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Interviewee: Omar Badsha Session #1 (video)

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark Johannesburg, South Africa

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Q: Omar Badsha, thank you so much for being with us. I want to ask you a little bit about your own personal and political background and how you became a photographer and why you chose the kind of photography you did.

Badsha: I grew up in a typical working-class Indian home, Muslim basically, but an unusual one in that my father was an artist. My uncle was a photographer. So I was always surrounded by images. And that's, I think -- but -- I started off when I was in high school, I started painting and drawing, got interested in that, and I only became interested in photography quite late in life, in the seventies, in the mid seventies.

And the type of photography, well, at a very young age, became part and parcel of the liberation movement, a very logical thing for artists or people like me to become aware of the social conditions around us. And, I think it was logical - given the fact that when I became politically active it was largely the underground, because the political organizations were banned. And so, yes, anything we could use to -- we were propagandists. Our main concern was to mobilize people, politicize them, and arm them.

So any medium that we were involved in, we would use it to teach, to put across ideas, to make people aware. That was how we saw ourselves as part of the struggle. It was over-

romanticized, but it became part of our life. [laughter] To use every occasion and any occasion to put across our views and to mobilize people. So it is logical, as an artist, that I began to draw images of struggle, put it that way. We became part of that generation of artists who used art as part of the struggle, as a weapon in the struggle.

But I think, as a document, I think from a very young age, like many other photographers, we were very influenced by *Life* magazine. As a young boy, I was fortunate that my father and my uncle always had magazines and newspapers around. I remember at a very young age paging through all these old copies of *Life* magazine, of the war years, and being very much influenced by that. I think it was there somewhere in the back of my mind.

So when I began interest in photography, I again used -- one saw photography as a way of bringing across ideas and exploring the world around you, and I, I think, gravitated automatically to documentary photography and using photography as a medium to teach.

I was involved in the early seventies in the trade union movement and where we had a majority of our members were illiterate. In fact, my entire executive was illiterate at one stage. And we had classes every night, shop stewards, to train shop stewards, leadership training courses. And so I felt that, well, we could use photographs as a way of illustrating our point, putting across certain things.

Especially I was involved in a number of unions, reviving a number of unions, but in particular I was involved in the chemical union. As one would recognize, what happens is that you get lots of people with horrific chemical burns and things like that. The idea was

to begin to document that and also use pictures on the early history, find pictures of the early history of the trade union movement to illustrate that history, to make people aware of that history of the trade union and why unions were banned or discouraged by the government.

So I gravitated, bought myself a camera and taught myself photography. But being somebody who's always interested in everything around me, my camera became an extension of -- like a diary for me. People I met and communities I worked in, I photographed. So for me it was just a way of learning a little bit more about my community and the world around me. Yes, so that's how I started.

Q: What were the restrictions in South Africa around that time in the seventies on the use of pictures and the printing of certain kinds of pictures? Were there any?

Badsha: Yes, there were lots of restrictions. Firstly, there was a social taboo in the sense that in the political movement, in the trade union movement, people didn't want to be photographed, because the people who used photography were the state. The security police always used pictures to identify those who had gone to meetings, who had attended meetings. So whenever you were picked up, you were first shown photographs, and they would say, "Yes, you were here. Tell us a little bit why. Who was the person sitting next to you?" People were very, very afraid of photographers and photography, because it could be -- it was used as an instrument of repression.

So one had to begin to break that, and some of us were able to do that because people

trusted us, trusted the fact that if we took a picture of them, we would not use it for purposes which would help identify. I must say, just as an aside, that in the early days, the early seventies, if you'd go into meetings, some of us would not photograph the audience. We would photograph the people who were on the stage, but not the audience. And if we do photograph the audience, we did it in a way that you couldn't really identify people. But people then became used to it. That was a restriction-- that the society and the state had made people so afraid of photographs and photographers. We broke that, in a way. We had to reeducate people.

The other restrictions were much more severe in the fact that you could not photograph policemen. While there was no restriction, law, against photographing policemen, but you know if you photographed them, they came and dunnered the hell out of you. [Laughter] But you could not photograph people who -- you could not photograph a lot of state installations, prisons. You could not publish pictures of people who were banned, imprisoned.

In photography -- well, there was enormous censorship, very strict censorship, and, as I said, self-censorship also. But newspapers would not publish your pictures. Most of the newspapers were white -- some of the white liberal press, but they would not publish pictures of meetings. They were not interested in those things until it became an issue.

It wasn't easy for people to be photographing in particular circumstances, in a strike or in certain communities, because people were very suspicious of what was being done and who the person was and what it was going to be used for. But in our case, over a period of time,

because people knew us or people knew me, they trusted me, so you could photograph them, especially in meetings and things like that. We had very severe censorship, but we always got past it. There are always ways past it.

Q: Where did you publish, then? Or did you --

Badsha: Well, initially we published in the black press, the progressive newspapers, but we set up our own newspapers, trade union papers, publications. Then there was the student newspapers, the church newspapers, those churches especially that were part of the anti-apartheid movement. And the international -- our movement outside used a lot of our pictures, so we would smuggle pictures out and it was being used by the movement for labor publications and propaganda work. But we put up pictures. We published it -- we put up pictures wherever we could, any occasion, and every wall we could find. We put up and we began to develop traveling exhibitions.

Q: When you say we, you're talking about other photographers or by that time did you have a collective?

Badsha: In the trade union movement, in the education units there, and then later on we set up a -- I was involved in setting up a photographers' collective called Afrapix, which was a group of progressive young photographers, black and white, who set out to document the country and what was happening in the country. And it became a very, very -- well, I think it became the most important agency, progressive agency, in the country, and it trained a lot of photographers.

Q: How did you get your funding?

Badsha: No, there was --

Q: There was no funding?

Badsha: There was no funding. The only funding we ever received was from -- was the use of a church at Khotso House in Johannesburg. The South African Council of Churches had a FAM [Faith and Mission] Unit, and they gave us a little space initially and the use of a telephone. But we were able to pay for ourselves. Well, not easily. Initially it was an enormous struggle. We put our own resources into this agency and collective, but once the movement in the country, the anti-apartheid movement, grew and there was -- and the underground and the anti-apartheid, it brought the press -- the alternative press began to emerge in this country. They used our pictures in the international community, the anti-apartheid movements around the world. So we became the most important agency.

And because nobody else was doing what we were doing, nobody else was -- and the mainstream press in this country were not using those pictures, but we had a market and began developing that through our network internationally. And that helped pay. Not much, but helped us grow. But when the struggle began to become internationalized and the world began to take more notice in the eighties, that agency really took off. Yes.

Q: Tell me about meeting Francis Wilson and hearing about the Carnegie [Corporation] Inquiry.

Badsha: Well, about the same time as we were setting up this Afrapix, talking to photographers, I heard a news broadcast, an interview by Francis Wilson talking about the establishment of this commission to document poverty in South Africa. And I had met Francis some time back, some years back, so all I did was -- I got very excited about this, and I phoned him and I said, "Look. Is there a place for photographers in this project?"

And he said, "Yes!" And he says, "Send me a note of what you think. Have you got any ideas?"

And I sent him a short proposal, and he then -- that's how the photographic unit was set up. I was then asked to come down to Cape Town. We talked through the project, the idea of bringing photographers in and going out and documenting, and the photographers working with researchers, and then putting together an exhibition at the end of the -- as part of the conference, at the end of the process. And that's how the project grew. And I then began to draw on this group of photographers, progressive photographers that we already had as a core group and then we began to draw on others around the country to come in. So that's how that process -- that's how I came to know Francis, and that's how the whole project started. It just, like everything else, it had its own life.

Q: So in terms of the process, you actually sent out these senior photographers, these very fine photographers, with field workers who were in the process of being trained? How did it work?

Badsha: Well, that was the idea of getting photographers, not just the most skilled or professional, but any -- as many photographers as we could find. The idea was then to look at some of the papers that were being put together and see whether we could twin the photographers with the writers. It didn't actually work like that in every case, but -- we also looked at what photographers themselves were doing, the projects that they had been involved in, and drawing those projects in and bringing that also as a way of contributing to our understanding of poverty and what was happening in South Africa at that stage. So it was not just going out, but getting the photographers to contribute and to become contributors in their own right.

So, yes, it was a mixture. For instance, there's a very fine photo essay by David Goldblatt on the night riders of KwaNdebele. There was a paper by somebody on not KwaNdebele in particular, but on people using, spending enormous amount of time in public transport to get to work in the Free State. So that, I said to Francis, "Look." Not to Francis, to David, "Look. Would you be interested in this?"

And he says, "Yes." And then he then looked at KwaNdebele, and he, together with a writer from the *New York Times*, did this essay. So there was that synergy where we used some of that material from the Carnegie, but I think the majority of pictures in the project itself came from the photographers' contribution.

Q: I was actually going to ask you about that, because sometimes there's this marvelous creative tension between the reporter or the field worker and the photographer, because

you're seeing different stories. Were there instances in which that was creative and instances in which it didn't work?

Badsha: There was. There was. There was this tension, but in most cases people were very aware. The photographers themselves were very aware of what was happening. They had already begun to do their own projects which related to the broad topic. In instances where -- and they did their own thing. In instances where photographers and the researchers worked together, I think they worked very well. There was a very good complement. I don't know of any instances where there was a great deal of tension, but I think they worked well.

Again, you know, if we had more time, we would have done a lot of those essays. We would have taken a lot of those papers. But the papers were still being written and the field work was still being done, and the photographers were not the same. There was not sufficient funding, also, to bring all of them together and to link them, but where we could, we did.

There wasn't much of a tension at all. It was quite a good working relationship. And fortunately, Francis allowed us to develop the project and the book and the exhibition. They didn't put any restrictions. So the concept was all ours, was left to me, and so I had a very free hand. So I was very lucky in that respect. Yes, I think that's -- I will stop there. If you have any other questions around that, but --

Q: No. In terms of some of the particular essays and your also thinking about themes as you develop these, the transportation one also struck me as very amazing, but which are some of the others that stand out in your mind?

Badsha: Let me put it this way. What happened was -- let me just give you how the concept evolved, the pictures, because then you will get -- then we can get to a specific. What we did was -- firstly, I said to Francis, "You know, Francis, we don't want to look at poverty. We don't want to show one -- we don't want pictures of starving children. We want to show apartheid as poverty, as the system, and not the stereotype of starving black children as apartheid." And this was the idea, the concept. We wanted to show that the system itself was wrong and rotten, and poverty was one of its -- how would you put it -- consequences. One of the reasons for the poverty was apartheid. And we wanted to break this stereotype of this country that a lot of people were projecting.

At that time there was a great deal of debate among us as photographers. How do we present our own view of our country without it becoming clichéd and perpetuating the old racial stereotypes and other stereotypes about apartheid? How do we do that? So we began, I began to look at the end product in that way, and also when we sent out photographers and the way we edited, not to have the stereotype. So I think that informed the way, one of the ways in which we put together the exhibition and the book.

If you look at the book, it talks about migrancy, it talks about the land, and the link between that and poverty. So you've got this journey through South Africa in a different

way, through migrants, migrancy, from Lesotho, in fact, and we incorporated that to show that link, and then coming into the mines and the factories and things like that.

At the same time, there was this other thing, that we were not just victims. We also had a tradition of struggle against poverty, and that was a political struggle and a cultural one. So the book ends, or the exhibition ends with pictures of people organizing in cooperatives and politically and things like that. So, again, this was this big debate, that we were not victims. We are part and parcel of the liberation movement. And we wanted to show the world that this was -- not all black people were victims and must not be seen as victims only.

Yes, those are some of the underlying themes, so the essays sort of very easily flowed from there. We were able to sequence it that way. It happened very quickly. It wasn't something that we debated. And it worked. I think it worked. Yes.

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Badsha: I think the extraordinary thing about that period was the fact that there was a community of people in this country, young people, artists, photographers, filmmakers, who became part of the movement -- let me put the word movement in a very broad sense in a great, very broad sense. Many of them just began to become political aware and so themselves began to explore this country. If you were young and white, now becoming all of a sudden aware and you had a camera in your hand and a pen or a song in your head

somewhere, you began to use that as a way of exploring this country of yours because you were so compartmentalized.

And so that was a period where photography really took off. Filmmakers, young filmmakers and documentary filmmakers also began to take off. We had set up a thing called Afriscope, a film unit. It was largely a propaganda unit to document political meetings and struggle meetings and things like that. But, yes, there was such a lot of synergy and energy there, and people were now beginning to go out and looking at the other, but in a new way, looking at the poor and the black people in a new way. Or black photographers looking at white South Africans in a new way. So that meant that people worked in projects and in communities for a long time and won the trust of those communities.

As I was saying, there's an essay by Chris Ledochowski of this migrant worker, but that worker was a servant in his family home, which is a rich middle-class home in the Transvaal, and he worked there for many years. And when he retired, Chris followed him and spent time with him, because he was very much a foster parent to him. And followed him over -- and every time he went to visit him, he photographed that community and that family. But it was a way of understanding the person that looked after him and his family.

So there was this -- I think that that informed the way people looked at South Africa and their own environment, and there was a great deal of empathy between them and the people that they were photographing. They were very sensitive about how they went about

portraying people. And I think that gave -- and that was part of a broader debate among photographers.

And you know -- and the Carnegie project, together with Afrapix, there was a magazine called *Staffrider* and others, and exhibitions that we put together in union offices and schools and things like that, were all part and parcel of this movement at that time, where culture and the arts really flourished, but were part and parcel of this broad struggle against apartheid. It was used also, as we said then, "We will use our work as weapons against the system."

But, yes, we also didn't want to use pictures purely as propaganda. We thought and we looked at documenting what was happening in the country. So there was a remarkable group of photographers beginning to emerge -- young people. Also one must remember that some of them were white and were dodging the army draft, you know, and so constantly they were part of this group of young people who might not have been members of the ANC [African National Congress], but broader left movement post-apartheid, and, in turn, the young black photographers looking at South Africa and white society. So there was this very interesting period, and I think it reflected in the way the pictures were taken and where they were taken and how they were taken.

Q: Can we talk about some of those areas, how you made decisions about where to take the pictures and to cover certain subjects?

Badsha: As I said, there was a two-prong process. One is that we saw ourselves as photographers, and in our right, contributing to the process, to the commission. So we brought our own work, work that we were doing, at the same time the -- and so the essays that I looked at, that the photographers were doing, I drew on that, at the same time there were essays that were commissioned or came out of the commission work, and we asked photographers to go and follow that, work with those commissioners or researchers and academics. So, yes, that was the two sort of things meeting, but we wanted to make our own contribution to the commission, in our own right.

Q: I notice that there are a lot of pictures with women doing different types of work and holding different types of responsibilities.

Badsha: Yes.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about --

Badsha: Well, again, the early eighties were a period when the whole women's movement began to emerge, and all of us were beginning to become much more sensitive about that. And there were women photographers in this group who brought that perspective also. So, yes, you got that element, without it being forced. It was a natural thing which reflected the thinking of the people, the new sort of awareness of woman's role in our society and in the struggle, and the effects poverty had on them.

Q: The picture of the woman pensioner, retired pensioner, was really profound, I thought.

Badsha: Yes. The picture of the old woman being carried in a blanket? Yes. They're very strong images, but we were surrounded by strong images. Wherever you looked, you could find things that you wanted to document, but it wasn't a voyeuristic sort of thing. We saw it as part of a broader thing, of capturing our society so that one could use pictures as a way of teaching people, at the same time teaching ourselves about that society.

Q: How did you choose the title picture and the title of the book?

Badsha: Well, I was very touched by a young white Afrikaans writer, Ingrid Jonker. She was the daughter of a Nationalist Party MP [Member of Parliament], came from a very conservative background, and she wrote poetry largely in Afrikaans. In the early sixties, this book came out of her poetry, but in English after she had committed suicide, and it was a tragic thing, but her poetry was very powerful. One of the poems that really I always lived with was about this young child killed in Nyanga, and so the title of the book, *[South Africa:] The Cordoned Heart*, comes from that poem. So we incorporated that poem into the exhibition, through the title, again, you know, as a way of drawing attention to this poetess and who she was and her struggle and her work.

The picture, the title picture, we had a lot of debate between myself and Alex Harris and the designer, his wife, Margaret Sartor, about what picture to use. They were wanting to use a picture of a young girl in front of a house. She was building this -- replastering this house, and she carried this plaster on the head. And I was very insistent that it should be a political image. They might have been right at

the end of the day, but we had this huge debate and I insisted that picture goes in, or nothing else. [Laughter] But it was a very interesting period, working with designers.

Q: How do you think that debate reflected the two views, the American view versus the --

Badsha: Well, it was, yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about that?

Badsha: You know, he's a very fine photographer, a very fine person. Both are very lovely people, very sensitive. They were very sensitive about what we were doing, and very empathetic, a great deal of empathy. But we would debate which pictures go in, and I was very insistent. I didn't want any American imperialist coming, Americans coming in, given our background. [Laughter] We were very suspicious of outsiders. We wanted to make sure that we wanted to reflect what was happening, and didn't want anyone to interfere, which was a very infantile attitude to take, because one could learn a lot from people outside. But there was also this tension, and now and then this tension -- actually, we had no problem at all with the rest of the book, excepting for the title page, this tension.

Q: What do you think the tussle over the representation was? In this picture, the men are carrying some -- what are they carrying?

Badsha: They're carrying a coffin of somebody who was killed by the police. In fact, the person killed was a young guerrilla who I had worked very closely with. He also worked with me in the darkroom. He was part of a group of young guerrilla fighters. He left the country, came back, and he was killed in a skirmish with the police. This is a picture I had taken, so, for me, that picture and the title, *The Cordoned Heart*, what was happening at that stage in South Africa was what we wanted to put across. So we had a political agenda and a perspective that we wanted to put across, and that was it.

When Margaret and Alex came, they felt that that picture of the child, young girl working with the mud, the mud in the background, the wall very much merging, was a very powerful symbol, also, of South Africa. Yes, one can look at it, it's much more subtle than us with our fists and our flags, you know.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the impact of the book? And it was so well received.

Badsha: Yes. What we did was we made a whole lot of copies, seven to eight copies. One copy went to America for this exhibition, and one we kept inside the country and it went around. We put it up in shopping malls, in schools, in union halls, wherever. It became very well known, and a great demand for it.

And then another copy was sort of given to the anti-apartheid set of structures that we knew in England and Germany and elsewhere, and so it traveled in all those countries. I think its impact was also on the photographers themselves, and it had a great deal of

impact among young photographers who saw this and were inspired to continue doing work in communities and as documentary photographers.

So, yes, it had an enormous amount of impact of that level, I think, when you look at it in retrospect. At that time it was part and parcel of our propaganda exercise, to put across the message. But, yes, it brought people together and it showed what we could do with photographs and text. But I think in America and elsewhere, from what I've heard, the exhibition was very well received. It traveled around America for ten years, from 1985 -- 1984 to 1994.

Q: You weren't able to come because you were --

Badsha: Yes. I didn't -- when the exhibition opened, I wasn't allowed to attend. For many years I was denied a passport, restricted from traveling. Fortunately, I was never banned, which meant -- if you are banned, then you are restricted to one particular locality, or your home. You're restricted to your home for twelve hours or sometimes twenty-four hours in extreme cases. So I was fortunate I was never banned, but I was not able to travel outside for about twenty-five, twenty-seven years.

So when this exhibition opened, I wasn't able to go, but my wife went. They decided that she should represent me. And a colleague of mine, Paul Weinberg, who also is a photographer and co-founder with me of Afrapix, he went to the opening.

Q: There are several pictures with Archbishop [Desmond] Tutu in them.

Badsha: Yes.

Q: Did you know him?

Badsha: Well, you know, Tutu became a symbol, like [Nelson] Mandela. Yes, I knew him. I know him. Not knew him, sorry. And he was such an important figure. It was an important way of also saying, showing again, building that profile. We would build Mandela. We built Mandela and the profile as a symbol of the struggle. Likewise, Tutu. So we incorporated, made sure that we paid due deference to him. But he's also such an important figure, such a powerful figure.

Q: How is he important?

Badsha: He was one of those who stood out inside the country and articulated, you know, the broad concerns of the people and was very, very articulate, and somebody that we all looked up to. I'm a socialist and communist, but we worked very closely with the church people, and people like Tutu and others. We were all part of one struggle. We never saw them as separate from us. So, yes, we have a great deal of regard and love for him, and that's why it was logical for him to also be a person who would do the foreword to the book. Yes.

Q: You said also that Mandela had used the poem that you referred to in the end of his inaugural speech.

Badsha: Yes. It was such a lovely thing. Mandela -- the story goes that in prison, you know, in the early days, for a long time, there was very heavy censorship, but they had come across a poem by Ingrid Jonker in a farmers' magazine. [laughter] Because that was one of the few magazines that was not censored, an agricultural magazine. I don't know how that poem got in there.

So when they came out, I remember giving him a copy of the book, and either that or he had got a copy of the poem, but he used that same poem to end his speech when he was inaugurated as President. And it was so nice. It was such a lovely moment. Because, you know, it was his way of acknowledging the Afrikaaner and Afrikaans and this woman who was part of the struggle. It was such a poignant thing to do, and I think it captured everyone. Yes, it was such a lovely thing to do. And it became very famous after that, you know. She became known all over and not just to a few of us. Yes, that's *The Cordoned Heart*.

Q: Given how political this book is, these pictures are, was there ever any difficulty in exhibiting them here in South Africa or --

Badsha: Well, you know, every time you had an exhibition, you would always have the security police around. But not really. By that stage, by the eighties, mid eighties, well,

we controlled many of those areas. We just defied the state, and many of the townships and churches and schools or halls that we put our pictures in, a no-go area for the police.

Q: How do you mean? How did you arrange that? Just in sheer numbers, you mean?

Badsha: You put it up, and if they came in and tried to break up a meeting -- we never had an exhibition on its own, ever. It was always part of a broader event. So when these things were shown, you know, it was an act of defiance, you know, it was part of that moment. And if the police came in, then, you know, people would defy then. Or if they'd take it away, or confiscated it, it was fine. We'll reprint some stuff. Yes.

Q: Can you talk about the role of the image in terms of conscientization [Paulo Freire's process of creating critical consciousness] about history and memory in South Africa?

Badsha: Yes. You know, the censorship and the Bantu education systems, the school system was so all-pervasive, that the memory of the struggle and people in the struggle was -- well, not obliterated totally, but suppressed. And you could not publish photographs of Mandela, people like -- who were in prison. You could not publish what they had said and things like that. So images of defiance, images of struggle became a form of -- or past struggles, became a way of reviving the memory of people and the movement, and talking about the movement and its history and its role. And I mean the movement in this case, the communist party, the trade unions, the women's struggle, the women's movement, the ANC history, Pan-Africanist Congress, or whatever, but using pictures as a way of opening debate around and talking about that memory, and using that memory to mobilize people.

So, as I said, we used -- at the drop of a hat, we could find a piece of wall or paper, we would use images also to draw attention to that rich history and a call to arms, you know.

Q: Were you at the actual conference?

Badsha: Yes, I was. Yes.

Q: Could you describe what it was like in terms of the exhibit?

Badsha: The exhibition and the book, the exhibition was very well received. It was the center of that conference, because it had a prominent place. The conference was at the University of Cape Town, UCT, in a very beautiful space, so the exhibition was put up and photographers were there, and there were a lot of people, four or five hundred, I think, academics and delegates. And there was a great deal of debate, but very exciting.

Also what was very exciting, and the first time it has happened, was there was a lot of other cultural events related to the conference. There were plays and songs and dance and music, and this exhibition. So it all sort of came together in a very nice sort of way. And the book came out not too soon after the conference, I think it was less than a year, and the exhibition was already on the road, so it was used as a way of publicizing.

But the conference itself, yes, was very, very exciting. It was an eye-opener for a lot of people as to what was happening, what the conditions of people were, and how poverty and apartheid had impoverished us so, not only physically, but culturally also, you know. So

that came across in a very powerful way. They couldn't deny it. And it was also -- what was very powerful about it is that it was bringing together academics from across the line, across the divide also, and the first time now saying that, "Look. There's a crisis in this country, an enormous amount of poverty." So I think that made a very major impact. The state could not say, "No, no." They could not say that apartheid was now working and it was alleviating poverty and things like that, which they were arguing.

Q: That was the beginning of the Reformist movement.

Badsha: That was about the same time, yes. It was about that period, where a new reform movement was beginning to articulate itself in the universities and among Afrikaner academics and things like that. So, yes, I think it had a very major impact. And as you know, that debate is still very much alive now and the major concern of the government, so if the government had then responded in a major anti-poverty drive, it would have made a bigger -- a great difference.

Q: Why do you think that didn't happen?

Badsha: Well, it wasn't in the interest at that stage to address and use the resources to alleviate poverty in this country or to democratize, because you can't -- the system was so pervasive and so far gone, that to now admit that your system didn't work --

Q: In terms of the international community, do you think that *The Cordoned Heart* and *Uprooting Poverty* made a difference in terms of making it impossible to believe that South Africa wasn't as poor as it actually was?

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: Omar, I was just going to talk a little bit about more -- some of the individual pictures that had a great impact on people, and one of the ones you said did, or part of the series that did, were the mine workers.

Badsha: Yes, the hostile and the conditions in which people lived. I think that there was such an impact, those pictures by Ben Maclennan, who was a young journalist, in fact, a student and just beginning his career as a journalist, and he took those pictures. When I saw them, I just thought, "These are the most remarkable set of pictures," which captured the condition of mine workers in such a poignant and powerful way. The sort of world without women, where these men dancing together in this hall, and this picture of -- I think the one that -- I think all those pictures, really, together with David Goldblatt's pictures of the night riders, had enormous impact on people.

The only way I can judge it is the number of requests for those pictures internationally that we got later, and also people coming up and phoning and saying, "Look. We saw these images. Can we have copies of them?" and things like that. So I think that shocked people, the fact that a man could live for twenty years or for any period of time and sleep in

a space that is not bigger than this chair, in a row, as you see, a row of these pigeon holes, virtually. I think they just really had a major impact.

David Goldblatt's pictures of people commuting every day, spending five to six hours, really brought home the effects of apartheid to people and shocked people, you know. Yes, I think these -- there were also pictures of mass removal. At that stage, as I said, the eighties were a period where there was an enormous amount of removal, mass removals, and people beginning to mobilize to make the world aware of this, and those images also of how the state -- trucks would come in and just take people, uproot people overnight, and dump them in a bare field somewhere miles away from where they grew up and their communities, and the breakup of those communities. I think those images, yes, I think were very powerful, brought home to people in a way that sometimes stories in newspapers didn't.

I remember there was a dual exhibition, schoolchildren, a whole -- I think about a hundred schoolchildren, white young girls from some school had come through, and they walked through, and like all young people, there will always be a lot of chatting around and moving from one picture to another, and looking at things, normal things in an exhibition where you have a lot of young schoolkids. But these were high school girls, and they came in, general noise, but they began going through this exhibition and there was silence. And we all noticed this. They just said very little. They just went through these pictures and read the text, and there was -- all this was done in absolute silence. There were 100, 150 young people, shocked at what they were seeing.

And, you know, that's when you see the impact of photographs on young people who lived in this country but didn't know what was happening in their own back yard. And that's when you feel -- that's, as a photographer, that you feel, ah, you're getting your message across, you know. And it's those sort of pictures that -- I remember that picture of the miner sitting and reading a magazine, with his shoe in front of him. And I remember these young girls all around this, and silence, you know. Yes.

The other pictures, I think of communities that we had -- some of the photographers had worked, in which a year or two years later had become flashpoints. There was war going on, they made those communities squatter areas, especially in the Knysna area, where there was unrest. So areas and communities that we had photographed had now begun to mobilize and people were becoming angry. They saw these links between the poverty and that. So I think if people had seen the book, seen some of the pictures in some of those areas that it dealt with, and then now on the radio and on the TV they saw, they heard these names that were -- they made that link that poverty and people's resistance against that, or removals and people's resistance against removals.

Q: In fact, your photo essay is named “The People Organize”.

Badsha: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the selections you made for that?

Badsha: As I said, we wanted to end the essay. It was, for us, natural that we'll end it, this exhibition, with our struggle, that we're not just victims. Poverty might be there and it's all-pervasive, but we're not victims. We're also struggling against this poverty and against apartheid. And so, yes, we would end with pictures of people organizing against apartheid. That was the message that we wanted to put across, and that's how we ended the exhibition and the book, and these pictures of people organizing.

And as you can see, they're young people marching, and most of those marches ended up in lots of people losing their lives, and being shot. At all marches virtually in that particular period, there was clashes with the state. So, yes, that's how some of those pictures -- that one picture of those women with their hands up, their fists up, was taken at the funeral of a chap, a young Indian activist, was a member of the underground. Strange enough, last week or two weeks back, the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] hearings was about those killings. Krish [Krishna] Rabilall , and others were ambushed by the police and shot. When I'm looking at that picture now, it just brings these two events that took place twenty years apart now. There's a finality about it, you know.

So a lot of those events still play themselves out, those killings of people. I think, yes, they still have a resonance in our society, and people looking at that now, reading it, will now know who and how those people were shot and killed. One can now go to the TRC reports and the amnesty report to follow those stories. Yes.

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]