

AmaNdebele

Reviewed by Ruth Kerkham Simbao

Peter Magubane and Sandra Klopper.

AmaNdebele. 2005. Cape Town: Sunbird Publishing. R 299,95.

AmaNdebele is a very attractive book with beautifully reproduced colour photographs taken by the renowned photographer Peter Magubane, who secured enormous credibility as a photo-journalist during the violent years of apartheid. While some South African readers who browse through the glossy portrayals of ceremonial attire and homestead decorations may recall Magubane's earlier books such as *Soweto speaks* (1981) and *Soweto: The fruit of fear* (1986) in which the photographer laid bare the ferocious violence of apartheid rule, many readers will skip over the nuances of both Magubane's disrupted career and the contentious relationship between the Ndebele people and the South African apartheid government.

While these pertinent details are discussed in the very informative text on the history of the Ndebele people by Sandra Klopper, the general layout and the use of photographic images and captions pull the book in a different direction. While the thrust of the text stresses the considerable change that the Ndebele people have had to face under the influence of white farmers, the influx control system of the apartheid government, and the ensuing debate of KwaNdebele 'independence', the images and captions fall short of capturing the complexities of Klopper's text.

The disjunction between image and text is alluded to by Klopper herself. Introducing the topic of 'Fashion' Klopper (p.32) writes that,

Browsing through photographs of Ndebele women wearing beaded garments and brass



'Among younger married women, sunglasses, peaked caps and clip on neck rings form part of a carefully coordinated fashion statement rather than an intent to honour the symbolic practices that once played a significant role in defining gender roles and relations.'