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THE WEEKENDER

WEEKEND REVIEW

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, MAY 10-11 2008

Through the
sharp lens of
a resilient

storytelle

Photographer Peter Magubane takes
MELANIE LAWRENCE ona trip down
memory lane

ELSON Mandela_ says Peter
Magubaneâ\200\231s photo stories on
apartheid â\200\234helped pave the way to
transformation in SAâ\200\235. He has en-
dured great personal sacrifices.
- Yet this formidable man continues
BYe _ imhis 54th year ofi pour ery to
document the â\200\234day-to-day life of peopleâ\200\235. i

As Â°we' drive through Sophiatown, en: rotte toâ\200\231

Soweto, Magubane recalls his childhood on these
streets. The old mining town-style houses stand on
historically loaded soil.

Itâ\200\231s hard to imagine the legendary days of the
Sophiatown that gave birth to activists and artists
such as Magubane. Those streets own his boyhood
memories: the first camera his father bought him; his
motherâ\200\231s love and discipline; the matchbox home his
family filled; his memories of being stabbed one day
while playing on those streets.

Picture 1955 in Sophiatown. Itâ\200\231s a Saturday night.
The swanky gents and classy dames are out on the
town. Dressed to the nines. High heels rat-a-tat-tat on
the dusty streets. The seductive jazz draws you into a
nearby shebeen. Inside foot-tapping saxophones and
social debates fill the air.

In the corner a handsome, 23-year-old Magubane
discusses news beats with his Drum friends, Can
Themba, â\200\234the English masterâ\200\235, and Bob Gosani, â\200\234the
brilliant photographerâ\200\235. In less than a year Magubane
has worked his way up the magazineâ\200\231s ranks from

driver to photojournalist. They are some of the many stars that Softown has raised.

Where others chose the political platform to confront the social injustices of apartheid, Magubane chose the camera. â\200\234I wanted to document the lives of black South Africans at the time. That was what drove me to photography.â\200\235 He had no idea what the years ahead would have in store for him.

Through zigzagging back roads, we arrive in Soweto. Today Magubane will be scouting the scrap heaps and coal yards for underage workers. Heâ\200\231s finishing the final shots for his book covering decades of child labour in SA, from as early as the 1950s until nay This is just one of his many projects.

His sturdy frame is strong and much younger than his 76 years. His presence owns the space it occupies.

The same passion that led him to expose the atrocities of apartheid yesterday, continues to drive

him to portray the social struggles of today.

Return with Magubane to the late 1950s. He is making his mark on the world. Having recently covered his first big assignment for Drum magazine â\200\224 the African National Congress â\200\224 the magazineâ\200\231s editor, Tom Hopkinson, is very satisfied with the young cameramanâ\200\231s work: Magubanerwill continue to work

Â».onexposÃ©s with Drum writers, such as the â\200\234Nude Pass Â©: ai Paradeâ\200\235 covering’the degrading pass laws and treat+" |

ment of black people in SA.

The following year, Magubane will win first and third place in a photographic competition. The white photographer who takes second place will not shake his hand. Despite the rampant prejudices of the period, an unstoppable career is launched. In 1959 he will cover a harrowing story on farm labour titled

Farm Labour Today: We Call It Semi-Slavery. This sto-

ry will cost him dearly.

At the same time, Sophiatown is being desecrated. Torn to the ground. Along with the other families, his is forcibly removed. Uprooted and relocated to Diepkloof.

We drive into the Soweto scrap yard. Giant rusting teeth bite into the air. Magubane is looking for the young boys who work here. They abandon school, to earn as little as R5 a day collecting and selling scrap metal. â\200\234Many of them are playing truant, and donâ\200\231t understand the value of.education,â\200\235 he says.

Magubane often goes beyond the camera to help the people he photographs. Over the years he has helped to reunite many runaways with their parents.

He explains that he will not interfere until, â\200\234They come to me. â\200\230Madala! Madala!â\200\231 they call me, â\200\230I want to go homeâ\200\231.â\200\235

Only five of the 35 boys and girls he has helped
have returned to the streets.

During the late 1960s, youth in other parts of the
world are expressing liberation through music and
drugs. On home soil, the photojournalist â\200\224 now in his
30s â\200\224 is covering momentous events for the Rand
Daily Mail such as the Rivonia trials and the
Sharpeville funeral. â\200\234I had never seen so many dead
people,â\200\235 he says.

Itâ\200\231s painful to bring up the past, but he does so
graciously. â\200\234I would find a person struggling, dying in
Sharpeville.â\200\235 But the photographs came first. â\200\234It was
only after, when I got home, when I ask my self, â\200\230What
are you doing?â\200\235

STRUGGLE IN FOCUS: Peter Magubane at his 2005 exhibition of Nelson Mandela photographs.
 Magubane endured â\200\224 arrests,
including a 556-day stint in solitary confinement. Picture: TEBOGO LETSIE

But the next morning, it was back on the streets
with camera in hand. He was driven by the belief that,
â\200\234The world will respond!â\200\235

Itâ\200\231s off the tar road and into the heart of the Jab-
ulani coal yard. Miniature mountains of depressing
nuggets block out the surrounding world. Dumpy,
squat, make-do homes sit sadly on the grit. A young
mother hangs bright clothing on a line, while a baby
boy plays in the sooty muck. Chicken cages are piled
up everywhere and a few escapees run in clucking
circles. A bitter smell saturates the air.

Starting as early as sunrise, these boys shovel
heavy coal for donkey-cart deliveries across Soweto.
In winter the skyline is smudged by them. â\200\234Itâ\200\231s
warmer here. They have coal and they have shelter.â\200\235
Magubane looks out the window. The biggest issue
facing these children â\200\224 exploited and devastatingly
poor â\200\224 he feels, is â\200\234without a doubt, education. With-
out education, thereâ\200\231s nothing you can do!â\200\235

A tough man recognises the photographer. â\200\234Heâ\200\231s
one of my boys,â\200\235 Magubane cheers. â\200\234He has been
working here for years.â\200\235

It is poignant that the boy Magubane
photographed in the â\200\23170s is his lead to the coal boys of
today. He has made his contact, so we leave this Ar-
mageddon moonscape for the livelier streets of Zola.

Teenagers decorate the curbs and parks. We over-
take a withering woman driving her wheelchair in the
left lane.

Sometimes Magubaneâ\200\231s work might step on toes.

. When he does get threats, he says very firmly, â\200\234I donâ\200\231t

take threats!â\200\235 He is a stubborn man, who is angered

when he doesnâ\200\231t get his own way. I can imagine most people backing down to his authority. After all, this man has gone up against the fierce reproach of a nationalist government, and has prevailed.

An otherwise normal day in June 1969 is life-changing for the newsman. The brutal fist of censorship will strike down hard. It is not the first time he has been harassed by the police, but this time he is dragged offto Pretoria Central Prison.

There he is interrogated about his farm-labour photographs. They demand he tell them if he â\200\234has been sent by the communists to put SA in a bad lightâ\200\235. They charge him under the Suppression of Communism Act and he is imprisoned in solitary confinement. Made to stand for five days and five nights on unstable bricks, he collapses on the fifth day.

Later that year, after being acquitted of the charges, they rearrest him immediately under the Terrorism Act.

Six months later, he is charged again under Section Six of the Terrorism Act, allowing for his indefinite detention.

The Rand Daily Mail publishes in May 1972:
â\200\234When they took Magubane away ... they turned him into a nonperson ... even his photographs may not be captioned.â\200\235

He is detained in solitary confinement for 556 days. Upon his release, he is forced to resign from the Rand Daily Mail and placed under a five-year banning order. True to his personality, he breaks the order and

Continued on Page 2

Load shedding is causing havoc in the economy. If you suffer damages, you can sue Eskom .

The process is however more complex than just suing them. This seminar will unpack, in non legalese,
the principles in terms of which Eskom can be sued. Guidelines and Tee} tips will also be given as
to how to prove a claim against Eskom.

ESKOM SEMINAR PROGRAMME

9:00 - 10:00 Why can you sue Eskom
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10:00- 11:15 Damages â\200\224

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Course material, teas and lunch
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ND REVIEW BAROMETER

Saturday-Sunday,

THE
May 10-112008 | WEEKENDER

Phuthu westerns and fake gangster rappers

AP music makes my stomach
turn. Iâ\200\231m suspicious of its per-
vasive Americanism and the cul-
tural hegemony media moguls
wield over undiscerning consumers the
world over, more so in gullible Africa.

Look how silly our children look, with
their oversized basketball shirts, drooping
pants and gangster gait that reminds one
of a constipated Nguni cow.

Thatâ\200\231s strange coming from a former
cultural mutt. Twenty-three years ago,
with my dusty feet curled up on my
parentsâ\200\231 brown velvety sofa, spaghetti
westerns were the best form of escapism
for children my impressionable age.

It allowed escape from the glare of the
scowling pantsula and marauding
comtsotsi, and the rubber bullets which
could graze my ankle if I dared stray too
far away from the safety of my folksâ\200\231 yard.

Can I equate this supposedly noble
resistance art form with the bestselling
Fong Kong of all times? Do contemporary
South African artists and musicians have
anything better to offer, aside from this

phuthu western, South African rap?

Watching the South African Music
Awards (Samas) last week, I was
convinced we do.

I suspect that, at the rate at which
African youth ape the American ghetto,
the motherland will in no time adopt the
filthy rag that is rap music, and soak up all
the bad language, aggression, misogyny,
anomie and reverse racism.

Out the sturdy African hut flies Eâ\200\231skia
Mphahleleâ\200\231s African humanism and
Mfuniselwa Bhenguâ\200\231s idea of weaving
ubuntu into western capitalism.

While watching the Sama awards

ceremony, an idea struck me like a bolt of
man-made Pietersburg lightning: indige-
nous Africansâ\200\231 version of rap music must
seem childlike to the record label boss
flopped on an animal-print swivel rocker
chair in a designer office somewhere in
Los Angeles.

Imagine Suge Knight of Death Row
Records, made famous by the late rapper
Tupac Shakur, sucking a cigar and chuck-
ling philosophically: â\200\234Yo, nigga. Dem
brodas in da motherlanâ\200\231 are trippin.â\200\235

Rewind to my adolescent version of
imported popular culture and I'll quickly
look for an anthill to bury my head in
faster than you can whistle an Ennio
Morricone score.

As recently as 1985, I couldnâ\200\231t be
caught dead fiddling with slingshots and
wire cars on Friday evenings. This had
nothing to do with girls and pubic hair.
Spaghetti westerns were the rage.

Remember director Sergio Leoneâ\200\231s
attempt â\200\224 in The Good, the Bad and the
Ugly â\200\224 at re-enacting a major Civil War
battle in Texas? The excessive violence in
the 1966 epic turned prissy America off,
while the unlikely cavalry battle amused
critics. For the record, no major battle
took place in Texas during this war.

But how we adored Leone films.

On Mondays at school, following the
flighting of a Leone western the previous
Friday, you looked like a wimp if you
didnâ\200\231t take part in the stories about gun-
fights and hangings.

Watching the quintessential cowboy
hero ride into the sunset, I had no
inclination the cast was Italian â\200\224 or
Spanish. Or that Leone had customised a

genre Hollywood had outgrown.

STRIKING A POSE: Youngsters look to rappers from the US for inspiration. Picture: GABRI ELLA FABBRI

Come to think of it, the last time anyone worth his cinematic salt had bothered to make, let alone watch avidly, a spaghetti western was in the mid-1970s.

The early 1960s marked the beginning of the end for the western, leaving continental filmmakers to fight over B-grade budgets, washed-out actors, and unrealistic plots. Itâ\200\231s easy to discern that the surreal, grotesque desert plains in The Good,

the Bad and the Ugly are not the Wild West but the Mediterranean countryside.

Such embarrassing geopolitical faux pas are a likely scenario if African children persist in their obsession with this ghetto garbage called rap music.

At the Samas, the immensely talented young African men and women the award organisers chose as presenters-nominees reminded me of director Leoneâ\200\231s Fong

Kong spaghettis. If it wasnâ\200\231t rapper HHP pounding his chest and _ jabbing aggressively into the air, a la Biggie, after winning the best hip-hop category, it was the laaitie presenter with cornrows giving groupies fake orgasms with his private-school twang.

Yet stunned silence bordering on discomfort filled the packed hall when a virtually unknown folk music singer from KwaZulu walked up to the stage to collect the award for best maskandi album.

No one had heard of Umgqumeniâ\200\231s i-Jukebox. Or the uncle from Ncandweni Christ Ambassadors, who took away the top-selling album award. 5

Unless Africa does something about its self-imposed cultural bondage, things it takes for granted will in the not-too-distant future fly over its head as objects and subjects of lecture-room discourses.

I, too, was embarrassed to discover recently that an academic had written a book about African headrests, what my late granny used to call isâ\200\231qamelo, as opposed to the western umgqamelo.

Itâ\200\231s not so much the cultural imperialism the west wields that irks me. I accept

it as a global village inevitability. After all, had civilisations not been subjugating and copying each, thereâ\200\231d be no Kaapse Klopse and Durban beach rickshaws.

Itâ\200\231s our failure to elevate ourselves that gives me sleepless nights.

I donâ\200\231t pretend to understand why Chinua Achebeâ\200\231s character, Okonkwo, an Igbo from the west African authorâ\200\231s deep-est creative recesses, had to wrestle instead of stick-fight. Fane ee

But Iâ\200\231d rather see my child wrestle than gang-bang.

JA-NEE
Nim Geva and Hannah

Morris

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Yes, life sucks, but itâ\200\231s j

ust a phase.

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] What are they saying?

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FREE SPEECH

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writer of the winning caption
according to the sole criterion of
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The prize will be a bottle of
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Mark entries BUBBLE and e-mail
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reach us by Tuesday at noon.
Please include your name,
telephone number and address.
The winner will be announced
next week.

LAST WEEKâ\200\231S WINNER
â\200\234| wish | was human, they have quickies.â\200\235 â\200\224˜
Submitted by Gary Michaels, Bryanston

hotographer who helped free SA

ontinued from Page 1

yet again, in 1972, he is dragged off to
serve another six months in prison.

As soon as he is out and able, he is back

on his news beat with the Rand Daily Mail. â\200\234No one was going to stop me from telling the truth!â\200\235

â\200\234IT have paid a price for being a photographer in this country.â\200\235 With poise he explains how he found ways and means of surviving in solitary confinement. His strength came â\200\234from God, and I knew that Ihad done absolutely nothing wrong! All I had done was to photograph the children working on farms.

â\200\234T could hear the other prisoners scream right through the night, being tor- tured. If I had thought I was the only one, I would have gone cuckoo. It helped me a great deal to know I was not the only one suffering. There were others suffering worse than me, on Robben Island, serving life sentences.â\200\235 :

Today he is a calm man who is quick to laugh, and it is clear he hasnâ\200\231t allowed resentment to fill his heart. â\200\234Forgive, and go on with your life. Donâ\200\231t forget, but go on with your life.â\200\235

The main intersection of Dube is a ustling, multilayered whirl of 2\1st- entury township life in SA. Magubane oins a patient queue to buy mealies. We hat about development in Soweto, the

new Maponya Mall and the stadium. About crumbling curbs and nonexistent pavements. About the people still without houses. He says passionately, â\200\234You cannot separate politics from people.â\200\235

It is June 16 1976. A phenomenon has swept the land. Word has spread like invisible fire. The black youth guard a

secret closely. Not even their teachers or

parents know ofthe planned march.

The nation will be shocked this cold winter morning, as news leaks of the protest against inferior Bantu education. It starts in Soweto, spreads to Alexandra, next to Pretoria and so its flames extend.

When journalists are prohibited from entering Soweto, Magubane is on the scene, equipment loaded. A soldier with a camera. In the distance he sees sinister black smoke. A signal of action on the ground. He flies between these sites. Police shots resound across Soweto. It is chaos. Magubane has more photographs on June 16 than any other photographer. Black-and-white images of the school- children fleeing from the downpour of

bullets intended to kill them.

Mixed emotions of terror
liberation saturate their faces.

This powerful turning point in a land
of oppression, forever recorded by
Magubaneâ\200\231s shutter. ;

During the course of the continuing
uprising, he is assaulted various times and

and

has his nose broken by police. But the
photos come first.

The world sees the undeniable horror,
the brutal retort and madness of apart-
heid. And the world responds.

Later that year, when the police incite
the Mzimhlope Hostel dwellers to attack
township residents, Magubane works into
the night covering the violence.

As he passes his Diepkloof home on his
way to the paperâ\200\231s offices, he sees his home
ablaze. He is powerless as he watches the
building crackle to the earth.

Again in August he is detained with
other black newsmen for 123 days.

As we pass the tourist queues outside
Madibaâ\200\231s old shoebox home, spilling into
Vilakazi Street, our conversation turns to
his time as official photographer to
Nelson Mandela.

Those years, between 1990 and 1994,
were, â\200\234Wonderful! Wonderful!â\200\235 He
expresses his gratitude to Madiba for the
amount of material given to him: close-
ups of his release, his symbolic return to
Soweto, and his early presidency.

This year, Magubane hopes to express
his gratitude with an exhibition during
Mandelaâ\200\231s birthday celebrations.

Magubane has 16 books, many of them
banned from local bookstores at the time
of publishing.

His subject matter is broad, from
vanishing cultures to life in postdemoc-

racy SA. â\200\234My photographs should educate
the entire world, not only South Africans,â\200\235
he says.

The 1980s opened international doors for the photojournalist. An assignment for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expanded his cause into Africa. â\200\234Through photography I have seen most parts of the world,â\200\235 he says. The starvation he witnessed in Somalia and Ethiopia â\200\234hits you right on the foreheadâ\200\235. But he hopes his photos inspire someone to help.

He was Time magazineâ\200\231s photographer in SA. On one assignment for them, in 1985, he covered a studentâ\200\231s funeral in Natalspruit and was shot 17 times. Back on the beat as soon as possible, in 1986, he stepped in to save a mother and daughter from an enraged crowd in Leandra.

At the end of our journey, as we enter his home, we are greeted by a vibrant painting of an Ndebele woman. His lounge is filled with bright, beaded pots and wooden carvings. In the corner an antique gramophone sits proudly near a black and white photograph of Magubane posing with a saxophone. From behind a straw hat, a young Sophiatown gent strikes a pose.

Light pouring in through a window illuminates Magubaneâ\200\231s trademark white hair. He has an exhibition coming up, called Apartheid in Focus. He shows me a

SOPHIATOWN GENT: This image of the young Peter Magubane hangs in his lounge.

harrowing image taken in the â\200\23150s. Lines of black men, applying for mining jobs, made to parade naked. We both sit in a momentâ\200\231s silence, until he breaks it.

â\200\234So, thatâ\200\231s apartheid for you. Oh, that exhibition is going to shock people.â\200\235