are sufficiently meaningful to alter their health seeking behaviour. It reveals how illness is not simply experienced as a 'biomedical' condition and is bound up in much larger ontological questions. It is also testimony of the painful extremes Mofokeng went to support his brother, despite his differing opinion and his desire for his brother to seek medical treatment. While Mofokeng's love for his brother meant that he enabled the visit to Motouleng caves to seek healing, Mofokeng did not necessarily share his brother's faith. It is within these fraught circumstances that Mofokeng produced the images of his brother. The act of photographing served as a means of Mofokeng attempting to cope with the circumstances:

...sometimes I make pictures in order to deal with the situation. If I am behind the camera I am not in the situation, I am outside it and I can deal with it. Although I am there I am not participating...what I am thinking is composition. I am thinking colour. I am thinking values. I am not thinking 'you'. So it requires a different way; being there and not being there at the same time. And so I can make jokes...I am looking at the *sangomas* and people who are helping Ishmael and then I make jokes about what they are doing. And I am looking at the goat and I say 'You see this priest. He is dressed up nicely but basically he is going to stab the goat'...I would say all these things. It is one way of dealing with the reality which is actually very difficult for me (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6).

This reveals the extent to which photography, and surprisingly humour, served as a means of mediating his experience and thus providing some distance between him and the pain of witnessing his brother's deteriorating health. The photographs that Mofokeng produced are testimony not only to his grief, but also possibly offer a meditation on the gaps that have arisen in the way South Africans make sense of and experience HIV infection. Rather than a simple privileging of one model over another, Mofokeng's images ask difficult questions

about the failure of biomedical understandings of HIV to reach many South Africans, as well as the role played by indigenous beliefs in understanding the causes of illness and death. Within the context of different, and even competing, ways of framing illness, it is important to be reminded that ‘Most of the time, most of us obtain our medicines from sources we trust and whose ideological underpinnings we believe in’ (Geffen, 2010:91).

Despite the seriousness of Mofokeng’s documentation of spiritual experience, it is useful to reconsider Mofokeng’s admission of ‘joking’ to cope with the pain of his brother’s illness. A friend and one-time colleague of his, Adam Ashforth cautions that Mofokeng’s work is ‘in danger of being smothered with reverence’ (2011:228). Ashforth emphasises the humour in Mofokeng’s images while noting that this does not equate with happiness and that it is more indicative of what he calls ‘serious laughter’ (2011:228). While ‘humour’ may seem at times too strong a word for Mofokeng’s wry and often painful observations, Ashforth’s reading of his images does demand a consideration of the duality of life and death, loss and richness, kindness and inhumanity and other forms of human experience captured in Mofokeng’s photographs. Mofokeng’s uncanny images involving illusion and ambiguity suggest that all is not as it first appears, and that in a similar way, experiences often enfold their counterpart and therefore within joy there is sadness, within life there is death.

No other photographer has grappled with the ambiguities and conflicts in peoples’ faith and sense of spiritual order caused by the epidemic. The epidemic has brought about a major crisis in many South Africans’ understanding of their relationship to their families, their communities and the spiritual world of the ancestors (Henderson, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 2, for many people the question of antiretroviral treatment does not even feature. The questions that are asked relate to infinitely more complex issues of faith, social and spiritual order. Mofokeng perhaps confirms this when he says:

What strikes me when talking to NGOs and do-gooders is that the people they are trying to help, they don’t understand, they don’t even know what you are talking about because the language is flying over their heads (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 6).

While this could be understood as a question of formal education and the challenge of understanding English or biomedical language, I believe it is more a sense of speaking a different cultural ‘language’ in relation to understandings of illness. It has already been demonstrated in South Africa that people are able to ‘learn’ about and adhere to antiretroviral treatment, regardless of socio-economic or educational contexts (MSF et al., 2006). This suggests that it is not a question of convincing people that antiretroviral treatment works, but rather acknowledging different ontological starting points in terms of how different cultures understand illness and healing.

In conclusion, it is interesting to consider how state-supported AIDS denialism resulted in the dominance of a biomedical understanding of HIV and AIDS as AIDS activists defended and promoted scientific understandings of HIV pathogenesis and treatment in order to save lives. It is possible that this may have inadvertently silenced indigenous ways of understanding illness. Others have argued that the ‘tendency to equate any reservations regarding ARVS with AIDS denialism arguably makes a broader and more democratic debate on the subject of treatment impossible’ (Wreford, 2008:16). There are thus potential parallels with this situation and the way in which ‘struggle photography’, which sought to reveal the injustices of the apartheid regime, also unintentionally may have had a potentially negative impact on how black experience was understood only in terms of suffering and violence.

The images discussed in this section have been shown extensively to local and international audiences in the exhibition and publication *Chasing Shadows: Thirty Years of Photographic Essays* (Mofokeng, 2011). Prior to this, the series *Chasing Shadows* had been shown in solo exhibitions in Michigan (USA) in 2010, and as part of the exhibition *Invoice* at the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg (2007) and at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town (2006). The series was also shown in 2003 in Belgium, in 2000 in Germany and in 1998 in the Netherlands. Most recently photographs from the Motouleng and Mautse caves have been exhibited in a series entitled *Ancestors/Fearing the Shadows* together with additional images which document the destruction of spiritually important sites by mining interests in Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. In this context the series takes on additional meanings and ‘reveal collisions between transnational developments, ancient traditions, and personal fates’ (Gaensheimer, 2013).

7.5 *Child-headed Households*: resisting the image of the ‘AIDS orphan’

In 2007 Mofokeng was awarded the Ruth First Fellowship. The nature of the fellowship demanded that he work together with journalist Leonie Joubert to produce a number of journalistic stories. In essence, the Ruth First award was a commission and Mofokeng was told what he should photograph (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 16). Joubert’s interest lay in the broader social impact of climate change on vulnerable communities in South Africa. It was within this framework that Mofokeng produced the series entitled *Child-headed households*. This style of working was the complete antithesis of how Mofokeng usually worked at this point of his career, especially considering his aversion to taking on projects aligned to social causes which he has articulated clearly in interviews:

...in the past [before 1994] I had the rationale and what we call legitimisation. ‘Why am I doing this? Why I am I coming into your house and showing things about you which you’d never commission and you don’t want people to know?’ This is your life. This is an invasion. And If I had continued, people would have said ‘Oh Santu is a sensitive photographer. He is this and that.’ And I become famous and I get published and I become a star, but nothing will have changed ...whether you are dying of AIDS or whether you are living in DiepSloot ...it was hard. I struggle even now (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 16).

This is not the only time Mofokeng has voiced his scepticism about the ability of documentary photography to change people’s lives (Mofokeng in Christopher, 2004:99). This point of view is the antithesis of other photographers, including Mendel and Wulfsohn (Chapters 4 and 5), who believed their work had the potential to have a positive impact, usually by increasing awareness.

The series *Child-headed Households* was displayed in the context of the Ruth First Award and in 2008 at the Johannesburg Art Gallery where it was exhibited alongside his work on climate change. The series consists of seven images in the 2011 book publication *Chasing Shadows*, four of which appear in the publication *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (Garb, 2011) that accompanied the exhibition by the same name. It also

appears in a fuller edit on Mofokeng's website. The series is focused on documenting the domestic spaces of child-headed households where parents had died of AIDS.

Mofokeng sought out details which would reveal the absence of the adults in the home and reflect the new reality of the children and young adults and the ways they constructed their space to reflect the things they valued, such as music. One example is the suspension of CDs as decoration (Figure 7.18) and the other is the central positioning of a music system and radio in a room almost devoid of other furnishing. Mofokeng compared his approach to photographing the homes to how he usually looks at landscape (Mofokeng, 2011:98). Those images without people in the frame also focus attention on the 'landscape' of the home.



Figure 7.18 Santu Mofokeng. Lounge-cum-bedroom at Dan Location, Limpopo. 2007. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

In other images (not included in the *Chasing Shadows* publication) the absence of the parents is evoked by an armchair where the presence of an adult is alluded to with the impression of a body left behind in the chair (Figure 7.19). In another image, the parents' clothes remain hanging in the corner of a room (Figure 7.20). The clothes are a haunting and intimate reminder of people who are no longer present with suggestions of the scent of the wearers

still embedded in the items. The graffiti documented in this image is also evidence of the ways the young people have chosen to occupy the space of the family home. The graffitied words ‘sex’ and a crossed out name followed by ‘loves girl’ offer a somewhat uneasy insight into the preoccupations of the young people in the homestead. While adolescent sexuality is not troubling in itself and is quite natural, in this instance, in the absence of parental guidance and in the context of the HIV epidemic it is potentially concerning. And yet this reading of the image potentially frames the young people in an unhelpful and moralising discourse connected to fears of delinquency with ‘AIDS orphans’ so heavily critiqued by others (Meintjes & Bray, 2005).



Figure 7.19 Santu Mofokeng. *Mkansi Family Bedroom*. 2007. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.



Figure 7.20 Santu Mofokeng. *Mkansi household bedroom with graffiti and clothes of their late parents.* 2007. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

The text that appears alongside the series details the unequal and arbitrary distribution of care, support and treatment for people living with HIV in two townships in Limpopo province (Mofokeng, 2011:184). It is revealed that the care is provided by a collection of church organisations, NGOs and other philanthropic groups. The absence of state support is indicative of the unequal spread of health and social services in the country, coupled with poverty in rural and less developed provinces such as Limpopo (Pauw & van Schoor, 2005). Apart from the lack of resources the text also addresses the silences within the communities where AIDS is seldom acknowledged as the cause of death and in its place ‘natural causes’ are commonly written on death certificates. Mofokeng also alludes to indigenous belief systems as a means of making sense of the epidemic, as has been discussed in more detail above. Another observation is the way the death of parents disrupts gender roles within the home and tasks usually assigned to the mother or female head of the household shift onto the children. This is evidenced in images of the young teenage boy, Rister Mkansi, preparing food in the kitchen (Figure 7.21).



Figure 7.21 Santu Mofokeng. *Rister Mkansi in the family kitchen*. 2007. © Santu Mofokeng. Images courtesy Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

Despite the ambiguities and the silences in these images, they also provide an alternative image of young people whose parents have died of AIDS-related illnesses. Mofokeng's rejection of a documentary approach to the *Child-headed Households* series is re-enforced in a quote which prefaces the series; 'One danger with documentary photography, especially "victim photography" is that it may create its victims as much as it finds them' (Peffer, 2009:264). The quoted text strongly references pre-existing critiques (Rosler, 1992; Solomon-Godeau, 1995) and clearly articulates Mofokeng's own concerns with documentary photography. Even when forced to document the stereotype of the 'African AIDS orphan', Mofokeng refuses to produce images which support this image of victimhood.

Meintjes and Bray raise various concerns including the continued use of the outdated term 'AIDS orphan' and the ways in which the media have tended to produce moralising discourses about the failure of African parents and 'families' to care for children which is largely projected as evidence of a decay in 'traditional values'. The media's focus on 'AIDS orphans' has alternatively framed them as innocent victims or as potential delinquents and a threat to society (Meintjes & Bray, 2005:147). Research has revealed that contrary to these media stereotypes, many children are more vulnerable in homes with sick caregivers and that

the majority of children do not find themselves living in a home without an adult caregiver (Meintjes & Bray, 2005:150-151). While Mofokeng may or may not have been aware of this research, he was clearly very aware of the implications of taking images that showed the young people as victims.

Mofokeng's focus on everyday life in South African townships in the 1980s offered a counter-image to the dominant narrative of suffering and hardship. The series *Child-headed Households* works in a similar way by emphasising the everyday life of young people who care for themselves in the absence of parental care. The images record the interiors of homes and also mundane moments such as the preparation of food or sitting together. Others have also noted that focusing on everyday life offers a counter-narrative to the stereotype of the 'AIDS orphan':

A focus on everyday life enables an appreciation of the multiple and varied nature of the young people's lives...a description that is at odds with the assumptions of passivity and unmitigated vulnerability circulating in discourse concerning 'AIDS orphans' (Henderson, 2013:83).

Henderson further critiques the emphasis in the literature on AIDS and children and the supposed vulnerability of young people who are not raised by their biological parents and the attendant assumptions related to 'appropriate childhoods' which she believes are patronising and ignore local responses (2013:84). She also points out that young people who live in poverty are often no better off than those who have lost one or both parents and therefore resists the exceptionalism that has often framed children orphaned by the HIV epidemic (Henderson, 2013:84). Henderson argues that generalised understandings of poverty and AIDS are problematic and the fixation on suffering is unethical:

Textures of lightness, beauty, love, strength and conviviality, often equally present in social contexts of scarcity and pain, are excluded from analysis in an attempt to depict the gravity of the epidemic (Henderson, 2013:85).

Mofokeng's approach to documenting the lives of young people living in family homes after the death of their parents similarly seeks out some of the 'textures of lightness, beauty, love, strength and conviviality' found in these domestic spaces. In choosing to document these

details and not to present the young people as victims, Mofokeng resists the dominant image of the 'African AIDS orphan'. Even the way Mofokeng titles the series *Child-headed Households* refuses to conjure up and reinforce pre-conceived notions about 'AIDS orphans'. This less sensational title emphasises the home which is where Mofokeng focused his camera lens.

7.6 Conclusion

Mofokeng's photography is focused on the everyday in order to emphasise normalcy. His investigation of spirituality and indigenous beliefs offers an insight into the central role of these beliefs in the lives of South Africans. The two series *Chasing Shadows* and *Child-headed Households* also reveals how the trauma of widespread illness and death caused by the HIV epidemic has disrupted the natural order of life and how many people interpret HIV and AIDS in spiritual, rather than biomedical terms. His photographs are essentially framed as a humanising endeavour; a response to chafe against other mainstream images of black life that tend to emphasise struggle.

His two series *Chasing Shadows* and *Child-headed Households* contribute an important alternative approach to photographing the impact of the HIV epidemic on individuals, families and communities in South Africa. Mofokeng avoids producing images that simply reproduce ideas about 'victims', and in particular African 'victims'. In its place, Mofokeng shows how life continues in the face of illness, death and loss. These are not potentially patronising stories of 'resilience', but more ambiguous in their suggestion of larger spiritual and philosophical questions of the continuity of cycles of death and life which lie beyond human control and yet are an integral part of being human, and thus emphasise the humanity of his African subjects.

Conclusion

Photography and the 'AIDS victim'

It is thirty years since the first South African was diagnosed with HIV in 1983. The past three decades have seen dramatic developments and shifts in terms of the medical, political and social impact of the epidemic both locally and globally. This thesis has shown how the history of the epidemic shaped photographic responses in profound and dynamic ways. We have seen how initially photographs, especially those appearing in the media, gave rise to largely stereotypical and potentially ultimately damaging images. The stereotype of the 'AIDS victim' typified by a skeletal, abandoned figure came to dominate the way the epidemic was visualised in the 1980s. This stereotype continued to govern the representation of the HIV epidemic in Africa in the decades that followed. However, as demonstrated in this thesis, a number of South African photographers came to challenge such representations and to produce alternative images of HIV and AIDS.

The development of antiretroviral treatment in 1996 was a major medical breakthrough in terms of treatment for HIV infection and had a significant impact on transforming the image of the 'AIDS victim'. As AIDS patients started treatment and recovered their health, a new image emerged of the 'AIDS survivor'. With the advent of treatment, HIV infection was slowly altered into a chronic illness and was no longer a terminal illness. However, to begin with this was only true for the global North. In the 1990s and continuing into the early 2000s, the treatment divide between the North and South was evidenced in the kinds of photographs produced. While in North America and Europe, photographs showed HIV-positive people continuing with their lives, images from sub-Saharan Africa documented people dying on a horrific scale. This is powerfully demonstrated in Chapter 4 in the work of Gideon Mendel from this time period, and particularly so in a comparison between his British project *The Wards* and the photographs he took at a Zimbabwean mission hospital a few months later.

In the early 2000s, activists and organisations such as the Global Fund, PEPFAR and UNAIDS, forged a global treatment initiative that aimed to increase the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the global South. So while photographs of Africans dying of AIDS

in the 1990s and early 2000s may well have contributed to a negative image of passive victimhood, these images were also largely instrumental in terms of advocating for the provision of treatment. The publication of Gideon Mendel's images in *The Guardian* and in NGO materials is one such example. Considering the vital role played by international bodies in enabling the provision of antiretroviral treatment in Africa, it is short-sighted to simply attack or dismiss all such images as only causing harm.

And yet the degree to which images of African 'AIDS victims' perpetuated a 'dependency complex' on foreign aid is also important to consider. In many ways, images of 'victims' used for advocacy or fundraising purposes, regardless of where the images originate from and what disaster they draw on, continue to present a challenge to photography as a medium. As demonstrated by historical examples discussed in Chapter 3, photographs of human suffering, be it famine, war, or HIV and AIDS, are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they appear to be successful in terms of raising awareness and funds, and on the other hand, the agency and humanity of the subject is often undermined. However, as I have argued in this thesis, not all photographs of human suffering are automatically dehumanising and some photographers have demonstrated that suffering and strength are often entwined.

South African photographers: re-reading and resisting the African 'AIDS victim'

While the dominant perception of photography of the HIV epidemic in Africa is that it has promoted damaging stereotypes (Hammonds, 1987; Cerullo & Hammonds, 1988; Sontag, 1989; Austin, 1990; Treichler, 1999) a number of South African photographers have tended to contribute a different and more complex image. The research presented in this thesis has demonstrated how many South African photographers have been intensely aware of the history of photographing HIV in Africa. The time period in which images were produced is also of critical importance in terms of the intended purpose of the photographer and who their audience was. For example, photographers who documented HIV and AIDS in the 1990s, including Gisèle Wulfsohn, Gideon Mendel, Eric Miller and Graeme Williams, reflected the realities of the epidemic at the time and showed AIDS sick people in the terminal stages of illness.

Mendel's continuous documentation of the effects of the epidemic on sub-Saharan Africa during the 1990s and early 2000s was by far the most internationally visible work of this region at the time. Mendel's images of extreme suffering in his *A Broken Landscape* project, and published in *The Guardian* and NGO materials, were largely intended to shock a privileged audience in the global North, especially Britain, and sway opinion in favour of international assistance for sub-Saharan Africa in the form of support for the Global Fund and other initiatives. As discussed in Chapter 4, senior staff at DFID and UNAIDS argued that Mendel's images were instrumental in increasing public awareness, which was conducive to creating an environment where policy changes were possible.

Other South African photographers who have produced images of suffering caused by AIDS include Fanie Jason, Dean (Nadine) Hutton, Eric Miller and Pieter Hugo, but this did not always translate into sensational or 'horror' images. While Miller was commissioned to photograph HIV and AIDS-related stories from the mid-1990s onwards, the other three photographers only photographed the issue in the 2000s. Miller's photographs of the epidemic were mostly commissioned by NGOs and overseas publications and were produced with the intention of increasing knowledge about the epidemic and used within campaigns. Miller has also more recently produced work that has been exhibited in galleries. Like Miller, Hugo was commissioned by foreign media and NGOs but also produced a series, entitled *The Bereaved*, which was a personal response to the epidemic and was displayed within the context of the fine art gallery.

While the media is largely associated with publishing sensational images of the HIV epidemic, the photographers I interviewed, and especially those with experience of working for the press, drew attention to the differences between the daily news and more in-depth journalism. A common argument was that the daily news tended towards images that would simply illustrate a story, whereas more nuanced and complex photo-essays were produced for weekend newspapers or foreign magazine publications. The photographers were well aware of the advantages and limitations of the media and some of them have since left the field and now produce photographs for NGO or fine art markets. It is also important to note that the print media industry itself has suffered severe funding cuts within this time period and many journalists have needed to supplement their media work with additional assignments from

other sectors, or have left the news industry entirely because of financial constraints and lack of opportunities.

Most criticism of photographic stereotypes of HIV and AIDS is focused on negative images, such as the 'AIDS victim' and 'AIDS orphan', or else moralising images of 'the prostitute', 'the homosexual' and 'the drug user'. However, it is rare to find discussion of the emergence of counter images, which are in their own way also stereotypes. For instance, South Africa's experience of state-supported AIDS denialism gave rise to an influential activist movement in the form of the TAC. The TAC has provided photographers with one of the most powerful examples of a 'counter image' in the form of the grassroots activist. These counter images were found not only within NGO publications but also within the local and international press.

Both Eric Miller and Gideon Mendel documented and worked with the TAC at different times. David Goldblatt also volunteered his time to photograph Zackie Achmat and other TAC leaders for the organisation's *Equal Treatment* magazine. Mendel's relationship with the TAC was formed in the period after the opening of his exhibition *A Broken Landscape* in December 2001. As discussed in Chapter 4, the collaborative way in which Mendel worked with the TAC in the five months that followed produced some of the most experimental images of the HIV epidemic in South Africa, including more collaborative approaches to producing images. Mendel's relationship with the TAC was particularly dynamic and while it projected the TAC's demands for antiretroviral treatment onto the world stage, it also provided Mendel with access to one of the most impressive AIDS activist stories in the world.

Mendel played an important role in disseminating stories documenting the work of the TAC and partner organisations, such as MSF. The publication of these images in the British newspaper *The Guardian* brought international attention to the organisations and their cause. While operating as advocacy images, instead of depicting suffering people in need of assistance, these images showed ordinary citizens taking a stand for their right to healthcare. This image of the empowered activist, often shown wearing the signature TAC HIV-positive t-shirt, came to dominate representations of the epidemic in South Africa during the early 2000s.

In addition to the image of the activist, another important photographic discourse developed in the early 2000s in South Africa. Portraiture became a powerful tool for combatting silence and stigma surrounding the disease. A number of photographers produced series that documented the lives of HIV-positive people in a bid to normalise the disease and counter the damaging association of HIV with death. For example, Sue Williamson's series *From the Inside* paired portraits of HIV-positive individuals with the documentation of a public graffiti statement. Gisèle Wulfsohn's two series, *Living Openly* and *Conversations: HIV and the family*, both affirm the dignity and normalcy of people living with HIV and offer a significant contribution to an alternative way of photographing the epidemic.

Nevertheless it is important to remember that the 'positive living' images of the 2000s were no less stereotypes than the earlier images of suffering and that despite the increased availability of antiretroviral treatment this did not translate into a universal end to suffering caused by HIV and AIDS. So while early media images of suffering offered a limited and frightening view of what it meant to be HIV-positive in a pre-treatment era, the later images of strong individuals in charge of their health also presented a one-sided view, albeit an arguably less stigmatising one. Apart from situating the analysis of photographs within the timeframe and context they were produced in, I also think it is important to rethink and challenge the assumption that all images of suffering automatically depict individuals as 'victims' and rob them of agency and humanity.

Dean (Nadine) Hutton is an example of a photographer who wrestled with the challenge of recording the terrible suffering people endured because she believed it was important not to ignore the reality of this suffering. At the same time, she actively sought out ways to ensure that her images acknowledged the humanity of the gravely ill by avoiding sensational photographs of their emaciated states and including their 'presence' and knowledge of the photograph being taken by ensuring direct eye contact. In this way, Hutton asserts that physical and social suffering is part of human experience and in refusing to ignore it she affirms the humanity of her subjects. Fanie Jason's essay *Sounds from Gugulethu* operates in a similar way. Many of Mendel's images from *A Broken Landscape* also show the full range of human emotions connected to the suffering of those dying of AIDS-related illnesses, and the pain experienced by those caring for the ill. Gentleness, compassion, concern and love are showed alongside despair, anger, sadness and grief. So instead of dismissing all images

of AIDS sick individuals as perpetuating a stereotype of 'victimhood' I think it is important to acknowledge that many photographic series offer a more complex image that contributes to a fuller understanding of the experience of HIV and AIDS which includes both suffering and strength.

In contrast to these images of people living with HIV and AIDS, and those affected by the epidemic, David Goldblatt's approach to the epidemic has been unique with the virtual absence of people in his images and a focus on the South African landscape. Goldblatt's approach reveals not only a counter response to the dominance of images of suffering, but is also in keeping with his approach to photography more generally. His series *In the Time of AIDS* offers a different way of documenting the impact of the epidemic on South Africa by photographing the presence of the AIDS ribbon in the landscape. The absence of people in the series translates into a presence, but one that is suffused with something ghostly and suggestive of loss.

Santu Mofokeng has produced two bodies of work related to the issue of HIV. Unlike all the other photographers included in this thesis Mofokeng did not seek out an 'AIDS story' or feel compelled to produce work in response to the epidemic. Instead HIV entered his life, firstly in a personal capacity with his brother's illness, and secondly in the form of a commission for the Ruth First Award. Mofokeng's series entitled *Child-Headed Households* is an interesting example of how even when commissioned to produce a body of work on one of the most sensationalised aspects of the epidemic, Mofokeng resisted reinforcing certain stereotypes that he considered damaging and unethical. Mofokeng refused to approach the subject matter in a way that 'made victims' of the young people he photographed. His focus on the details of how the young people decorated and ran the home in the absence of the parents offered an alternative ways of considering this loss and what it means for young people to live without parents. And yet his images reveal the everyday realities of learning to prepare food and run a household without adults, particularly maternal figures, who were usually responsible for these domestic tasks.

The series *Chasing Shadows* offers an even more radical response to engaging with the meaning of the epidemic in the South African context. This series was a long-term body of work started in 1996 and principally concerned with how black South Africans experience

spirituality and their relationship to this world and the next. HIV and AIDS entered this body of work in the form of his brother's illness. As discussed in Chapter 7, the narrative of illness and health became entwined in Mofokeng's investigation of spirituality because of assisting his brother in his search for healing. Mofokeng has commented that he took photographs as a way of coping with the painful reality of his brother's failing health. He has argued that he would not have taken such images of a stranger (Mofokeng, personal interview, 2011 May 16).

And yet Mofokeng's decision to insert these personal images into the larger series *Chasing Shadows* reveals a challenge to the prevailing ways of thinking about and visualising HIV and AIDS in South Africa. The 2000s were dominated by the story of the struggle for access to antiretroviral treatment. Little attention was paid to how people, other than activists, experienced HIV infection. Mofokeng's photographs are alone in their engagement with indigenous beliefs and the way the disease is experienced by many South Africans in spiritual terms. Mofokeng's approach to visualising HIV and AIDS is fundamentally linked to his longstanding concerns with how black South Africans have been photographically represented.

Mofokeng's HIV-related work is intimately connected to an ethos of redress. More so than any other South African photographer, Mofokeng has seriously grappled with what it means to represent black South African life and throughout his career he has sought ways to offer an alternative view of township life. His photographs have worked against other images that either present the township as a site of unremitting struggle, or as a place of poverty. While his images do not shy away from showing socio-economic realities and challenges, his work emphasises the spiritual and social and affirms the humanity of his subjects.

Mofokeng's work resists both the stereotype of the African AIDS 'victim' and the 'living positive' activist found mostly in the media and NGO contexts. Mofokeng's work most persuasively addresses my initial questions of 'How do photographers document difficult and uncomfortable South African realities?' and 'Is it possible to photograph HIV in a way that is not bleak and dehumanising?' While many South African photographers have been sensitive to these questions, which have contributed to their approach to documenting the HIV epidemic, Mofokeng's work provides a particularly profound answer because of his

unswerving focus on the humanity of the subject and a deeply philosophical engagement with questions of faith and spirituality. Mofokeng's work supports the observation that the HIV epidemic has presented '...a unique moment to revalidate African personhood, the permanent and irreplaceable value of being a person, in this instance, of African descent' (Biakolo, Mathangwane & Odallo, 2003:7).

Reflections on the research method

My research includes a number of approaches. I drew on existing literature on photographic theory and the representation of the HIV epidemic, both internationally and locally. This informed my analysis of the photographs, as well as the structure and thinking behind the thesis. I also relied on the texts accompanying the series included in this thesis, as well as existing interviews and critiques of the work. I then conducted my own interviews in order to better understand how the photographers approached their work and the thinking behind their different projects.

My analysis of both published and unpublished photographic series was only possible after extensive research and establishing relationships with the photographers and other individuals connected with specific projects or organisations. By bringing relatively unknown projects to light, as well as looking at material published abroad or only available in personal archives, this thesis contributes to public understanding of the extent and diversity of projects by South African photographers on HIV and AIDS.

My decision to interview the photographers enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of their working processes and their intentions, as well as the role played by various professional relationships that enabled and influenced their work. These insights into the lesser known contributing factors that shape photographic projects offer an important contribution to knowledge. However the interview process also presented its own challenges and I was aware of the dangers of being overly influenced by the photographer's accounts. Apart from the interviews with the photographers I also relied on texts accompanying the different series, as well as existing literature and other assessments of their projects to provide a more balanced perspective.

My theoretical analysis of individual images and the different photographers' projects was informed by international and local theory on photographic discourse and South African photography. With regards to influential international photographic criticism I drew on a wide range of texts⁶⁹. I am also indebted to local art historians and theorists⁷⁰ and international figures writing on African and South African photography⁷¹. In addition to art criticism and theory, I found the literature on the representation of Africa and African people and images of human suffering enlarged my understanding and enriched my analysis of photographs of HIV and AIDS⁷². My theoretically informed analysis of the photographers' work seeks to reveal the links between the working processes and intentions of the photographers, the contexts they publish their work in and the kinds of visual languages they employ.

This thesis is not primarily a comparative study, but rather seeks to provide the reader with an insight into the diversity of the responses to the HIV epidemic by South African photographers and in particular highlight significant, alternative approaches to photographing HIV and AIDS. My project essentially seeks to differentiate rather than compare. The four photographers that I have focused on are engaged with fundamentally different aesthetic and intellectual projects which serve to reveal a range of responses to the epidemic. However, throughout the thesis I do comment on similarities and differences between individual images and series.

I intentionally sought out South African photographers working in different contexts in order to demonstrate the impact of the choice of publication on the kinds of images they produced. This thesis aims to demonstrate how specific photographers actively chose to work in particular ways and display their work in specific contexts. There is a relationship between

⁶⁹ The following texts, among others, were enormously influential: Sontag, 1977; 1989; 2003; Barthes, 1981; 1988; Burgin, 1982; Sekula, 1982; Tagg, 1988; Solomon-Godeau, 1995; Clarke, 1997; Alvarado, 2001; Berger, 2001; 2003; Wells; 2003; 2009.

⁷⁰ A number of local writers and academics have written on local photography including: Atkinson & Breitz, 1999; Dubow, 1998; Godby, 1999; 2001a; 2003, 2008; Bester, 2006; 2010; Hayes, 2007; 2009; Dietrich & Bank, 2008; O'Toole, 2012a; 2012b.

⁷¹ The following texts on African photography were the most influential: Bell, Enwezor, Zaya & Oguibe, 1996; Enwezor, 1997; 2001; 2006; Newbury; 2009; Haney, 2010; Garb, 2011;2013.

⁷² A fuller range of references are included in Chapter 1 but major texts include the following: Fanon, 1967; Sontag, 1977; 1989; 2003; Gilman, 1985; Monti, 1987; Achebe, 1988; 1998; Appiah, 1992; Ayittey, 1992; Hooks, 1992; Edwards, 1992; 2001; Davidson, 1994; Mudimbe, 1994; Diawara, 1998; Campbell, 2009; 2011, 2012; Mbembe, 2001; 2002; Reinhardt, Edwards & Duganne, 2007.

the photographers' unique creative and philosophical approaches to their work and their decision to present their work in particular contexts. There is a further relationship between these contexts and the kind of visual languages employed by the photographers.

This is evidenced in the examples of Gideon Mendel and Gisèle Wulfsohn who both tended to work predominantly for NGOs and the media. Prior to the 2000s both these photographers favoured black and white film and for many of their early projects adopted a 'fly on the wall' approach where the subjects appear unaware of the photographer's presence. This visual language is distinctly informed by the history of photojournalism described in the Introduction. It is closely aligned within the tradition of documentary photography and communicates a sense of authenticity and veracity, as well as the discourse of 'bearing witness'. In addition to working in this way Wulfsohn also took powerful portraits for her NGO-related work that referenced an honorific tradition in portrait painting and suited the intentions of publications such as *Living Openly*. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, over the years Mendel's work shifted away from a traditional documentary style as the media and NGO markets demanded colour and multi-media work.

Further examples of the relationship between context and the kinds of images produced can be found in the work of Goldblatt and Mofokeng. Both these photographers primarily choose to exhibit their work in fine art galleries and their HIV-related work has only appeared within this context and in book and catalogue publications. The less obvious and more philosophical responses of Goldblatt and Mofokeng are enabled by the fine art context and would not be acceptable within the media with its demand for breaking news and more illustrative images. Both Goldblatt and Mofokeng are sceptical in their own distinct ways of the idea that photographs can serve an instrumental purpose aligned to bringing about political or social change. And yet despite their claims of seeking to address fundamentally more personal concerns within their photography, both photographers powerfully contribute alternative ways of visualising the South African HIV epidemic within the contexts connected to the fine art gallery.

Each of the four photographers represented in this thesis demonstrate how context informs the kinds of images produced, as well as the visual languages that are acceptable within these different places of publication and display. Each photographer's intention and personal

creative and intellectual approach to their work informs where they chose to show their work and has given rise to the diverse responses included in this thesis.

An absence of images and the decline of the AIDS treatment movement

Another consideration when reflecting on the role photography has played in profiling the issue of HIV and AIDS is the decline of the global AIDS treatment movement. In the early 2000s, the HIV epidemic came to dominate the international community's agenda. In 2002 the Global Fund was launched and a year later PEPFAR was established (Grebe, 2012:5). These two programmes channelled significant funds to developing countries to assist with AIDS treatment and prevention programmes. These organisations have played a major role in the provision of antiretroviral treatment to countries in the global South, including South Africa.

However the recent global economic recession has destabilised these coalitions and funding bodies. Donor support has remained at the same level as 2008 (UNAIDS, 2012b:1). Despite domestic investments surpassing donor assistance in 2011, international assistance for HIV and AIDS still remains indispensable in the short and medium term. A recent report estimates that 9.7 million people globally received antiretroviral treatment in 2012 which represents 65% of the 15 million people who need it (WHO, 2013b:7). HIV and AIDS are no longer seen as the major priority they once were with public attention focusing on new concerns, such as climate change (Grebe, 2012:168). It is interesting to note that this is reflected in the work of Gideon Mendel whose major focus is now on climate change with his new project *Drowning World* documenting floods around the world.

The international decline in interest and support for HIV and AIDS is mirrored within the photographic world. Of all the South African photographers I interviewed, only Eric Miller continues to work on HIV-related stories. Mendel remains involved in the *Through Positive Eyes* project but this also is winding down. A similar picture is found abroad. Don McCullin and James Nachtwey were the last big international names to photograph the HIV epidemic in Africa in the early 2000s. Brent Stirton's 2011 series on HIV in the Ukraine is one of the

few recent photographic projects concerned with HIV (Stirton, 2011). Within the South African context, the provision of antiretroviral treatment in the public healthcare sector and the end of state-supported AIDS denialism in 2008, has in many ways removed the major impetus for both the activist and photographic communities. However, this is not to say the issue is fully resolved, as evidenced by Miller's extended essay on the long-term impact of the loss of adult children on the elderly. In 2012, it was estimated that 6.1 million South Africans were living with HIV and of these, 2 010 340 were receiving antiretroviral treatment (UNAIDS, 2013b:A14&A84).

The thirty year history of the epidemic coincides with major shifts in photography. I write at a point in the history of photography where photographers are more aware than ever of the limits of their story telling ability. In the 1980s there was a very powerful sense of purpose and rationale for South African photographers engaged in social and political issues. The moral high ground of the anti-apartheid 'struggle' photographer transformed their image-making into heroism. The 1990s saw the gradual draining away of this didactic understanding of photography and the move of documentary photography into the fine art context.

The 1990s also saw radical advancements in digital technology which revolutionised the photographic market. South African photographers faced the considerable expense of switching to digital cameras and related computer software if they intended to compete on an international level. The technological advances continued at a pace and in the 2000s there was the development of mobile phones with cameras, followed by tablets and other image and communication devices. We now live in a time when anyone with such a device can be a photographer, or perhaps more accurately, can contribute to the image economy. This has been evidenced in examples of citizen journalism where the ultimate 'witness' is the participant or passer-by, not the professional photographer. In the South African context we have also seen a documentary award go to a photographer who produced his project entirely with an iPhone.⁷³

⁷³ In 2012, the Ernest Cole Award was granted to Dale Yudelman who produced a compelling and insightful project entitled *Living under Democracy*. The entire project was shot on an iPhone.

If we consider Gideon Mendel's twenty years of documenting the HIV epidemic, we see how his approach changed from black and white film, to digital colour formats and then increasingly the production of multimedia and film-based work which is viewed primarily on the World Wide Web. His only remaining engagement with the issue of HIV and AIDS is as Creative Director of the *Through Positive Eyes* project where the images and films are produced by the HIV-positive participants. It is worth considering if Mendel's trajectory signals a wider experience of the decline of a particular photographic approach in relation to social challenges, such as HIV.

And yet, despite the apparent loss of authority and creative power of the photographer, the current moment is also one of the most inter-connected moments in history. The World Wide Web remains a formidable tool and most photographers would not survive without it. One example of photography finding a new way to reach audiences is the use of Twitter and other social media. Mendel recently recounted how despite his on-going documentation of global flooding since 2010, the image that received the most attention was one he posted on Twitter of the floods in Nigeria (Mendel, personal interview, 2013 April 12). Perhaps this suggests that new platforms are necessary for engaging audiences with social issues, and that old formats are less successful in communicating with a technologically driven multimedia culture.

In recent years the sense of urgency surrounding the global HIV epidemic has undoubtedly diminished. This is reflected in the worldwide decline of photographic coverage of HIV and AIDS and also in decreasing donor support for the issue. And yet despite these shifts in the attention on HIV and AIDS, 35.3 million people were living with HIV globally in 2012 (UNAIDS, 2013b:4). Whether or not photographers will continue to play a role in grappling with the complexities of the enduring realities of the HIV epidemic remains to be seen.

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Appendix A

List of personal interviews

1. Crewe, Mary. 2013. Director of *The Centre for the Study of AIDS*. University of Pretoria. Pretoria. 8 April.
2. Goldblatt, David. 2011. Photographer. Cape Town. 9 June.
3. Goldblatt, David. 2011. Photographer. Johannesburg. 14 July.
4. Goldblatt, David. 2012. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: Johannesburg. 12 November.
5. Goosen, Margaretha. 2013. Editor of *The South African Women's Health Book*. Johannesburg. 2 April.
6. Hugo, Pieter. 2012. Photographer. Cape Town. 10 May.
7. Hutton, Dean (Nadine). 2011. Photographer. Johannesburg. 14 July.
8. Jason, Fanie. 2011. Photographer. Cape Town. 19 May.
9. Mofokeng, Santu. 2011. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: Paris. 6 May.
10. Mofokeng, Santu. 2011. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: Paris. 16 May.
11. Mofokeng, Santu. 2011. Photographer. Johannesburg. 14 July.
12. Mendel, Gideon. 2010. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: London. 2 December.
13. Mendel, Gideon. 2011. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: London. 13 April.
14. Mendel, Gideon. 2012. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: London. 27 September.
15. Mendel, Gideon. 2012. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: London. 28 September.
16. Miller, Eric. 2011. Photographer. Cape Town. 1 September.
17. Nkosi, Oupa. 2011. Photographer. Johannesburg. 15 July.
18. Weinberg, Paul. 2012. Photographer. Cape Town. 24 February.
19. Williams, Graeme. 2011. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: Johannesburg. 24 November.

20. Wulfsohn, Gisèle. 2011. Photographer. Skype interview. Cape Town: Johannesburg. 4 May.
21. Wulfsohn, Gisèle. 2011. Photographer. Johannesburg. 15 July.

Additional personal communication:

1. duPreez, John-David. 2013. Email correspondence. 8 May.
2. duPreez, John-David. 2013. Email correspondence. 20 May.
3. Goldblatt, David. 2012. Photographer. Email correspondence. 12 November.
4. Gorna, Robin. 2012. Previous Head of DFID Global Team for AIDS. Email correspondence with Gideon Mendel. September 27.
5. Hou, Annemarie. 2012. UNAIDS Director of Communications. Email correspondence with Gideon Mendel. September 12.
6. Miller, Eric. 2013. Photographer. Email correspondence. 14 July.