

told in the camera close-up technique of first person; Jo's in the long-distance one of third person and through the recollecting minds of Eeben and Beth. Then a part of Caroline's is told through her letters, as are some parts of Mafimane's. There are also Jo's memorial flashbacks, which make the past not far away and long ago, but a continuous, immediate present. All these give the narrative the pace and quality of a slow-motion picture in which the camera lingers continuously on the faces of the actors, to register their minute and slowly changing emotions. The technique also enjoins the reader to constantly adjust her/his emotional involvement in the story, in addition to adding to its technical as well as thematic complexities. This is particularly apposite in a novel about time and memories, as the title emphasises. As Beth surmises, 'memories were not the same as facts.... Without memories facts were like the bricks of a demolished house. It was memories that held them together, gave them shape, meaning' (p.88). Indeed, at another point, there is a brief debate about the uses of memory between Beth and Lettie. 'Old memories,' says, Lettie, 'are like too much fat. They block the arteries.' No, Beth disagrees, '...they're the oxygen in the blood' (p.133). It is memories of their repressed childhood, of their brutal father as symbol of Afrikanerdom, that destroy first Eeben, and then Jo. But then, it is also memory, a refusal to sweep the past under the carpet of naive forgiveness, that will save the future nation from its horrendous past. Individuals like Jo, Eeben and Mafimane may be crushed, but as long as the nation is saved, their tragedies would not have been in vain. At the group level, the point that Andrie's story drives home is that the Afrikaners have been as much dam-

aged by their oppression of others (to oppress others, you have to repress yourself) as the Black people; but that because they are the victimisers, their own damage has remained repressed, hidden and unrecognised.

Written in a simple lyrical style that verges on the poetic (especially in the numerous landscape descriptions), *A Duty of Memory* invites reading as a political allegory, especially of its numerous, obviously symbolic objects, actions and episodes: the tape as hidden/repressed memory which has to be brought out into the open; the birth of Jo and Mafimane at the same moment and together, plus the posthumous combination of their names in Jomane Enterprises, both encapsulating the past and future of South Africa; Jo's failed solo attempt to build a memorial wall in the kraal and her dream of Lettie (African), Beth (English) and Muller (Boer) cooperating to build it; and many more.

Although holding the advantage of numerical superiority, Blacks in South Africa never looked forward to the day when the Afrikaners would be driven into the sea, even in the days when war was considered the only option left for achieving freedom. Literature of reconciliation and racial integration has always poured forth from them, and from the pens of Coloured and Anglo-South African writers. Now that Afrikaners like W.P.B. Botha are adding their voice to this genre, we have reason to look forward to a real attitudinal sea-change in the country. For what *A Duty of Memory* shows is that, beyond its political and economic manifestations, apartheid was fundamentally a religious doctrine.

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## Reading Faces

Owen Logan

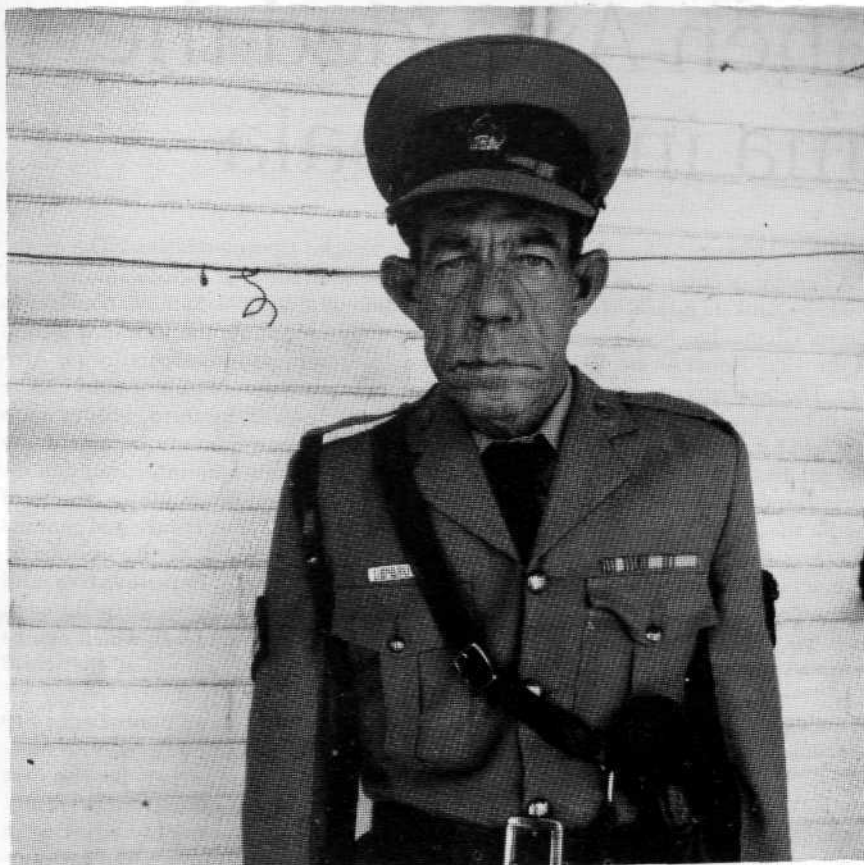
Roger Ballen, *CETTE AFRIQUE LA*, photo Poche Societe, Paris, 1997, 55 pp

**T**O summarise Roger Ballen's photographs in South Africa involves inevitable simplifications. The pictures are for the most part of white South Africans and have been made in a way slightly reminiscent of Diane Arbus. Extending the

parallel with north America one might borrow the term 'white trash' which, although harshly pejorative, doesn't seem out of place when approaching the images. Lionel Murcott's introduction to the photo poche publication remarks on the 'atavistic' bleakness to be found in these pic-

tures. Ballen has indeed sought out a particular version of whiteness in South Africa which may appear subversive in the context of the former apartheid regime. The psychological sense which Ballen has brought to the pictures suggests perversely damaged and fragmented identities which seem to spit on South Africa's former white face. Many of the pictures also suggest an unseen violence which is more frightening by its very absence. Apart from the occasional gun or truncheon, Ballen draws on more ambiguous

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Sergeant F. de Bruin, employé du Département des prisons, Etat libre d'Orange, 1992

props; soft porn posters and small pets, dogs of various sizes, domestic wiring and family pictures which all come together in this series to lead the viewer towards a view of increasingly internalised disturbance.

Ballen is quoted in Murcott's introduction, speaking metaphorically, of pinning a man against a wall to squeeze the essence out of him. The apparent brutality of Ballen's representation is tacitly exonerated within the framework of South Africa's racism, poor people rarely get this treatment by photographers unless they are also deemed to be scarcely. Murcott's introduction raises the ghost of *Heart of Darkness* in which Joseph Conrad made Africans into savages only just aware of their own

bitter suffering at the hands of a mercantile colonialism. Murcott goes on to say that Ballen's images stand at an ironic angle to that vision; 'the most basic, almost animalist man can surface in any group or locality'. The introduction may be an ill service to the photographer given that the writer seems unaware of the more subtle post-colonial critiques of Conrad's novel and with these in mind the 'ironic angle' becomes an extremely acute one. Until Chinua Achebe's critique of Conrad's 'classic', *Heart of Darkness* had always been revered as English literature's great indictment of colonialism specifically on the basis of the novel's exposure of the colonialist's moral descent. Ballen's images conjure with the same kind of Conradian trauma leaving Af-

rica as a domain against which civilisation may be measured. 'This Africa' is a place where Ballen's subjects are revealed in all their 'naked intensity', and the continuing suggestion in the text is that of a documentary process of unmasking. Colonial and settler mentalities have however, always been able to encompass their own 'savagery' and have revelled in notions of their own primality as a virtue of their supposed position at the vanguard of 'civilisation'.

It is difficult as a photographer to look at these pictures without being drawn into a comparison with David Goldblatt's very different pictures about white South Africans. Where Ballen is bold Goldblatt is understated and looks to complexities of relationships and nuance both within and beyond the language of documentary. It would of course be unfair to suggest that one photographer should be more like another but looking at one of Ballen's pictures showing a couple with their small boy one senses a missed opportunity which begins to pervade the whole body of work. The picture made in a typically full frontal way shows a couple - a white car mechanic with his black wife, on a bed between them their small son sits with his legs apart and arms waving. Encountered here the family seem to be simply another aberration. The questions raised by the picture are largely overlooked in Ballen's pictures which fail to escape apartheid's categories of racialised identity but rather in an attempt to make a direct opposition ends up taking them at face value.

• Logan, an independent photographer, has worked extensively in Morocco and Nigeria.