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WOMEN AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

MARIE MEYERDING

ROUTLEDGE

Women and Photography in Apartheid South Africa

Tracing the lives and works of five women in four case studies, author Marie Meyerding examines the representation of women in the field of photography in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. All of them are critically understudied, with no existing scholarship dedicated exclusively to their photographic contributions.

Focusing on the representation of women on two different levels—as agents, behind the camera, and as subjects, in photographs—it showcases women photographers portraying their female contemporaries and analyses to what extent they adhered to or subverted common forms of gender representation. In recuperating their forgotten archives, the book argues that none of these women are marginal figures, but rather that each of them played a leading role in the field of photography in their own time.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, history of photography, gender studies, intersectionality and African studies.

Marie Meyerding is a postdoc with a Walter Benjamin position (German Research Foundation) at the Institute of Art and Musicology at the Technische Universität Dresden and received her PhD from the Freie Universität Berlin. Her research has been published in *African Arts*, *Third Text*, *kritische berichte*, *Critical Arts*, *Safundi, Camera Austria* and *sehepunkte* and she is the author of *Sights of Struggle: The History of the Tambo Village Women*.

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Marie Meyerding

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Introduction

The history of photography in apartheid South Africa is a history of men. Jürgen Schadeberg, Peter Magubane, Bob Gosani, Ernest Cole, Alf Khumalo, David Goldblatt, Paul Weinberg, Omar Badsha as well as Kevin Carter, Greg Marinovich, Ken Oosterbroek and João Silva from the Bang-Bang Club—these are the photographers that historiography holds up. Until recently, the existing literature on photography from apartheid South Africa focused mainly on male practitioners. Two books took up the important task of outlining the historiography of the medium during decades of oppression. These are Darren Newbury's *Defiant Images* and Rory Bester and Okwui Enwezor's *Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, which accompanied the eponymous large-scale exhibition.[1] By focusing mainly on male photographers, and thereby partly overshadowing the work of women who were involved with photography during that time, they provided the critical background against which the existing gaps in historiography first became apparent.

In recent years, there has been a heightened interest in women photographers working during apartheid. While most of the recent studies focus on white women, leaving large gaps about the lives and works of Black women photographers, they aptly show that there have been not many but some women who were deeply involved with photography during a time of brutal oppression by the apartheid regime. Who were these women? Which power structures prevented or enabled their inclusion into the history of photography in apartheid South Africa? Reframed in other words, why were there so few women photographers working during apartheid and why are women working with cameras (should they call themselves photographers or not) absent from photographic histories? This book tries to answer these questions by examining in detail the personal and professional lives of the five women—Mabel Cetu, Jansje Wissema, Lesley Lawson, Mavis Mtandeki and Primrose Talakumeni—who all worked in South Africa during apartheid.

This book further addresses how these women portrayed their female contemporaries in their photographs. Considering how they navigated the prevailing norms of gender representation in their practice, I want to reveal how the modes of presenting womanhood in the visual culture of South Africa changed over the decades by four detailed case studies. Thereby, I want to disclose to what extent these women's lenses captured their sitters differently than their male colleagues did.[2] To this end, I closely examine the extent to which the photographers were able to determine the final publication of their work and which power mechanisms in the field of visual production played a role in this process. My book, therefore, examines the representation of women in photography in apartheid South Africa, both as agents behind the camera and as subjects in the photographs, in order to shed light on shifting power structures related to intersectional issues in the field of photography.

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The Power of Language

Before I discuss the involvement of women with photography in apartheid South Africa, I want to come to terms with my own art historical writing and explain the language I use to describe race and gender as social classifications, which were and still are important to analyse social realities. When I refer to race and gender categorisations, these are not to be understood as enclosed, fixed, binary or timeless biology—or appearance-based classifications—but as ever-changing, developmental, fluid and shifting categories defined through history, politics and culture, following Stuart Hall's 'politics of living identity through difference […] [which recognises] that all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not of one.'[3] After the introduction of the Population Registration Act of 1950, every South African was obliged to be classified into one of four racial categories (White, Asian, Coloured or Black). While these racial classifications are justly viewed ambivalently, they are still widely used as self- and other designations meant to be descriptive rather than discriminatory. In US-American scholarship, the term 'Black' is mostly written with a capital 'B' to situate racial categorisations as the products of social forces, following W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote in 1898 that he believes 'that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter.'[4] This political Blackness, which encompasses the excluded and oppressed in a single category as a form of intentional solidarity, was present not only in the United States of America (US), but also in the British and South African contexts, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s within the framework of the anti-apartheid Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Biko. Much literature on the South African context, however, uses the non-capitalised version of the term, including the aforementioned books by Newbury, Enwezor and Bester or recent literature on women photographers, such as the contributions of the South African scholars Ingrid Masondo and Nomusa Makhubu to the 2020 exhibition catalogue *Not the Ususal Suspects*.[5] Yet, another racialised term is almost consistently written with a capital letter in the South African context: Coloured.

Whether to distinguish the term from the meaning of 'Black' in general or to separate it from its offensive meaning in the US, the term is written with a capital initial to describe a person '[o]f mixed racial or ethnic origin' and is today largely '[u]sed as a self-designation, and not considered offensive.'[6] Yet, the term derives from a deeply racist history, and while the term had been used before, its use as a racial classification was fully established by the apartheid government through the aforementioned Population Registration Act, according to which people were classified as 'Coloured' based on their outward appearance and socio-economic standing. While the act was repealed in 1991, these categories continue to shape South African identities and policies, such as the affirmative action Black Economic Empowerment policy. However, other racist terms that had been used by the state for classifying Black individuals, such as 'Bantu' or 'native,' are '[n]ow chiefly *historical* or *ironic*, and avoided as *offensive*.'[7] I therefore do not use these terms but have decided to write Coloured with a capital 'C' throughout this book because it is now valued differently and the term is often used for self-identification in my research contexts.

If these recurrent debates about capitalisation show anything, it is the multitude of individual experiences, which cannot be confined to one cross-historical, all-encompassing term, but instead must be renegotiated in each context. The same applies for the term 'white.' By using it, I acknowledge the associated historically overarching privileges as well as the different and changing qualities of invisibility. These continue to prevail in Germany but have not in the context of South Africa, where whiteness has been highly

complex, also under apartheid. There was British colonial whiteness, Afrikaner nationalist whiteness and the political accordance and tensions between the two as well as the transition of some Jewish immigrants, who had been racialised in Nazi Germany, from which they fled to South Africa where they would have been, at least initially and in rural parts, perceived as white.[8] In order to avoid any allusion to supremacist views, I write white with a lowercase 'w,' understanding the term in the present context as an analytical category for oppressive power relations. Similarly, I understand Black-ness as a socio-political category. Due to the historic and contemporary structural and personal violence perpetrated by white people against Black people and my belonging to the former group, it seems appropriate for me to acknowledge this lingering inequality and the ongoing struggle of Black people in this book. This, above almost anything else to me, is the crucial point for writing Black with a capital 'B' in this book.

However, in the context of South Africa, and in that of my case studies, another concept of self-designation seems to be of equally great significance. More so than belonging to a racial categorisation established by the government, belonging to an ethnic group played a major role in the everyday lives of many South Africans in the past, just as it still does today. For instance, three of the photographers discussed in this book, namely Cetu, Mtandeki and Talakumeni, strongly identified or identify as members of the Nguni ethnic group of amaXhosa. For instance, Talakumeni and Mtandeki both speak isiXhosa in their everyday lives and follow Xhosa customs, such as *Ulwaluko*, commonly referred to as going to the bush, which stands for the initiation from boy- to manhood. Additionally, Cetu seems to have been a strong advocator for the Ciskei, a so-called Bantustan for Xhosa-speaking people in the Eastern Cape, as she states that 'to have a Ciskei citizenship is an honour.'[9] Her position was extremely controversial in the context of anti-apartheid politics, as it made concessions to a policy of separate development for Black and white people, advocating that people lose their South African passports to become citizens of an all-Black state. This example shows how complex ethnic identification became under a racist regime that not only used racial divisions to make the country accessible only to individual population groups and reserved urban space only for whites, but also used their classification system to pit the Black majority against each other and divide them. Nevertheless, as the photographers' examples show, a recognition of Xhosa self-designation is important to speak about individual identities, while the term Black is useful for the purpose of revealing the large scale of discrimination set in place during apartheid.

The controversy surrounding unambiguous naming of social classifications is particularly reflected in one socio-political instrument: the census. Though some countries follow the approach of making racial categories and ethnicity invisible to prevent discrimination (with the case of France's official statistics collection being perhaps the most prominent example), others, such as Canada, collect such data to observe and combat discrimination because statistical data can help minorities claim their rights and promote affirmative action.[10] Since in South Africa, similar to Canada, the collection of ethnic data has a long tradition, also in order to bring about changes in the historical power structures of post-apartheid society, I follow the latter approach in this study, even though the designations used are never simple classifications but always highly complicated social constructs that can only ever represent fragmentary parts of identities. In an ideal world without discrimination, we should no longer need these labels, but, as my research aptly shows, we are nowhere near that point.

Additionally, in writing about 'women' I want to recognise the manifold meanings this term entails. With this, I, as a white female author, want to counter what Audre Lorde

describes when she writes that '[a]s white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become "other," the outsider whose experience and tradition is too "alien" to comprehend.'[11] In this study, I thus do not wish to speak for all women but I want to recognise women in all their differences, following Griselda Pollock's approach to feminist studies which builds on the fact that 'we have problematized the category women to make its historical construction the very object of our analysis.'[12] This includes bearing in mind that the term's historical construction is very different for Black and white women as well as questioning gender normativity to recognise acts of resistance against it. In the following chapters, this also includes the analysis of when women do not follow the path pointed out to them, but instead follow 'a feminist politics that issues not from a doing but from an undoing, not from a being or becoming women but from a refusal to be or to become woman as she has been defined and imagined within Western philosophy.'[13] Similar to Saidiya Hartman's history writing in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, I try to highlight moments of defiance in these women's lives without glossing over the limits of their possibilities or presenting some of the motivations for their actions as anything other than a struggle for survival.[14]

In her argument for situating knowledge to attain feminist objectivity, Donna Haraway reminds us that '[v]ision is always a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices.'[15] Highlighting the violence potentially caused by Western scholars who study other regions of the world, Haraway also acknowledges the skills of Western feminists to challenge traditional views on the world, turning them upside down.[16] I turn to Haraway not only to highlight my privileged position as a white German female academic writing about photography in South Africa but also to point out my aspirations for this book which lie in providing in many details a partial view from a clearly defined voice to obtain not only feminist but intersectional objectivity. This means that in what follows I examine not only the power implications of social divisions in gender but also in racial categories and class, then and now, through detailed analyses that are never holistic but fragmentary. With this, I aim to show how social classifications and their overlapping have influenced the lives and histories of individuals.

At this point I would like to briefly address that the human-made, image-making technologies I am dealing with, just like historiography, are not free of discriminatory structures, but rather have had them inscribed within from the very beginning. From their inception, a racial bias was built into photographic practices and materials, as light skin was used as the chemical basis for film technology due to higher sales markets.[17] Furthermore, some of the most important texts in photography theory, such as Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, use images of racialised others and enslaved persons to make their points without addressing the historical realities of such persons.[18] The aforementioned social classifications are thus deeply inscribed into the technology and history of the medium studied in this book. Using these classifications as categories of analysis is therefore indispensable for uncovering discriminatory structures in a historical view of photography.

Women and Photography in South Africa Before Apartheid

To set the stage for my book focusing on the apartheid era, I want to give a brief, in no way complete, overview of the role women played in the field of photography in South Africa prior to apartheid. Yet, though the official beginning of apartheid is usually dated to the National Party's seizure of power in 1948, it should be recognised that

racial discrimination had shaped the country for many centuries before. Beginning with the large-scale European colonisation of the country in the mid-seventeenth century and continuing into the Union of South Africa formed in 1910, racial discrimination was exacerbated by laws such as the Natives Land Act (1913) in the first half of the twentieth century, while apartheid's legacy of inequality still influences many aspects of life in South Africa today.

In September 1846, the daguerreotype was brought to South Africa by a man, and the medium was predominantly used by men, as the country's photographic history indicates, being largely and almost exclusively concerned with male photographers.[19] Yet, '[t]he earliest extant photograph taken in Southern Africa' portrays a woman. In one of the rare accounts on the medium's early history in the country titled *Silver Images*, Arthur David Bensusan describes the photograph as following: '[A] daguerreotype exists in the George Eastman House, Rochester, which was taken by E. Thiésson in 1845 and depicts a native woman of Sofala in Portuguese East Africa. This […] small Daguerreotype (approximately 3½ × 2½ inches) is clearly defined and the native sitter has a placid 'Mona-Lisa' smile on her countenance.'[20] The photograph exemplifies a dichotomy that determined the modes of representation in photography in Southern Africa for about another century, in which white men photographed Black women for their own purposes and through their own framing. Also, in the historiography of photography, this framing continues, made evident by Bensusan's description of the Black woman wearing a '"Mona-Lisa" smile'—a decidedly gendered description that could hardly be more Eurocentric while concurrently revealing a strong desire to locate photography in the realm of art. Patricia Hayes writes that '[i]n southern Africa in the late nineteenth century, photography is related to the history of exploration, colonization, knowledge production and captivity.'[21] Rarely behind the camera and yet often pictured in nineteenth-century photography in South Africa, 'black women were frequently stripped of individual identity and offered up as representatives of an exotic and inferior culture.'[22] This only changed later 'when they became paying customers […] [and] gained greater control over the manner in which they were represented.'[23]

Yet, though the field of photography was largely male-dominated, women were engaged in many steps of the photographic process apart from pressing the shutter. For example, women played a great role in the process of hand-colouring photographs, which was used in Cape Town from 1847.[24] This aspect of historical photographic practices is particularly interesting because since its inception 'the colorist field was crowded with women practitioners, both professional and amateur.'[25] Furthermore, the extensive production, distribution and collection of the popular *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards and ethnographic postcards in South Africa as elsewhere in the world can hardly be imagined without the participation of women.[26]

A greater distribution of photography in the whole of Africa came about through the launch of portable Kodak cameras in the late 1800s.[27] The increased use of less expensive, hand-held cameras led to a greater variety of photographed themes in the first half of the twentieth century.[28] Also, as newspapers started to print photographs from the 1890s onwards, 'photographs of Africa were published profusely to promote a variety of imperial, commercial, missionary, and scientific enterprises.'[29] Furthermore, there was an 'increasing flow of photographs out of the [African] continent during the second half of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, […] driven by an ever greater demand for images of Africa amongst European and American viewing publics.'[30] This was mirrored in travel reports from the continent, such as the documented journey *From the Cape to*

Cairo: The First Traverse of Africa from South to North, undertaken by two Englishmen from 1898 until 1900.[31] Only seven years later, the British woman Mary Hall published her report on the same travel route, using the same alliterative title but foregrounding her gender, and although the photographs in the report are not explicitly credited to her, several incidences in the book prove that Hall also took photographs, herself.[32] Even a quarter of a century later, this genre still seemed interesting, as the 1932 travelogue *Olivia's African diary: Cape Town to Cairo*, about the Africa-crossing journey of the US-American photographer Mary Marvin Breckinridge Patterson together with Olivia Stokes Hatch, shows.[33] With her three cameras, Breckinridge Patterson documented the places and people she encountered and twelve of the photographs printed in the book show South Africa at the time.[34]

The first professional woman photographer based in South Africa was Maria Walter.[35] In June 1856, after having arrived from Rio, Maria Walter's spouse William Frederick opened his first photographic studio offering daguerreotypes in Strand Street, Cape Town.[36] Apart from a break between June 1861 and August 1862, during which the couple and their son toured the South African countryside as entertainers, the Walters operated photographic studios in various locations in Cape Town within a radius of around one kilometre.[37] In September 1857, Maria Walter entered her husband's enterprise of taking photographic portraits on silver plates.[38] Subsequently, in a full-page advertisement published in the *Cape Almanac* in 1859 Maria Walter proclaimed her move into larger buildings because of 'her fast increasing business.'[39] While this led Besusan to believe that Maria Walter practised as an independent photographer, Bull and Denfield assume 'that the announcement in the Cape Almanac was merely an advertising gimmick, assuring the timid ladies of the day that should they require a female photographer, Mrs. Walter would be there to attend to them.'[40] There is a time, however, during which Maria Walter might have practised independently because after her husband's death in February 1866 'it appears that Mrs. Walter carried on with the business until she left for Rio in June 1867.'[41] In any case, Maria Walter's professional engagement with the photographic medium remains undeniable. Her story further highlights the often inadequate documentation of female photographers in South Africa. The unique case presented by the extensive media coverage of Maria Walter's photographic practice and the couple's collaboration through advertisements published in numerous newspapers between 1856 and 1867 testifies to the otherwise extremely sparse documentation of women photographers working in South Africa in the nineteenth century.

William Frederick Walter rigorously categorised his photographic practice in the realm of art. In 1865, he advertised himself as a 'professor' teaching 'the art of photography practically and theoretically.'[42] Furthermore, attached to a daguerreotype copy of a painting taken in 1857 is his business card, stating the photographer's name and address as well as the description 'photographic artist.'[43] This positioning was related to the increasing success of pictorialism. Its heyday was already apparent in Walter's last creative years and was theoretically manifested only three years after his death by the English photographer Henry Peach Robinson's *Pictorial Effect in Photography* as an international aesthetic movement in photography.[44] Among the works of two other professional photographers, Walter's daguerreotypes were also included in the first exhibition of photographs in Cape Town, which took place at the *Third Fine Arts Exhibition* in October 1858.[45] Although there were most likely other displays of photographs in the following years, of which we may no longer have a record, Bensusan describes that 'the first important photographic exhibition of its kind' was shown in Cape Town in 1906,

marking the further uplift of pictorial photography and the beginning of photography as an art medium in the South African context.[46]

Else and Anna Ginsberg were two other women photographers who owned a photographic studio called Ginsberg's Art Studio in Qonce, formerly King William's Town, around the turn of the century, as indicated by a newspaper advertisement from 1901.[47] The sisters emigrated from Germany in the late nineteenth century and took over an existing photography studio.[48] Bensusan writes that '[t]hese two ladies were probably the first "women photographer" partners in the country and they produced some beautifully artistic child studies with delicate backgrounds.'[49] Moreover, the research of Carol Hardijzer has led me to some female photographers working in South Africa prior to 1915, such as Martha Robertson, Nina Murray and Sara Buyskes.[50] An account by Bensusan also names Buyskes as one of several pioneering women photographers working in Johannesburg:

> Johannesburg was indeed fortunate in having such a fine series of photographic studios which flourished right from the start of the camp. Rigors of the nascent science did not deter the many lady exponents of photography in Johannesburg and they overcame the hindrances of their long frocks in studio and dark-room. Mrs. R. A. Rees had a studio in Noord Street before the turn of the century and many of her works were published in the London magazine *South Africa*. Other very prominent lady professional photographers were to follow later, namely Marion Maxwell, who died at the age of 83 years and was reported to be one of the wealthiest unmarried women in the country with an estate exceeding two thirds of a million pounds. Jane Plotz, Sara and Maud Buyskes were also notable personalities. Sara had completed 58 years of professional photography by 1965 and was still working in the same studio which she had occupied since the depression of 1931.[51]

Next to numerous other names, Bensusan mentions Jane Plotz, who was born in Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth, in 1901 to Lithuanian immigrants.[52] Her father, Israel Plotz, who organised moving pictures at funfairs, later opened a photography studio in Johannesburg and taught his daughter photography.[53] In the 1920s, she opened her own studio in the Thrupps Building on Pritchard Street and became one of the city's best known society photographers.[54] In 1976, she moved to the US to live with her family and died in 1984, leaving her collection of negatives to the Museum Africa in Johannesburg.[55] During the first half of the twentieth century, many photographers created soft-focused ethnographic images of Black South Africans that romanticised and transfigured the realities of their sitters' lives through their depiction in traditional attire and in nature. Minna Keene's pictorialist portrayals of members of the South African society between 1903 and 1913, while she was living in Cape Town, present such imagery.[56] For instance, Keene's photograph of a *South African Flower Seller* (1904) portrays a young Black woman with two baskets of flowers (Figure 0.1). One of them she wears on her head and holds with her left hand, the other she carries in her right hand. She wears a light-coloured, long-sleeved, high-necked blouse, a long, dark skirt with light-coloured dots and a belt and a light-coloured headscarf. There is no indication of where the woman is standing, because the photograph's background is washed out and makes the subject look like she is standing in front of a painted studio background. The woman is looking towards the camera with a gentle look and facial features in which little emotion can be read. Malcolm Corrigall describes how the missing anchorage of the sitter in an environment through 'the washed out background and the softly focussed [*sic*] sentimentality of the floral baskets

Figure 0.1 Minna Keene, *South African Flower Seller*, 1904. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

all function to imbue the subject with a romantic glow.'[57] Despite the intimacy created through the direct gaze and the pictorialist approach, Corrigall further assesses that the detailed depiction of the anonymous woman's attire in front of a blank space showcases Keene's portrayal of the woman as a racialised type, namely that of an Islamic 'Malay' flower seller from the streets of Cape Town, a type with which contemporary white audiences would likely have identified her.[58]

In a comparable vein, Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin produced thousands of primitivising images while travelling through Southern Africa between 1919 and 1939.[59] Among these negatives are numerous depictions of half-naked women in rural landscapes, such as *A typical bushman maiden* (ca. 1928–1954). Michael Godby describes that these frequently used motifs 'rehearse the idea of the primitive maiden, although the general nakedness of such subjects had obvious prurient appeal in a context where the popular academic genre of the "Nude" was strictly reserved for white subjects.'[60] In addition to eroticising the female body, Duggan-Cronin and his contemporaries also made 'use of the evocative photogravure style for these statuesque figures [which] contributes a sense of nostalgia, as if one were actually looking at figures from the past. This contrived vision is clearly gendered – male figures tend towards the heroic while female figures tend towards the sentimental.'[61] The sentimentality can further be construed from the passive, standing pose of the woman, including her drooping shoulders and her gaze going out of the picture and not straight into Duggan-Cronin's camera. As a result, the contemporaneous white viewers could contemplate her appearance with even less disruption. Keene's and Duggan-Cronin's images further testify to their makers' disinterest in the realities of the sitters' lives—the portrayed are shown as if in a historical vacuum, detached from their current political and socio-economic situation, while, in fact, the urban and rural landscapes they inhabited became increasingly politicised due to ever more racist and oppressive legislature, such as the Natives Land Act (1913) or the Native Trust and Land Act (1936), which dispossessed South Africa's Black population of its land.

A similar ideological approach was detected in the work of well-known photographer Constance Stuart Larrabee, though she radically broke with pictorialism, employing instead a modern style characterised by sharp focus, contrasts and strong lines.[62] Having received photography training in Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1936 before going on to capture scenes of the Second World War as South Africa's first and only woman photographer, with the resulting images 'exhibited throughout South Africa during the war as a morale booster for the folks back home,' Stuart Larrabee applied her newly learnt skills to portray Black South Africans as if they were living in their own world, cut off from modern life.[63] Photographs, such as *Ndebele mother and child (South Africa)* (ca. 1936–1949), show that primitivising representations of the female body are not bound to the works of male photographers at the time.

A decidedly different approach can be found in some of the photographs by Anne Fischer, who had arrived in the country together with around 6,000 Jewish people, including the two other women photographers Else Hausmann and Etel Mittag-Fodor, all fleeing from Germany due to the rise of the Nazis and the beginning of the Second World War.[64] Fischer's photograph *Farmer's Wife* (ca. 1941–1945), for instance, portrays a woman ploughing the field in a strong, active pose confronting the viewer directly with her uncompromising gaze. Pointing towards the land she tills, as Jessica Williams notes, the woman seems to highlight her complicated belonging to the white-ruled land as a Black subject.[65] The two photographers, who lived and worked at the same time, thus both pointed their cameras at Black women, but deliberately showed them without or with clear reference to the country and the associated political implications in which they lived. Unlike Stuart Larrabee, Fischer's early work recurringly uses a modernist style to document the urbanisation and poverty of Black South Africans—an expression of her leftist politics.[66] A similar approach was detected in some photographs taken by the aforementioned anthropologist Ellen Hellmann, who captured Black women in urban settings, unlike many of her predecessors, such as Dorothea Bleek, who mainly pictured Black South Africans in rural areas. Thereby, Hellmann's photographs 'refocused attention away from women's decorated bodies as evidence of ethnic specificity onto the living spaces that constituted Johannesburg's slum-yards.'[67] The comparison of the work of Fischer and Stuart Larrabee as two female contemporaries thus shows the ambivalence present in white women's photographic practices around the middle of the century, highlighting the importance of the politics of representation for constructing and contesting the concept of apartheid even before it was politically entrenched.

Women and Photography During Apartheid

The era of apartheid was bracketed by two elections: the parliamentary election on 26 May 1948 that was won by the Reunited National Party and the first South African general elections held from 26 to 29 April 1994, in which all citizens regardless of racial categories were able to vote. In 1949, Stuart Larrabee left her home country, while Margaret Bourke-White, to whom Stuart Larrabee referred as a source of inspiration, travelled to South Africa and produced four photo-essays for *Life* magazine that introduced apartheid to a US-American audience.[68] At the same time, the first mass-circulated magazines which were aimed at a Black readership were introduced in South Africa, creating a new demand for photography. This development led to the 1950s being heralded as a high time for the medium, which was especially due to 'the remarkable efflorescence of black photographers in South Africa, associated in particular with the magazine *Drum*.'[69]

First published in 1951, *Drum* soon became the country's most widely circulated monthly magazine aimed at Black readers, serving as one of the only platforms for numerous now-famous writers and photographers who documented township life under apartheid. Mabel Cetu, one of the magazine's photographers, is often described as the country's first Black woman photojournalist.[70]

Due to severe repression by the apartheid regime in the 1960s and early 1970s, the years between *Drum*'s success in the late 1950s and the strongly emerging, politically charged photography of the late 1970s, which was not least due to the escalating violence and its wide media coverage during the Soweto Uprising in 1976, have often been described as a dark time for the medium in South Africa.[71] There is little information about photographers who were active during this historical period, and even less about women photographers. One exception is the photographer Jansje Wissema, who was active from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s and trained with the photographer Anne Fischer. Fischer also trained at least one other woman photographer, Georgina Karvellas, and influenced the work of the next generation, such as Jillian Edelstein's.[72] In 1975, the South African National Gallery (SANG) showed *Jansje Wissema's Cape Town*, the museum's first photographic solo exhibition.[73] This move by the museum mirrored a larger global trend in the institutional landscape in the 1970s, awarding the medium the attribute of art through highly praised photography exhibitions by important art museums such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[74] Yet, a later event gave photography a completely different task.

In 1982, at the Botswana Festival of Culture and Resistance, photographers were called to take their responsibility and use their cameras for the anti-apartheid struggle.[75] Following this approach, the photographic collective and picture agency Afrapix was formed, which, despite its nine female members, was perceived as an organisation with a clear gender imbalance in the form of male dominance in its structures and a greater eminence of its male members.[76] Nonetheless, many of these nine women, namely Gille de Vlieg, Ellen Elmendorp, Lesley Lawson, Deseni Moodliar (later Soobben), Biddy Partridge, Wendy Schwegmann, Zubeida Vallie, Gisèle Wulfsohn and Anna Zieminski as well as some of the women who were not official members of Afrapix but worked in the same circles, such as Suzie Bernstein, Jenny Altschuler and Jenny Gordon, pursued a rather feminist programme.[77] Bee Berman, who learned to take and print photographs at the Stage Theatre in Cape Town in 1980, was also active in the women's movement while taking documentary images in the political upheavals of the 1980s.[78] Louise Gubb and Hetty Zantman are two other South African women photojournalists who documented the country's transition from the 1970s and 1980s respectively.[79]

When it comes to the last years of apartheid, photographic historiography frequently lists the names of the Black women photographers Mavis Mtandeki and Primrose Talakumeni. Although they were some of the first Black women documenting Black life in South Africa from the late 1980s, nothing much apart from their names and photographic training is known.[80] Another Black woman who started photographing at the time is Ruth Seopedi Motau, who is said to be one of the country's earliest Black female photojournalists.[81] Having studied at the Market Photo Workshop from 1991 until 1992, Motau worked as a photographic intern at the *Mail & Guardian* in 1993, where she eventually became their chief photographer—a role she held until 2002. She describes the difficulties she faced in her role: 'Sometimes, when I get [to my shoot], people will look at [me] thinking, "Does she know what she's doing?" Or maybe they've never seen [a] black woman doing that kind of job. When I started [at the *Mail & Guardian*] it was a bit difficult, but

later I understood [that it's] very [rare] to find a black woman [photographer].'[82] While Motau worked in the sphere of news photography, the medium was increasingly exhibited in the art world. For instance, though the SANG had shown photography nearly annually since 1975, its programme became more dynamic from the 1990s through efforts to host travelling exhibitions and stage its own shows on photography from South Africa, such as *Photographs from Drum Magazine* (1992), *Vumani: All Our Children* (1992) showing photographs taken by Afrapix members or *Through a Lens Darkly* (1993), which featured the commissioned work of Lawson and Ingrid Hudson.[83] Another example is the group exhibition *Photo Works by Women*, which was shown at the South African Association of Arts in Cape Town in September 1994. These exhibitions demonstrate the momentum for the work of women photographers during the democratic transition.

While this list of women photographers working during apartheid does not intend to be exhaustive nor complete, it hints towards the consistent involvement of women with the medium of photography. Furthermore, the different contexts in which these photographs were produced, distributed and received, from popular magazine photography of the 1950s over highly politicised struggle photography to art photography in the early 1990s, show how the status of photography changed in compliance with the global trends in the medium, the political situation in South Africa and the country's external relations.

Archives and Access

The main institutional archives and private collections where information on these women photographers' personal and professional lives are held, and which I have been able to identify, are in Cape Town and Johannesburg. These are personal archives and private collections, such as the Bailey's African History Archive, independent arts and human rights archives, such as the Association for Visual Arts Gallery and the South African History Archive as well as state-funded institutions and archives, such as the SANG, the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), the Mayibuye Archive at the University of the Western Cape, the Special Collections at the University of Cape Town, the District Six Museum, the Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Bensusan Museum of Photography at Museum Africa. Mary Hames wrote about the apartheid state's control over access in the NLSA: 'Researching there meant that your name was entered in a register so that the state could perpetuate its surveillance of political dissidents. Strict records were kept of users.'[84] Hames thus concludes that '[a]cademic libraries were supposedly granted the right to possess banned material for bona fide research purposes, but the white university librarians were, not surprisingly, agents of the state.'[85] Nowadays, each NLSA visitor must still register by hand, giving not only their full name but also their ID number, full address, mobile phone number, time of arrival and the reason for their visit. In some European libraries, such as the British Library, access to reading rooms even requires a library card, which is only issued under certain circumstances. Compared to this, the NLSA is very accessible today, a quality which can also be traced back to dedicated legislation after the end of apartheid, such as the *National Archives of South Africa Act No. 43* introduced by Nelson Mandela in 1996. Thus, South African archives as sources of knowledge have been and still are sites of political struggle which continue to be rigorously monitored by the state to this day.

Furthermore, in the country's archival landscape, restrictive access has been and still is imposed not only by politics and culture, depending on who feels they have the right to enter and navigate these institutions, but also by economics. One example in the private