

DAVID GOLDBLATT: RETURNS AND ELISIONS

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David Goldblatt's photographs are uncanny in their capacity to highlight South African un-ease, suggests Neelika Jayawardane. Reflecting on a re-visitation of his early oeuvre, Jayawardane and Goldblatt discuss the photographs' visual elaboration of the unspeakable: racial intimacy and fear, suppressed sexuality, the face of power, and – most taboo of all – a tension between responsibility and disavowal engendered in contemporary viewers.

Winter 1998: I was spending Christmas with Lars, my then-boyfriend, and his family in their home in a tiny village located on the border of the Netherlands and Germany. The church was built in the 13th century. A year before, when his parents moved from an adjoining village – one that had a church from 11th century – people asked them, “Don’t you like us anymore?” At the Christmas breakfast table, the conversation was about the funeral plans proposed by a Japanese millionaire: when he died, he wanted his Mondrian buried with his body. Over poached eggs and almond-paste stollen, the Japanese, as a whole, were trashed: invading hordes crashing through European museums in platform heels, flashing cameras at paintings.

I was discovering the Dutch: these were extraordinarily situated people, I thought, so sure of their ownership – their things, and others’ things. For a person like me, who had never been located in any

one people or nation, the Dutch were a weird, solid breed.

And then I saw it – an excuse to satisfy my itch to get out of there for a few days: a tiny, square image in the local newspaper. It is a Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, said the caption. I could see the detail of brick upon brick, turning into the curvature of the steeple, reduced though that image was within the village paper.

David Goldblatt’s photograph of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Quellerina, Johannesburg – built to re-imagine the great prow of a ship, sailing the Transvaal high plains – became the first of his photographs to exercise a holy hold on my imagination. The exhibition, organized by the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAi), scrutinised the manner in which architectural and political issues came to be so intertwined: understanding the structures of South Africa would lie at the heart of reconceptualising community, homeland, environment, power, gender relationships, and – of course – race.

The entrance to the NAi in Rotterdam introduced the visitor to the exhibit via Goldblatt’s images – small and unobtrusive. I stood before the photographs, and found myself weeping. I couldn’t tell you why, or for what loss. All I can say is that it was the first moment in which, after over a decade of leaving my own childhood home in Zambia – with only the understanding that it was a location that had no place for me – I realised that it is possible to renegotiate a relationship with a place that had little patience for the nuances of difference. The images before me showed that it is possible to begin a conversation with one’s history, as impossible and displacing as it will be, undoubtedly, at times. And that no amount of Other Love – romantic and erotic

attachments to powerful others who possess an unquestioning belonging to home and nation – was going to grant me a get-out-of-jail-easy-pass from the necessity of engaging with that difficult conversation.

The images before me showed that it is possible to begin a conversation with one’s history, as impossible and displacing as it will be, undoubtedly, at times.

It was only in 2006 that I returned to David Goldblatt’s images. A friend in Cape Town told me about an exhibit of *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (<http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/goldblatt/afrikaners/index.htm>), an expanded view of Goldblatt’s body of work, first published in 1975 as *Some Afrikaners Photographed*. Michael Stevenson Gallery was, in 2006, located in the fashionable de Waterkant district of Cape Town. The cobblestoned streets, buildings constructed using a mixture of crushed seashells and lime, and the particularities of the architectural styles in this area reveal its history: it is the district built by the exiles, artisans, workers and kitchen maids brought from the areas in which the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* – or the Dutch East India Company – carried out “colonial activities”, empowered by the 21-year monopoly granted by the States-General of the Netherlands in 1602. The VOC’s “colonial activities” included the transportation of dissenters and labourers from its South Asian areas of interest to other Dutch strongholds, including the Cape. De Waterkant continued to be a location in which the descendants of these transported people lived, until the apartheid-era Group Areas Act was enforced in



“In Martjie Marais’s kitchen in Gamkaskloof”, 1967.

1966, forcing the inhabitants to leave “the Water’s Side” for the windswept plains an hour away from the city.

The location of Michael Stevenson Gallery was difficult to approach without that history in mind. There, again, were Goldblatt’s photographs: each of them surprisingly small, and yet, powerfully luminous. I found that I wanted to walk over to each one and become intimate with them. Conversing with those photographs revealed the heart of Goldblatt’s work: his instinctive talent for spotting – and pinpointing – the things that make South Africans uneasy, probing the predicaments at the core of contemporary South African existence, and elaborating upon those unspeakable issues using the sharpness of an image.



“The bride and her parents-in-law”, near Barkly East, 1966.

What was it about these people that allowed them to carve out a niche in a location that they found so inhospitable – and so alluring – simultaneously? What was it about an ordinary Southern African landscape (one that my Sri Lankan extended family found to be the antithesis of beauty – “without a leaf to make it green”, exclaimed an aunt) that took possession, and made people behave as though they had, indeed, been possessed?

Here, among Goldblatt’s images, were their kitchens and the soot of their country hearths (“In Martjie Marais’s kitchen in Gamkaskloof”, 1967), their marriages (“The bride and her parents-in-law”, near Barkly East, 1966), their love for their prized ewes (“J.G. Loots of the farm Quaggasfontein”, where his family had farmed for more than 200 years, Graaff-Reinet, 1966). Here, juxtaposed, were the immensity of the landscape they loved, and the fear with which they held it. And here, also, was the terror they wielded over those on whom their lives depended – those they loved, feared, and intimidated into a subordination that removed their humanity (“Johannes van der Linde, farmer and major in



“J.G. Loots of the farm Quaggasfontein”, where his family had farmed for more than 200 years, Graaff-Reinet, 1966.

the local army reserve, with his head labourer ‘Ou Sam”, near Bloemfontein, 1965; and “Shiftboss with ‘his piccanin”, underground at Randfontein Estates Gold Mine, Randfontein, 1965).

My ambivalence about home, language, landscape and belonging were not their lot; it was, in fact, an abundance of belonging with which they grappled.

Goldblatt himself was an outsider in such belonging, among such situated people. At a young age, he was already taunted for being Jewish by the Afrikaner boys around him – but ironically, it was at English-medium schools that he “experienced serious incidents of anti-Semitism and even sadism, first at Pretoria Boys High and then at Marist Brothers



“Johannes van der Linde, farmer and major in the local army reserve, with his head labourer ‘Ou Sam’”, near Bloemfontein, 1965.

in Johannesburg” (<http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/goldblatt/afrikaners/index.htm>).

He found, despite himself, that he liked the company of the Afrikaners who came to get suited at his father’s clothing shop, and was beginning to enjoy the language that he had once disliked so intensely. When he set out as a photographer, it was to explore what lay at the heart of their power: to explore the contradictory nature that those who are enclosed within protective power structures must, necessarily, cultivate in order to negotiate through ordinary life, while including/excluding those who live outside of the same power structures.

I was captivated by “Watching home movies” (Northcliff, Johannesburg, 1968): here, a family is gathered together to celebrate the birthday of the grandmother. I remember the collection of young girls the most vividly: some are seated on low sofas, others languid on the floor, the fashionable sleeveless mini-dresses of the period revealing the sporty



“Watching home movies”, Northcliff, Johannesburg, 1968.

thighs and arms of outdoorswomen. The light from the cinema screen illuminates the delight on their faces. When I interviewed Goldblatt in July 2010, seated at the small breakfast table at his flat on Long Street, Cape Town, this was one of the first images to which I returned. Maybe it is all the unawareness inherent in pleasure, ensconced as it is in the photograph – the seeming ability of beauty, luxury, youth, and power to stand outside of suffering – that got my attention.

Neelika Jayawardane (NJ): “The last time I’d spoken to you, you mentioned that the family came from different parts of South Africa every year, to watch ... actually, themselves in ...”

Goldblatt finishes my sentence: “Family films, ja.”

NJ: And here, also, is an image of a beautiful teenage boy and two girls on a beach, waving and smiling in ...



“On the beach, Keurboomstrand”, 1968.

David Goldblatt (DG): Keurboomstrand. (“On the beach, Keurboomstrand”, 1968.)

NJ: I was thinking, “How beautiful that life seems”, and how removed they seem from what was happening all around them. The images contain nothing of strife – the captions contain no mention of anything other than that the young women gather together every year to be voyeuristic about their own joys.

DG: But ja, like almost all of the photographs that I’ve ever done, the strands are very complex. You see that photograph of the family watching the old family films? The man of that family was a leading advocate – a lawyer – who was well known for taking on cases that were not popular with the regime.

Other images are more stark in their beauty. The light streaming through “In Martjie Marais’s kitchen in Gamkaskloof” (1967), seems, at first, to be coming solely from a small, rectangular window hollowed out in the back wall; but then, one notices a door near the boy is open, illuminating his left side, and his uncle’s face and crossed leg. Within this illumination, there is also a beatification of the ordinary, rather than a glamourisation of poverty – the way that Vermeer held his working class subjects in light, making something very humdrum into the extraordinary, creating the same reflective moment in which there is a space for meditation.

The captions under the images of Gamkaskloof describe an isolated valley in which people grew fruit and dried it, taking “their produce once or twice a year in a caravan of donkeys over the mountains to Prince Albert [to] sell it for the things they needed”. After a road was driven through in 1957, life changed: “each family has a bakkie and a radio and uses detergent and, when they grow older, the youngsters go to the towns and do not come back. But withal, life still retains much of the quality of the isolated existence they led here for many years.” (In fact, by 2006, everyone had drifted out, and the small settlements in Gamkaskloof no longer existed.)

It seemed purposeful to me that Goldblatt took images of those who ploughed and harvested their own fields, whose homes displayed their unmistakable poverty. The images of “A pensioner with his wife and a portrait of her first husband” (Wheatlands Plots, near Randfontein, 1962) and of their daughter, who had bought the furniture in their *voorkamer* on a hire-purchase plan, are hardly the Afrikaners that officialdom would have advertised. I could only imagine the resistance that Goldblatt en-



“A pensioner with his wife and a portrait of her first husband”, Wheatlands Plots, near Randfontein, 1962.

countered from the powers that controlled the Afrikaner image: for a group of people who so apotheosised national image, who capitalised on cultivating a particular brand of superior smugness based on an erasure of self-awareness and historical knowledge, this public re-presentation of the poorer country cousins must have been a damaging blow. These were the people for whose benefit the National Party purportedly made their policies. I asked Goldblatt about the reasons behind choosing these particular locations and people for his photographs – people who were living, almost, in a world outside of the nation – maybe benefitting, and maybe not, from apartheid policies.

[These were the people for whose benefit the National Party purportedly made their policies.](#)

DG: Well, I started off with the ambition of doing a fairly thorough exposition of The Afrikaner people. So I made it my business to become acquainted with some leading Afrikaners and upper middle class

people, wealthier people, newly rich. But as I went along, I realised that I was grossly under-equipped to do something so ambitious, but secondly, in any event, I would not want to do it because I’m not interested in creating encyclopaedias and anyone who ventures to do that is in for a hiding before he starts, because how do you ... how do you create an encyclopaedic view of a people? I don’t think it’s possible; certainly, it wasn’t possible for me. I don’t think, in theory, it’s possible at all. So. I then realised that ... although I’d photographed a number of the fat cats and the more cultured people, in fact, I was more interested in working class people and farmers.

That was partly because I’d met many of these people in the course of working in my father’s shop, in Randfontein. And I knew, from having spoken to them, and having served them, that many of them were salt-of-the-earth people. And yet at the same time, there was this almost naked fear of The Black. And yet at the same time, there was an intimacy with blacks that far transcended the intimacy that I knew in my own home, with my parents, or among friends and other people in my middle class life. So it’s obvious that that’s where I had to explore, for me. It would have been rather pretentious and perhaps even boring for me to try to penetrate the layers of the upper echelons of Afrikanerdom. I wasn’t very interested in them, because in fact, you see, the support base (and that was one of the things I was interested in) ... the support base for the National Party and for the church – the Afrikaner churches – was in the farming and working class Afrikaner community. They provided the votes – the mass votes. So I was especially interested in their values. And ancillary to all of that was the fact that among middle class and upper class people, particularly if

they have become acquainted with the media, there are defence mechanisms that more or less block access. I'm talking now emotional and psychological access that I sought. Because these people have learned how to fend off inquiring eyes.

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NJ: You said that there was an intimacy that you saw between an Afrikaans person and a black person who worked for them ... and at the same time, a fear that was sort of an irrational, archetypal fear.

DG: I mean between a white person and the black person who worked for that white person. In the middle class whites I came from [there wasn't the same intimacy]. So in my own class, it would have been unthinkable, for example, for a family to spend a Saturday making a coffin for a black servant. Not even their own servant ... [but] their neighbour's servant? ("Making a coffin for the body of a neighbour's servant whose family could not afford to buy one", Bootha Plots, Randfontein, 1962.) I mean, that's such a physical thing to do. Make a coffin! You know? So among my own people, if you like, if they were generous, they might have given money to the family for the funeral. Or to buy a coffin, or ... but to actually spend a Saturday making a coffin. This was something so physical. And I saw it over and over, not just in that kind of thing, but You know if a black worker in Major van der Linde's farm took ill, there's no question: he or his wife would take them to hospital straightaway. And probably spend the



"Making a coffin for the body of a neighbour's servant whose family could not afford to buy one", Bootha Plots, Randfontein, 1962.

night there. With them. And yet at the same time, he wouldn't have hesitated to beat up a black worker who was obstreperous. Ja, these were the kind of contradictions that you came up against.

And then, of course, there was the sexual intimacy. Which was much more common among Afrikaner men and black women than it was with, say, middle class Jewish men and black women, or middle class English speakers.

And I think that was largely because Afrikaner men, very often, grew up on farms where their playmates were black kids. So they had a physical intimacy with black kids right from an early age, and then suddenly, at puberty, they were told, "No, it's forbidden. You can't do this anymore. You can't touch that. Well, of course, once you're forbidden, you want to do it.

NJ: Do you think that's why so many people comment on that image of the young boy who is with his minder ("The farmer's son with his nursemaid", on



"The farmer's son with his nursemaid", on the farm Heimweeberg, near Nietverdiend in the Marico Bushveld, 1964.

the farm Heimweeberg, near Nietverdiend in the Marico Bushveld, 1964)?

DG: Well, there's no question to me that that picture is pregnant – to use the correct word – it's pregnant ... with all of those things.

NJ: Because there are other images of intimacy. There's an image of a boy on a wheeled contraption – a go-cart. "Kleinbaas with klonkie", Bootha Plots, Randfontein, 1963.

DG: Kleinbass with klonkie. And Klonkie with kleinbass.

NJ: It's an image of incredible friendship.

DG: Yes, yes. That's exactly what I'm talking about. So that kind of intimacy was unknown among most of my Jewish compatriots. In my own home, however, I have to say that I used to piggyback my nanny's



“Kleinbaas with klonkie”, Bootha Plots, Randfontein, 1963.

kids. We had an intimacy that I didn’t see among my compatriots in the Jewish community.

The diptych of images portraying the playmates illustrates the subordination of one friend to the other. The roles that the two friends are meant to play are unmistakable: “Kleinbaas”, the bigger of the two, is in control of the vehicle, but “Klonkie” is destined to push “Keinbaas” up the hill, when they came to that part of the road. It is the simultaneous



“On the stoep: a girl in her new tutu”, 1979/80.

intimacy and distance created by each knowing one’s place.

NJ: The images in *In Boksburg*. Those are of the small town, middle class, white community in South Africa. So they’re not the rural people in *Some Afrikaners*.

DG: And furthermore, many of these people are not Afrikaners. I was very specific. This was the middle class white community. Mixed. Italian, Portuguese, Jewish, Greek, English speakers, Afrikaans speak-



“A girl and her mother at home”, 1979/80.

ers. Probably 60% of the white population of Boksburg was Afrikaners. But that’s not what I was looking at. I was looking at middleclass, white values.

NJ: And they seem very different from those in *Some Afrikaners*.

DG: Yes. Ja, but bear in mind that, on the whole, in *In Boksburg* I photographed middle class, urban people. Whereas in *Some Afrikaners Photographed*, most of my subjects were – if not always – rural, then at least peri-urban. They weren’t city slickers.

NJ: So there’s “girl in her new tutu on her stoep” and a girl, hair curled at the ends into four ringlets, and her mother at home – and here, [the girl] is playing the piano.



“At the Rugby Dance: in the supper room of the Town Hall”, 1979/80.

DG: It’s the same girl.

NJ: Oh, it is?! And they [the mother and daughter] are separated by this kind of vast carpet with a big, fern-leaf pattern on it. The floor-to-ceiling windows are covered by elaborate drapery.

DG: That’s right ...

The details are impossible to miss: there’s a small, white dog on the chair to her left; the mother – in white stockings and white ankle boots – is watching, with another lapdog in its right place. A parrot is captured in a round wire cage – itself perched atop a small, intricately scrolled Grecian column.

NJ: There’s very little intimacy between [the mother and daughter]. But when she [the girl] is on her stoep, in her ballerina outfit, she looks like she’s alive.



“Preparing to serve dinner at the Rugby Dance in the Town Hall”, 1979/80.

DG: Yes, but that’s a peculiar kind of liveliness. Her smile is fixed. It’s the fixity that she’s been taught. “If you’re going to be a ballet dancer, you must learn to smile, my girl. You can’t have a grim face. You must smile! And when you’re on point ...”

NJ: Also in *In Boksburg*, there’s “Preparing to serve dinner at the Rugby Dance in the Town Hall” and several other images that surround the Rugby Dance. There’s a lot of posturing between women, and there’s one of the supper room of the Town Hall: a man is pouring a small – a miniature bottles of liquor – into a glass.

DG: Pinkie sticking up ...

NJ: Ja, and a woman looking on very delightedly.

Then there are several images of sanctioned moments when the female body – and sexuality – are on display. “At an inter-school competition for drum

majorettes” and “Saturday morning at the Hypermarket: Miss Lovely Legs Competition”, 1979/80.

In “Drum Majorettes”, the girls sport black wide-brimmed hats. Stylised riding coats skim their raised buttocks, the 1½ inch heel of the silver calf-length boots accentuating the bare thighs. One girl has a satchel over her shoulder, and her pose pulls up the drape of the coat above her buttock to reveal the undergarment.

In “Miss Lovely Legs”, the four girls on display are numbers 11, 12, 16 and 15. No. 11 is the leggiest, aided by platform sandals and a thin maillot revealing her nipples; 12 and 15’s one-pieces are dangerously high cut. The competition seems to be sponsored by “Cameo” – three pairs of pantyhose in each pack (small flags advertising the brand drape the edge of the catwalk). The girls, in the fashion of their time and class, wear pantyhose, though they have open toed sandals.

DG: I think there is, or was, certainly, a very powerful suppressed sexuality in communities like that. It was a very strange kind of sexuality. Because those girls in their drum majorette uniforms ... you know, they could have easily passed for whores at the temple. But it was ok. And yet these were convent girls, many of them. It was ok, because in that particular set of circumstances, it was ok to reveal your body. It was, in fact, encouraged. You were encouraged to strut, and thrust out your chest. And to you know ... the whole thing. So it was a very strange phenomenon. I was fascinated by it.

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“At an inter-school competition for drum-majorettes”, 1979/80.

NJ: In “Miss Lovely Legs”, a row of children’s faces is lined up against the edge of the catwalk. Is the entire audience black?

DG: No, not the entire audience. Mixed. And this was very significant ... because that was the only situation in which you could legitimately have a mixed audience. It was a big hypermarket, so anybody could shop there. And secondly, it gave ... it gave permission, if you like, for a black man ... to look at white pubescence or nubility without fear. If one of those girls was strutting outside at her parents’ swimming pool, and the gardener stared at her like that, he would have got a *klap*.

NJ: And those sanctioned moments also reiterate superiority Creating a “special” situation in which



“Saturday morning at the Hypermarket: Miss Lovely Legs Competition”, 1979/80.

you get to gaze at something you are not ordinarily allowed to is a way to show that what’s on display is the best thing that there is ...

DG: Yes. That’s right. And of course, there are no black girls in that group. They’re all white. Lily white, you know.

NJ: “The Farmer’s Wife”. That image was in *Some Afrikaners* (“On an old Transvaal farm near Fochsville: the farmer’s wife”, 1965). Laughing. Standing against the great, expanding crack in the stone wall behind her.

DG: Yes.

NJ: The very beautiful woman ...

DG: Beautiful woman, yes ... in her tennis dress.

NJ: Yeah, a very *new* looking tennis dress. I thought, “She may have put on a different dress [for the photo]”.

DG: Well, I came to that farm, I knocked on the door, introduced myself, and said, “I’d like to take photographs here if you don’t mind,” and “May I take a photograph of you?” and she said, “Yes, you can, but I first have to change.”

NJ: Oh, she did?

DG: And she went and she came out in that white dress.

NJ: What was she wearing before?

DG: I don’t remember ... but obviously, she didn’t regard it as ... she didn’t feel comfortable in it. And I er ... she was beautiful, and certainly very turned on.

NJ: Yeah. I was thinking that she seemed very self-aware ... of the enormous power she carries with her beauty. But it was so isolated there ... so it wasn’t possible for her to exercise it [her power] because it required gaze.

DG: Hm.

NJ: And she ... was suddenly surprised by your visit.



“On an old Transvaal farm near Fochsville: the farmer’s wife”, 1965.

DG: Yeah, yes. Absolutely. It was a very interesting situation. I made it a principle ... never ever to take anything from any subjects that I photographed. [laughs]

NJ: When *Some Afrikaners Revisited* was launched at the 2007 Cape Town Book Fair, Umuzi – your publisher – organised a “Conversation” with Mar-

lene van Niekerk, who had just won the South African *Sunday Times* Literary Prize for her novel, *Agaat*.

She asked you to describe what it was like growing up in Randfontein; which you did – very honestly, detailing what it was like to live in a country where (I’m paraphrasing now) “a small, energetic group of people had taken over ... people whose fear of both black and Jewish people was so great that it turned into an active hate”. (Here, Goldblatt corrected my understanding: the fear of blacks and Jews were hardly on the “same level”; rather, “Jews were not so much feared as envied and distrusted [as] the ‘other’ and the money lenders.”)

NJ: At one point, van Niekerk asked you about “Policeman in a squad car on Church Square”, Pretoria, 1967.

DG: Policeman in squad car, yes.

NJ: In my mind, that image survives differently – but here it is. There are two heads in the car – two policemen in the car. One is sharply in focus, looking out directly at the camera – his head blocks out the other policeman. His gauntness, the bone structure makes it look like a Death’s Head. Behind the car, there’s a row of people standing in line, who are not in focus. The older man’s eyes are shaded by the brim of his hat, and the younger man’s eyes are hidden by dark glasses. Two women – one younger, one older, seem to stare impassively into the afternoon sun.

DG: Well there’s the squad car ... or the policemen in the squad car in sharp focus in the foreground,



“Policeman in a squad car on Church Square”, Pretoria, 1967.

and in the background is this granite building, and in front of it are a number of people queuing for a bus. And they are blurred, but they are quite clearly white. And so for me, that photograph – at first sight – is one-dimensional. And I don’t like making one-dimensional pictures; I hate them ... because you’re judging for the reader how to read the picture. But on second sight, that photograph is not one-dimensional, because those people are, in fact, all white, and it’s us, it’s us, the whites of South Africa sheltering behind the policeman’s gun. And there’s no question that that’s largely what we did. There are very few whites who were prepared to go out from that protective encirclement of the armed forces and deal with black people one to one, as it were.

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NJ: At that particular interview [with van Niekerk], what I found particularly interesting was that ... the audience was probably mostly Afrikaner people who had come to sort of see themselves “revisited”. Most were women – older women. And they were full of pleasure – murmuring and animated. The ladies were perfumed, in their Sunday best ...

DG: Ah, Really? That’s interesting.

NJ: Like they had come for church. In fine clothes. Hats.

DG: I don’t remember that.

NJ: I was there with a friend of mine from Italy. So we were probably the only foreign people there. And there was so much pleasure that it was audible. But then, when this image was shown, and you said these things, it just became very, very silent. In fact, van Niekerk said, “It’s very quiet now ... we are all very quiet.”

DG: (laughter).

NJ: And I thought it was a moment in which one had to meditate on oneself, really. And face it. And your photographs were saying that it’s necessary to do that. That it’s the difficult work necessary for liking yourself.

DG: Sure, yeah.

NJ: But before anything like that could happen, I think ... because it was too frightening ... that silence was broken by something else. I think van Niekerk



“Senior members of the National Party listen to speeches at the party’s 50th Anniversary celebrations”, De Wildt, Transvaal, October 1964.

showed another image in *Some Afrikaners*: “Senior members of the National Party listen to speeches at the party’s 50th Anniversary celebrations”, De Wildt, Transvaal, October 1964.

Here, it is the severity conveyed by the down-turned lips and the fleshy faces that remain in my memory. They wear hats, and dark sunglasses or spectacles covering their eyes; the women have cat’s eye-frames. The man last in line, on the right end – the oldest – looks to be asleep. Though not identified by name in the original publication, in *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, the caption reads: “From left to right: Senator Jan de Klerk, Minister of Education, Arts and Science, his wife Corrie, Daan de Wet Nel, Minister of Bantu Education and Development, and his wife, Jim Fouche, Minister of Defence, and an oudstryder who was present at De Wildt when General J.B.M. Hertzog made his famous ‘Suid-Afrika eerste’ (South Africa first) speech there on 7 December 1912.”

NJ: van Niekerk said, “I am going to say something terrible now. I’m going to say something terrible. The face of power looks the same everywhere.”

DG: Oh did she?

NJ: I believe that she was referring to – or making a link with – the current faces of power. At this point, silence in the room – which had made the space dense with tension – expanded and released itself in murmurs of approval. Some clapped, the loudest of all the young men seated next to me.

DG: Is that so?

NJ: Yeah.

DG: I don’t remember that. She was amazing, but I don’t remember that.

NJ: Yes, van Niekerk did an amazing interview. And then, the audience had a release, finally. They felt comfortable, because ...

DG: Yeah.

NJ: Now [if there is a direct comparison of the NP party members to ANC party members], they are not so bad. In a way, this “release” destroyed the moment created by ...

DG: Of the other one ...

NJ: Yeah.

DG: That’s really very interesting.

NJ: The room was ... it was a pleasurable experience, but a very tense experience, too. I suppose it's a difficult invitation – by someone like a photographer – to meditate on oneself. And people would much rather quickly move into ...

DG: Something more comfortable. Or uncomfortable, in a way, but ... something you can handle.

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'Something more comfortable. Or uncomfortable ...
but ... something you can handle.'

Looking carefully through the images and captions in the original publication (*Some Afrikaners Photographed*) and the reprint (*Some Afrikaners Revisited*) will produce small, but significant differences. The library at Cape Town's National Gallery owns a first edition of *Some Afrikaners* – signed by Goldblatt. After a stint at the library, I went to The Book Lounge (a shop on the corner of Roeland and Buitenkant), which had the new edition. It was here that I noticed key differences in the text accompanying certain “uncomfortable” images.

NJ: For instance, “Johannes van der Linde, farmer and major in the local army reserve, with his head labourer ‘Ou Sam’ near Bloemfontein, 1965”: in the original, that's all the text that there is. But in the new edition, you have the two men in dialogue. Van der Linde says, “Does the Baas swear at you?” and ...

DG: And Ou Sam says, “No, the Boss does not swear at me”. You always talk in the third person if you're inferior.



“Shiftboss with ‘his piccanin’”, underground at Randfontein Estates Gold Mine, Randfontein, 1965.

In fact, in *Revisited*, Goldblatt is even more precise: “In the manner of respectful indirect address used in Afrikaans as between a parent and child, van der Linde asked, ‘Old Sam, does the Baas swear at you?’ To which the reply was, ‘No Baas, the Baas does not swear at me.’ Near Bloemfontein, Free State, 1965.” And in “Shiftboss with ‘his piccanin’”, underground at Randfontein Estates Gold Mine, Randfontein, 1965, Goldblatt includes the comment: “For the shiftboss the young man carried measuring instruments, a bottle of tea and a ‘pneumo’ jacket; for me – at the shiftboss’s insistence and over my objections – he carried my tripod.”

NJ: So what made you add something more to the captions?

DG: Well, there were things that I knew that I could now talk about more openly ... you mustn't forget that when I first published that first edition, I was on a knife's edge. And I implied quite a lot I think, but

I couldn't explicitly say some things ... which I was able to do later.

But the images carry that energy, in any case. I saw that at once, from across the room at Michael Stevenson Gallery. The fear and intensity of the subordination reflected in the so-called piccanin's downward glare – the only light illuminating this terrible scene coming from his own miner's hardhat lamp – is unmistakable.

Quickly flipping through certain complex photographs in *Some Afrikaners*, those willful elisions allow a recollection that is more digestible; those forced removals make history – and complicity within that story – more consumable. The collection that had originally made people feel ashamed – and was received with vitriol from party leaders because of the honesty with which those lives were portrayed for all the world to see – now present the possibility of a desirable way out. The images in *Some Afrikaners* picture a people who are removed from grand doings of the nation: these “salt of the earth” people, going about eking a living out of growing fruit, raising prize ewes, and dancing at wedding feasts can hardly be linked to that lineup of grim leaders. A comparison between the NP leaders and current leaders of South Africa – or any “face of power”, for that matter – made the more “dangerous” images in the book easier to take. But hoping that Goldblatt's body of work will make history sweeter – transforming itself into coffee table book – would take a supreme act of erasure.

Many thanks to Stefan Blom, who first told me about the Some Afrikaners Revisited show, and to the delightful staff at Michael Stevenson Gallery (now located at 160 Sir Lowry Road, Woodstock, Cape Town), and the staff at the library of the National Gallery, who were gracious in their conversation and direction.

The photographs in the exhibition of *Some Afrikaners Revisited* were published in book form by Umuzi, Random House, in 2007.

Another essay by Neelika Jayawardane on David Goldblatt's is published on the site *Africa is a country*: <http://africasacountry.com/2010/10/11/david-goldblatt-takes-manhattan/>