

The anatomy of the crowd



By Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the demonstrating crowd at the forefront of the Soweto uprising on 16 June 1976. The ongoing debate about the origins of the uprisings include the view that it can be attributed to the dominance of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) during the 1970s and even the claim that the BCM led Soweto uprising. This has of course tended to obscure the true nature of the crowd taking part in the uprising, particularly the fact that this crowd was socially identifiable and impelled by specific grievances originating from the classroom and underpinned by cultural imperialism. This dates back to the early years of the Union of South Africa when Dutch and English, spoken by the white minority, were recognised as the official languages in South Africa. This ideological decision was adopted at the expense of languages spoken by the majority of the people in South Africa. The forceful imposition of Afrikaans and English as languages of instruction on a 50:50 basis in selected schools led to the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976. This chapter will confine itself to expanding debates on cultural imperialism and the politics of language, in other words, what happened outside the classroom. Why and how did the affected learners respond to indoctrination and what happened during the early morning of 16 June 1976 when the crowds of students from various parts of the township marched to Orlando West/Phefeni Junior Secondary School and were confronted by a cordon of armed and violent police. This meant that the protesting students were unable to present their grievances to the authorities of the Department of Bantu Education based at the regional office in Booyens, Johannesburg. In short, the chapter will analyse the anatomy of the crowd which demonstrated against the forceful imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools.

The chapter does not focus on what happened during the late afternoon of 16 June 1976 and throughout the week and the months that followed when, in response to brutal repression inflicted by police, the situation changed and the crowd began to

comprise other elements who dispensed a rough and ready type of natural justice by destroying property belonging to the state. This turn of events also included, among other things, attacking innocent residents, vandalism, burning down buildings, bottle stores and beer halls. Such disturbances distracted attention from the genuine student protest and with the subsequent commission of inquiry that was conducted, are covered in most other studies on the Soweto uprising. Martin Mahlaba, a journalist for *The Rand Daily Mail* wrote that ‘thugs and spivs’ cashed in on the chaos as thuggery took over what many in Soweto believed was a genuine student protest and demonstration based on valid grievances. Hence, apart from looting, robbing and arson later during the day, after 16 June, criminal gangs set up road blocks on roads into Soweto, demanding ‘protection money’ before allowing innocent motorists to pass through. Taxi drivers were also victims and were preparing to attack these criminal gangs.¹ These incidents are discussed in great length by the report of the Cillie Commission and other publications about the Soweto Uprisings.

As George Rudé highlights in his various publications, studies about the crowd in history dates back to interest in the French Revolution and also to the English urban riots or what are often referred to in historical terms as the food riots, including the Gin riots of 1736 and the ‘Wilkes and Liberty’ riots of 1768–1769 which took place in Britain.² Philip Bonner asserts that what needs to be integrated into the history of the struggle for national liberation in South Africa, is the study of what the authorities termed the riot as a key component of black political culture. He posits that the riot has never been seriously interrogated or theorised in South Africa, yet from 1940 onwards, it has been a central element in struggle politics, so much so that police authorities began to compile a register and profile the anatomy of riots. Like so many other features in black struggle politics, this was intimately related to accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation. For reasons that are still to be explained, this was the decade when Africans finally demanded to be recognised as urban residents.³

As primary evidence, this chapter will use archival material including banners, posters, placards, police statements, documentary photographs and other visual images related to 16 June 1976. Most of this original material is catalogued and housed at the South African National Archives in Pretoria. The poster displayed below forms part of this archival material. It might be amateurish in design when compared to impressive professionally designed anti-apartheid posters, banners and placards

1 ‘Thugs and Spies Cash in on Chaos’, *The Rand Daily Mail*, 19 June 1976.

2 See G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); G. Rudé, ‘Wilkes and Liberty, 1768–1769’, *The Guildhall Miscellany*, 8 (1957), 3–24; ‘The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and their Victims’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vi (1956), 93–114. On a different perspective about the crowd particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s in South Africa see N.C. Manganyi, ‘Crowds and Their Vicissitudes: Psychology and Law in the South African Courtroom’, in N.C. Manganyi and A. du Toit, *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); N.C. Manganyi, *Apartheid and the Making of a Black Psychologist* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), chapter 7.

3 P. Bonner, ‘Fragmentation and Cohesion in the ANC: The First Seventy Years’, in A. Lissoni, J. Soske, N. Erlank, N. Nieftagodien and O. Badsha, *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Wits University Press and SAHO, 2012), 7.



National Archives of South Africa

A clear message from the marching students addressed to Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Justice.

produced during the heydays of apartheid, but its message is poignantly effective and direct. The Soweto higher primary and secondary school students did not have access to professional art studios, nor did they have any support from creative artists when they designed their banners, placards and posters. It is possible that this poster, produced from cheap, readily available material, was designed on 16 June when the marching students noticed a column of heavily armed police moving into Orlando West to confront them. On the one hand, the poster labels Afrikaans as a daredevil, foreign language ideologically used to promote cultural imperialism. On the other, the crowd tells Jimmy Kruger, the minister of police, to leave the students (kids) alone so they can proceed with their peaceful protest march. The hatred the crowd expressed for Afrikaans refers to complex education and epistemological challenges which faced the students in the classroom; they were forced to learn mathematics, geography and biology in Afrikaans. The next section will analyse these issues which ultimately influenced the students to boycott classes, go on strike and stage a mammoth protest march on 16 June 1976. The outcome might well have been different had the police and authorities given serious attention to the messages held aloft by the marching crowd.

The marching crowd: Banners, placards, pamphlets, posters and freedom songs

Defining the youth at the forefront of the Soweto uprising is a complex but rewarding exercise. Various accounts and oral testimonies on the uprising raise questions about the age of the students involved in the march on 16 June 1976. This posits the question of the definition of the terms 'youth', 'childhood', 'schoolchildren', 'scholars', 'students', and 'pupils' (these days officially called 'learners'). According to Jeremy Seekings, the ambiguity attached to the term youth is probably greater in South Africa than elsewhere in the world, and is fundamental to the very concept of youth. Youth has a dual meaning in the English language, referring either to age or to the attributes generally associated with age and refers to the period between childhood and adulthood. South Africa underwent considerable social change in the 1970s; childhood, youth, and adulthood became blurred as the natural progression from home to school, and then to work became anything but commonplace. In this context the category of youth became increasingly understood in terms of attitude and behaviour, particular related to the process of political change. This gave rise to stereotypes based on interpretation of the broader process of political change. One stereotype was essentially sympathetic, the other hostile. The first, liberatory view, portrayed the youth as politicised and militant; the second, apocalyptic view, regarded the youth as destructive and rebellious.⁴

Pohlandt-McCormick emphasises the point that attempts to define words such as youth, childhood, child, and adolescence is sometimes easier in terms of what they are not, that is, they are not infants or adults. According to her, the boundaries between child, youth and adult, both in age and meaning, are not only penetrable but indefinite and shifting, and always historically specific. It is necessary to consider these terms not simply as defined by age or degree of maturity, behaviour, attitude or status, but determined instead by young people themselves, by their actions, by their definitions of themselves vis-à-vis- others, as different from others, and possibly from generations that came before them. They are also different from definitions imposed upon them by those from the outside and by adults, and different because of the particular historical context within which they emerged as a group, shaping itself, defining itself, explaining itself. During the 1970s school-going children also included young women and men in their twenties. 'School age' children were not necessarily enrolled in schools because education was not compulsory for Africans. Some spent their days as child-minders, hawkers, 'spanner-boys', motor-car mechanics or doing odd jobs. 'These are no children, these are men, these are women', a Soweto parent explained during an interview for a television documentary about the uprising. She made this instructive statement precisely because 12-, 13-, 14- and 15-year-old children took up the battle on behalf of their parents, whom they saw weakened and humiliated by white South Africans to the point of submission, and also because they had learned to shoulder responsibility at an extremely young age. Therefore, the children of Soweto

4 J. Seekings, *Heroes or Villains? Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1993).

1976 brought forth a new and distinctive generation, different from those who came before and after, a new age category of their own making, between adolescence and maturity.⁵

It is thus also crucial to note that a sizeable number of young primary school students from various parts of Soweto also took part in the march. Hector Pieteron was himself a young 12-year-old student from Itshepeng Higher Primary School – then neighbouring and sharing a perimeter fence with Morris Isaacson High School in Central Western Jabavu. The age of the Soweto 1976 marchers probably varied from nine-year-olds to those in their early twenties if one considers that some in the crowd had completed their secondary education and were no longer students at high school. A perfect example is the presence of Zweli Sizane and Mbuyisa Makhubo who joined the marching students. According to Colonel Kleingeld, in charge of the police contingent in June 1976, he confronted students gathering in Vilakazi Street and noticed ‘that the crowd no longer consisted only of school children ... Bantu men could be noticed among the crowd’. He also made the remark: ‘I also noticed that many in the crowd were not dressed in school uniform’.⁶

Various newspaper reports estimated the marching crowd at 10 000 students and as a young student at Phefeni Junior Secondary School, I was one of them. The humanist documentary photographs captured by Mike Mzileni and Sam Nzima, two of the most prominent photo-journalist in South Africa, vividly portray the mood of the marching crowd before the violent intervention by the callous police. The clenched fist openly displayed by the crowd of students signified the black power salute; the smiling faces of good-natured and well-behaved students symbolised the peaceful mood of the march before the brutality of the police force was unleashed on them. As a symbol of solidarity, the clenched fist united students across the ideological divide during the 1970s. Its non-sectarian use in the South African context by, among others, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), the African National Congress (ANC), trade unions and civic associations denoted unsurpassed commitment to the national liberation struggle. The clenched fist was accompanied by the slogan: ‘*Amandla ngawethu*’, meaning ‘Power to the People’ – a famous ANC slogan. It was also adopted by communists, leftists, anarchists, socialists, pacifists, workers and others who opposed the oppressive apartheid regime. The clenched fist was frequently also associated with the slogan ‘Black Power’ which led to the appropriation of the Soweto uprising by the Black Consciousness Movement.⁷ The use of the clenched fist in other countries, as in the Black Power struggles in the United States of America is also instructive. It still remains in the South African mind-set as a reminder of the heroes and heroines of the struggle for political freedom and national liberation.

5 Pohlandt-McCormick, ‘Doing Violence to Memory’, 10; Ndlovu, ‘The Soweto Uprising’.

6 National Archives of South Africa (NASA), testimony of Johannes Kleingeld, SAB K345, Vol 85, South African Police No: 2/21/12/12, Part 4.

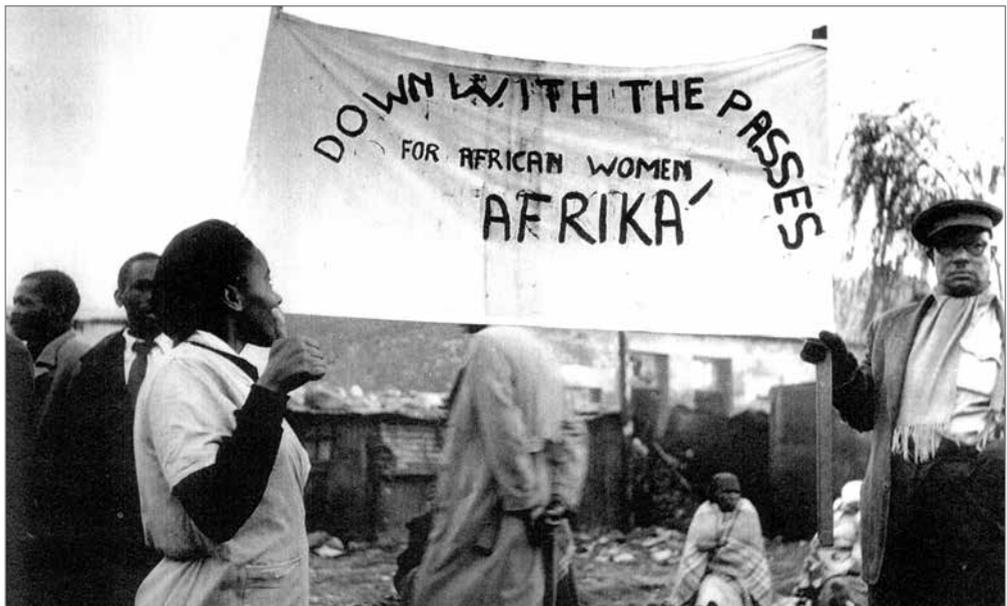
7 See also the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from 16 June 1976 to 28 February 1977, (hereafter Cillie Report). In the report the clenched fist is accorded the status of a threatening Black Power salute used as a shibboleth and a gesture of solidarity, power and authority, 110.

It originated with the ANC when it was formed in 1912 and together with the slogan ‘*Mayibuye iAfrica*’ and the national song ‘*Thina Silusapho lwe Africa*’, later replaced by ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’, draws attention to the Pan-Africanist origins of the liberation movement. The difference then was that the thumb protruded from the clenched fist, pointing up to the sky- symbolising the horn of Africa.

Darren Newbury and Ruth Kerkham Simbao have published insightful and critical studies on the student uprising and provide theories on the use and relevance of humanist documentary photography in apartheid South Africa. According to Newbury, photographs are not simply raw material for creating histories, they bring with them their own histories and are open to multiple interpretations and conflicting readings. Kerkham Simbao’s illuminating article on ‘Reading the Shadow in Sam

Nzima’s Iconic Photograph of Hector Pieterse’ illustrates this salient point, but because of the lack of space, I am not going to analyse the convincing arguments elaborated by the two authors.⁸ As Kerkham Simbao wrote in 2006:

Sam Nzima’s iconic photograph of Hector Pieterse has been reanimated in many ways over the last thirty years. Each re-articulation of the image, through two dimensional design or three dimensional performance, leaves a shadow behind it



Bailey African History Archive

A female activist displaying a banner against the law which compelled African women to carry passes. She also showcases the original Pan-African clenched fist sign with the protruding thumb symbolising the Horn of Africa.

8 R. Kerkham Simbao, ‘The 30th Anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings: Reading the Shadow of Sam Nzima’s Iconic Photograph of Hector Pieterse’, *African Arts*, 40, 2 (Summer 2007). This article was reproduced in A.K. Hlongwane, *Footprints of the ‘Class of 76’: Commemorations, Memory, Mapping and Heritage* (Soweto: Hector Pieterse Museum, 2008), chapter 4; D. Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), chapter 6.

and reveals the ability of this well-known and powerful image to accommodate a multiplicity of narratives. Far from relying on an ontological documentary core, the meaning of the photograph subtly changes with different uses, not destroying but building upon other interpretations and creating a fecund, multilingual 'translation' or palimpsest.⁹

One could perhaps postulate that Sam Nzima's documentary photograph does not necessarily only represent misery and does not symbolise the desperate action of a passive, defeated generation as represented by Antoinette Sithole (Musi), Mbuyisa Makhubu and the wounded Hector Pieterse. Indeed, the three subjects portrayed in Nzima's photograph are anything but weak, pitiable, inferior mortals. Instead the photograph symbolises the violence, cruelty and brutality of the apartheid regime which committed crimes against humanity. As portrayed in the documentary photograph below, taken by Mike Mzileni, the marching crowd was neither passive nor pitiable. It was not violent nor was it an unruly mob, or a crowd of mindless, unthinking savages on a mission to kill police and destroy government property as the Cillie Commission report, authorities representing apartheid regime and supporters would have us believe. Nat Serache a *Rand Daily Mail* journalist who was at the scene in Vilakazi Street on 16 June 1976 reported that the demonstration was peaceful before it exploded in response to police action. Prior to the intervention, he witnessed a crowd singing the African national anthem, '*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*', amid cries of 'Power...Power' as thousands of placard-waving high school students marched through Soweto towards Phefeni/Orlando West Junior Secondary School. The demonstrators, with their placards held high, blocked Vilakazi Street as they waited outside the school for another column of students to join them. This other column had been marching peacefully to Orlando West from distant Naledi Township.¹⁰

The marching crowd was made up of students from higher primary, secondary and high schools in Soweto and the participation of high school students was an expression of solidarity with students in junior schools who were the original leaders of the march. They were the ones who wanted to show their resistance to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in some Soweto schools. To maintain discipline and close control of the crowds, the demonstrating students wore their official school uniforms to make it possible to differentiate between bona fide students and criminal elements who might have taken advantage of the situation. It was not a threatening and inchoate mob as the authorities would like us to believe. It was not a belligerent crowd and did not molest the public as it proceeded peacefully to one of the intended destinations Phefeni Junior Secondary School in Orlando West. Antoinette Sithole, trying to comprehend how her brother, Hector Pieterse, at the time a student at Itshepeng Higher Primary School, had joined the marching crowd from Central Western Jabavu to Orlando West, where he was shot dead by the police, reflected:

9 Kerkham Simbao, 'The 30th Anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings'. See also D. Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*.

10 'The Peaceful Demo that Exploded', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

I think it was just out of curiosity [that he joined the march] because I had to ask myself afterwards how did the primary school children become involved because we were targeting high schools and secondary schools. I was told that the primary school children were so curious, that their teachers tried to stop them but they couldn't. So, Hector, who was a student at Itshepeng Higher Primary School adjacent to Morris Isaacson High School, joined me because he saw the crowd wearing uniforms similar to our school uniform at Thesele Secondary School marching down the road from Morris Isaacson School. He probably said to himself, my uncle is there, my sister is also there why can't I join the march.¹¹



Photograph by Mike Mzileni.

Note the smiling faces and clenched fists of the young students in official school uniform and the explicit political messages on the placards, posters and banners they held aloft. These were 12:- 13:- 14:- and 15-year-old students. What is also noticeable in this documentary photograph is the determination to put their message across to officials of the Department of Bantu Education and the sizeable number of young female students.

Antoinette Sithole's eyewitness accounts on the nature of the crowd challenges reports penned by authorities alleging that students who joined the several marches along the route to Orlando West did not do so voluntarily. A student at Thesele Secondary School, Sithole challenged the view propagated in the Cillie Commission claiming that students from Morris Isaacson High School violently forced and threatened the unwilling pupils at Thesele Secondary School into joining them; that when

11 Interview with Antoinette Sithole, conducted by Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu for the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum, Soweto, 20 July 2001.

the principal tried to intervene they had chased him away and forcefully took the unwilling pupils along.¹²

The marching crowd also included young people who had completed formal schooling. One such youth, Mbuyisa Makhubu, is adamant he was neither a ‘street urchin’ nor an ‘inciter’ as was claimed by Judge Petros Malan Cillie, the Judge President of the Transvaal Provincial Division, throughout the Cillie Commission report. Makhubu had completed his matric education at Orlando North High School the previous year in 1975. He was at his grandmother’s house in Orlando West when the demonstration by students was taking place. After hearing the commotion and seeing the fleeing students running towards his grandmother’s house for shelter from the hail of bullets, he went to investigate. He heard people shouting, ‘the Boers are killing people’, and ran to see what was going on. That is when he saw the wounded Hector Pieterse on the ground and he lifted him up.¹³ The rest is history.

Daniel Montsisi confirmed the central role played by female students during the June 16 protest march. He recalled, ‘now on our way to Morris Isaacson we met a van, it was a green bakkie, one of the municipality vans ... mostly the girls were in the forefront of the march’.¹⁴ Montsisi’s recollection is verified by available visual images and documentary photographs of the protest march. What we have failed to do as historians is to record, narrate and publish the liberating stories of these extraordinary, unsung, heroines. The challenge is for us to recapture their stories for they define the interconnected relationship between women’s emancipation and national liberation.¹⁵ We must also be mindful not to forget to link such a significant project to other international projects that include the role of women in their struggle against rampant fascism in Europe and Latin America during the 20th century. During our endeavours to write our history we must be wary of intellectual attempts to create a false division between the struggle for national liberation and women’s struggles in South Africa.

The use of documentary photographs as public history highlights their importance as archival material. Thus, the warm smile of the beret-clad and gap-toothed male student on the left, marching with his fellow female students leading the march towards Vilakazi Street in Orlando West provides us with primary evidence that challenges the interpretation offered by the state in the Cillie Commission. The crowd, singing freedom songs, was by no means made up of criminals wielding bricks, stones, batons, shields and knives. They were ordinary students who wore official school uniforms. They hoisted banners, placards, pamphlets and leaflets, made of cloth, paper, and wood panels and cardboard which immediately became historical documents because they recorded public history and the political issues of the day.

12 Ibid; see also Cillie Commission Report, 109.

13 Interview with Elizabeth Nombulelo Makhubu conducted by Sarah Mandrup, 19 May 2003, in A.K. Hlongwane, S.M. Ndlovu and M. Mutloatse (eds), *Soweto 76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggle. Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16 1976* (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2006), 73.

14 Testimony of Daniel Montsisi to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), 22 July 1992.

15 See also Pohlandt-McCormick, ‘Doing Violence to Memory’, chapters 5 and 6.



Photograph by Sam Nzima.

Besides the messages expressed on placards, pamphlets and banners, this documentary photograph also captures the decisive role of young female students who represented an integral component of the protest march. None of the students look threatening or disposed to act violently.

The overtly political messages rejected cultural imperialism and the ideological abuse of education as a tool for political control by the apartheid regime.

The marching crowd captured these political message on their banners and placards which had an assortment of messages such as: 'Afrikaans must be abolished'; 'To hell with Afrikaans'; 'We do not want Afrikaans'; 'Today is the burial of the boere taal'; 'Away with Afrikaans'; 'Vorster and Kruger shall not go to heaven'; 'My baas MC Botha is a shit'; 'Afrikaans stinks'; 'Afrikaans is a language of the oppressors'; 'Vorster and Kruger are Rubbish multiply by Nonsense: Away with Afrikaans'; 'If we must do Afrikaans, Vorster must do Zulu'; and 'We are fed the crumbs of ignorance with Afrikaans as a poisonous spoon'.¹⁶ What did it all mean? The crumbs of ignorance refers to cultural imperialism, and Afrikaner ideology was all too clear – to

¹⁶ See various newspapers published on 16 June 1976; and evidence at the South African National Archives, Pretoria (hereafter NASA) in the Report of the Cillie Commission of Inquiry.

permanently enslave the African mind and create a class of docile students who would be expected to mimic white South Africans and provide a buffer zone of protection for the white minority regime. When the student demonstrators left Naledi High School on the morning of 16 June, a banner with the following words was fastened to the fence of the school, 'We shall not use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The DBE¹⁷ is formed of ignorant fools. It (Revolution) happened in Angola. Why not here?'¹⁸ These banners, pamphlets and placards were simple but effective weapons of the struggle used by the marching crowd to attack and denounce the apartheid regime whose officials included M.C. Botha, the Bantu Education minister; John Vorster, the Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa; and Jimmy Kruger, the Justice minister. The placards and pamphlets were a means of communicating the marching crowd's sentiments about Bantu Education because African people were not represented in the formal structures of government. The marchers were politically powerless and without a vote and the apartheid regime excluded them from formal structures because it did not want Africans to influence its policy-making bodies whose authorities arrogated themselves the power and the right to prescribe white languages as the medium of instruction in African schools. Moreover, the marching crowd was conscious of the fact that these racist policies were against the principles of freedom, fairness, equity, justice and democracy. The overtly political messages such as the reference to the war in Angola in one of the banners highlight that the protesting crowd was not passive, docile, weak, defeated and oblivious to the geopolitics of the Cold War in the African continent. The crowd opposed white supremacy and imperialism, and was determined not to accept the political and socio-economic domination of Africans by the apartheid regime, a surrogate and client state of western superpowers. Therefore the assertion and arguments articulated by some experts that it is ahistorical to focus on educational and epistemological causal factors or pay attention to the language issue when analysing the origins of the uprising is unconvincing. In short, the message displayed in the placard about Angola also focuses on educational matters, that is, the marching students were well educated in terms of the geo-politics of the world.

Apart from directing their messages to the ruling white minority government, the students' pamphlets, banners, placards and leaflets were also designed to mobilise the people of Soweto. The overtly political and educational placards and pamphlets communicated a message of solidarity between the protesting students and the oppressed masses. They were also aimed at winning the hearts and minds of ordinary people, grandparents, parents and teachers – asking them to join the students' fight against the apartheid regime. The unity in action was a call for support in the struggle for equality, justice and the provision of a good education for all in a democratic and non-racial South Africa. It also challenges the hegemonic narratives constructed by the exponents of Black Consciousness. They maintain that the protesting students on

17 Department of Bantu Education.

18 The Cillie Report, 108. The commission was chaired by Justice P.M. Cillie.

16 June 1976 displayed banners and placards that signified their unqualified support of the Black Consciousness Movement because some of the banners displayed the words 'Black Power'. They avoid analysing the actual message on other banners, pamphlets and placards which were also hoisted high by the marching crowds. When provided with contrary evidence in the documentary photographs shown above, these ideologues shift the argument to the public display of the clenched fist by the crowd and this symbolism is often cited as primary evidence to reach the same unconvincing conclusion. But then the Nguni translation of the 'Black Power' slogan is '*Amandla ngawethu*'. It was and still is a favourite slogan of the ANC, but the ANC does not own it – it belongs to the people – and therefore power to the people. As I have already noted, the clenched fist, as a symbol of Pan-Africanism, also originated with the ANC after it was founded in 1912. The politics of language and slogans among black people extends to yet another site of struggle.

While we have hardly scratched the surface in terms of recording and preserving our past, we must also be conscious of attempts to dismiss the importance of public history and voices linked to our neglected history. An example of this was the action taken by white parents in persuading Oxford University Press to censor its secondary school history textbook by removing one of the documentary photographs portraying the mood of the crowd on 16 June 1976. The photograph in question is Mike Mzileni's visual image of the marching student poster that reads 'TO HELL WITH AFRIKAANS'. It is showcased in the opening section of this chapter. The censorship



An example of one of the posters held aloft by the students. The clenched fist openly displayed by those in the crowd signified the black power salute.

was carried out by the publishers after ‘complaints’ were voiced by white parents and ‘concerned representatives’ of the ‘Afrikaner community’. But whose public history is it anyway? Surely the views of the ‘Afrikaner community’ and ‘white parents’ do not represent the majority in a non-racial democratic South Africa. The photograph is also displayed at the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum.

Freedom songs and performance

The protest march on 16 June was definitely not a solemn march and the crowd sang heartily as they walked. Among other songs, two of the most popular were ‘*Senzeni na?*’ and ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’. Freedom songs are an integral part of a people’s culture and their meaning came across as intertwined with the political messages displayed on the banners and placards. We can conclude that those in the crowd possessed historical consciousness in high doses and were expressing their emotion in song. On 16 June 1976, Murphy Morobe recalls the following about these redemptive songs of freedom:¹⁹

On the 16th June I left my home [in Orlando East] for school at 7 am and got to school [Morris Isaacson] at about 8.15am. On arrival I found that students had already left and I managed to trace them in the direction of Thesele Secondary School [this is probably the group that was joined by the young Hector Pieterse]. I joined the procession and we moved towards White City, met pupils from neighbouring schools and then moved towards Mofolo, the route to Dube. We moved past Dube towards Orlando West and there were no incidents nor police interference till we came to Orlando West ... students were singing *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*...we moved along Orlando West High which is next to Phefeni Junior Secondary ... and we were joined by others....

The singing of ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’, meaning ‘God bless the African continent’, by the marching crowd was also confirmed by Sophie Tema a journalist with *The World* newspaper. She wrote that a crowd of students estimated at ‘thousands’ had gathered in front of Phefeni Junior Secondary School and were singing the Sesotho version of the oppressed African people’s national anthem, ‘*Morena Boloḱa Sechaba Sa Heso*’.²⁰ It is worth pointing out that ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’ was the national anthem of the oppressed black majority in South Africa at the time and it was first adopted by the ANC during the late 1920s because it represented – and still represents – a call for compassion, human solidarity and human dignity to be restored to the African continent and its people. This was also the case with the ANC’s first official anthem ‘*Silusapho lwase Africa*’, meaning we are the children of Africa, composed by Reuben Caluza in 1913. This anthem was later replaced by ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’, composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897. In 1927, Samuel Mqhayi added several isiXhosa stanzas.

19 NASA, SAB K345, Volume 148, Part 19, Commission Volume 102, 4902, Murphy Morobe’s testimony before the Cillie Commission, February 1977. See also Hlongwane, ‘The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprising Routes’.

20 ‘World Car Rushes Shot School Riot Victim to Clinic’, *The World*, 17 June 1976. This is Tema’s eyewitness account of the death of Hector Pieterse.

The haunting melody constitutes the first part of the official national anthem of the democratic South Africa. In a country where white minority rule attempted to eradicate not only African culture, but also essential humanity, Africans retained and developed their songs as a way of resisting, protesting, remembering, enduring, celebrating and subverting white rule. The ANC formally adopted these national anthems during the reigns of Louis Botha, Jan Smuts and J.B.M. Hertzog. Thus, about the songs of protest and freedom, Antoinette Sithole remembers:²¹

On June 16, at school the pupils gathered for assembly as they usually did. Suddenly there was a loud sound...then I observed a group of pupils from Morris Isaacson High School making a noise at the gate...the group entered the school, and it was clear that assembly could not continue. All the pupils started singing and chanting ... they were singing 'Senzeni na?'... it was now time to demonstrate. One of the pupils from Morris Isaacson told the pupils at Thesele Secondary that they were going to march from Jabavu (CWJ) to other high schools and secondary schools...

The highly creative crowd improvised the lyrics of 'Senzeni na?' by incorporating an old freedom song '*Thina sizwe esimnyama*':

Senzeni, na (x2)?
 Amabhunu (ayizinja x2)
 Sono sethu ubumnyama (x2)
 Thina sizwe esimnyama
 Sikhalela umhlaba wethu
 Owathathwa ngabamhlophe
 Mabawuyeke umhlaba wethu
 Unzima lomthwalo ufuna sihlangane
 Asikhathali noma siyaboshwa
 Sifuna inkululeko²²

The lyrics of these freedom songs focus on issues of race, racism, land, justice, unity and freedom in our lifetime. This intervention through songs of protest and liberation directed towards the public was vital because the South African struggle for national liberation was not simply for inclusion of the oppressed majority in what white politicians called a 'plural society' with white South Africans at the helm. It was a struggle for power and land in a society consisting of the oppressor and the oppressed; of exploiters and the exploited. So the marching students sang: '*thina sizwe esimnyama, sikhalela umhlaba wethu, owathathwa ngabamhlophe, mabawuyeke umhlaba wethu*'. These lyrics imply that the socio-economic factors which motivated European settler action and colonialism were land hunger and territorial ambition. South Africa was a society in which those who opposed land dispossession and the inhumanity of racist white minority rule were incarcerated in jail, tortured and killed. This was because the exceedingly violent, racist system could not be maintained in any other way. For the oppressed majority, human solidarity and unity in strength

21 Interview with Antoinette 'Tiny' Sithole, conducted by Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 20 July 2001.

22 Hlongwane, *Footprints of the 'Class of 76'*, 61.

underpinned their quest for freedom because *'unzima lomthwalo, ufuna sihlangane, asikhathali noma siyaboshwa, sifuna inkululeko'*. Even though carrying this heavy burden was demanding for the youth and students, the quest for liberty, emancipation and justice was of fundamental importance to them. These lyrics signified the high level of political commitment and historical consciousness as expressed by the marching crowd of students. In his study of the history of African-American freedom songs, which also applies to the South African socio-political situation, Amiri Bakara (Leroi Jones) noted:²³

As I began to enter into the history of the music, I found that this was impossible without, at the same time, getting deeper into the history of the people. That it was the history of the people as a text, tale, as story, as exposition, narrative, or what you have....that the music was explaining the history as the history was explaining the music, and both were expressions of and reflections of the people!

If we focus on a broader political perspective by contextualising these freedom songs in the realms of apartheid education, we reach the conclusion that the crowd displayed perceptive political acumen. They understood that by imposing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in selected African schools in Soweto, white authorities were actively perpetuating racism, obedience, communal loyalty, ethnicity, national diversity, racial discrimination and white supremacy through cultural imperialism. The apartheid government's so-called Bantu Education curriculum produced knowledge which placed whites at the centre of the production of knowledge, emphasising the exercise of power by white men as a privileged group. The basic belief was underscored that whites belonged to a superior race group and were in charge of producing the content to be taught in Afrikaans – the language of the colonial master. As a result, the crowd, conscious of the fact that singing was one of the most potent cultural weapons in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid asked the rhetorical question, *'Senzeni na?'* – what have we done to deserve this racist white rule and domination? The 'Sosiale Studie' syllabus did not promote the notion of equality, or that civilisation can derive from an interaction of different cultures. Such a humanist perspective was totally absent in the curriculum promoted by the apartheid regime. Superiority is always relative, and requires that other oppressed groups are discredited. To enhance the claims of white South Africans, the past, the ancestry and character of subjugated Africans was proclaimed by the Bantu Education curriculum as backward, barbarian, savage and inferior in a subtle, patronising manner. And through song, the marching crowd retorted that this was inflicted upon them because, *'isono sethu ubumnyama'* – for us to be subjected to such humiliation and privations is because 'our sin is that we are black'. The assertion of these lyrics confirm that by imposing Afrikaans as medium of instruction through Bantu Education as a weapon of oppression, the apartheid regime was acting in conformity with a plan of action about white minority

23 A. Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), iv–x. S.L. Redmond *ANTHEM: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

rule by Boers and Britons, expressly included in the 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging which subsequently led to the imposition of English and Afrikaans as official languages by the white-led government of the Union of South Africa. Therefore songs such as ‘*Senzeni na?*’ were sung by the crowd on 16 June 1976 as a medium of communication to conscientise, educate, inform, politicise and liberate the people. Such songs had the ability to communicate feelings of joy, sorrow, anger, protest, frustration, desire, hate, love and triumph against the harsh conditions instituted by the enemy. ‘*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*’ and ‘*Senzeni na?*’ reflected the deepest thoughts, meanings, feelings, aspirations and provided a tremendous source of sustenance for the marching crowd.²⁴ Another protest song, ‘*Sizobadubula Ngembayimbayi*’ literally means ‘we will bombard the enemy with canons’ and through the lyrics, the crowd acknowledged the military struggle and its leadership which included Robert Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela.²⁵

The role of the media

Among the crowd on 16 June 1976 were representatives of the media, particularly African journalists who worked for daily newspapers such as *The World*, *The Rand Daily Mail* and *The Star*. The media was consciously used by the crowd to relay sentiments of dissatisfaction, grievance or outrage to the authorities of the apartheid regime. *The Star* newspaper reported that ‘placards being carried by the marching pupils read ‘Afrikaans will spoil our future’ and ‘Down with Afrikaans as a medium of instruction’. The government of the day certainly got the message because an enraged Justice Minister issued a statement in parliament on the evening of 16 June 1976. He acknowledged that student dissatisfaction with their curriculum had been brewing in Soweto since the beginning of the month. According to Kruger, at about 8.15am about 10 000 pupils launched a rowdy procession. They were aggressive, screamed inciting slogans, carried banners, attacked the police who were present and threw stones at them. What is interesting about Kruger’s statement is the fact that he does not mention a single word about the police violence or the killing of students such as Hector Pieterse, Hastings Ndlovu and others. However, in his statement, he specifically mentioned two vehicles belonging to the West Rand Administration Board that were overturned by the students and the subsequent killing of a white man and a black man who were chopped to death. There was much attention in the press and other forms of media (radio and television) given to the death of Melville Edelstein, a white welfare officer, who worked in Soweto. The African worker who worked for the municipality was nameless in most of the reports but he survived, though he was badly injured and his name was Hamilton Mtambo. Kruger added that two police dogs were chopped to death and set alight, ten police vehicles were

24 On these views and the role of songs in liberation history, see N. Ramoupi, ‘*Izingomazo Mzabalazo’ Esiqithini!* Role of Songs in the African Liberation Struggle of South Africa, 1960–1991: A Cultural History of Robben Island’, PhD, Howard University, 2013.

25 Hlongwane, *Footprints of the ‘Class of 76’*, 61–62.

damaged and several policemen were injured. He did not fail to mention that the vehicles of four white women who worked in Soweto were damaged, and that these women were badly injured and admitted to hospital. He also stated that various buildings and cars were set alight while the police tried everything they could to bring the rioters under control but were eventually obliged to fire warning shots over the protestors' heads.²⁶ The Justice Minister also presented a speech in parliament on 17 June. It was remarkable for its emphasis on the *rooi gevaar* tactics of the National Party against the supposed communist threat that hung over the country; his fear of the clenched fist and the slogan 'Power' (*Amandla*) observed in the crowd. The agitated Justice Minister then asked his fellow white parliamentarians the following contrived questions:²⁷

What would have caused that? ... the young people walked with their fists in the air. Why do they walk with upraised fists? Surely this is a sign of the Communist Party. I do not want to accuse them of being Communists, but where does this walking with upraised fist come from? Why do they walk through streets shouting the word 'power'? Where do these things among the young people come from? The question also arises: How is it that they are such skilled incendiaries, so that we are no longer able to contain arson?

The constant repetition by government officials and the police of such catch-phrases as rowdy, rampaging mobs with clenched fists, obscure the true nature of the demonstration and the fact that the make-up of the crowd was socially identifiable and impelled by specific grievances and motives other than arson and smashing of windscreens. The first official statement from the government, presented by Kruger, made no mention of the fact that some of the marching students had been shot, killed and injured by the police. The lives of the dead and injured students did not matter to Kruger and other officials of the apartheid regime. They repeatedly claimed that the police were forced to fire warning shots over the heads of the protesting students. But the late afternoon edition of *The World*, on 16 June 1976, published Sam Nzima's iconic photograph of the badly injured Hector Pieterse shot by the police and carried by Mbuyisa Makhubu with Antoinette Sithole accompanying him. The facial expressions of Makhubu and Sithole were anguished and grief-stricken – indicating a change in the mood of the shocked crowd. The three certainly did not represent the 'skilled arsonists or incendiaries' referred to by Kruger later that evening. *The World* also mentioned that among the dead and injured were students, an old man and a white motorist.²⁸ Surely by the evening of 16 June 1976, before presenting his parliamentary speech, Kruger knew that there were dead students among those killed as a result of the Soweto uprising.

The marching crowd was composed of social elements with their own distinctive identities, interests, and aspirations. It was not a rowdy procession. The students

26 'Riot-Kruger speaks', *The World*, 17 June 1976,

27 *Hansard*, House of Assembly Debates, 17 June 1976, 9640–9642, Speech by the Minister of Police.

28 '4 Dead, 11 Hurt as Kids riot', *The World*, 16 June 1976,

were not aggressive and did not scream inciting slogans. But even if the crowd was impregnated with and stimulated by ideas propagated by the banned ANC, PAC and the South African Communist Party, as Kruger alleged, the crowd cannot be defined as a mere passive instrument of these organisations. Kruger's official statement about aggressive students screaming inciting slogans was also punted by *The Argus*, a newspaper which catered for white readers based in the Cape. It presented the crowd as an inchoate, bloodthirsty, rampaging mob, informing its white readers about:²⁹

Angry Soweto school pupils who rioted and stoned a large contingent of police at Phefeni Junior Secondary School in Orlando West early today. At least one pupil was shot as police fired hundreds of rounds into the air ... police cars ... had their windscreens smashed by the rampaging students.

But a different version was recorded by another Johannesburg-based newspaper. It reported that a senior student had addressed the crowd at Phefeni Junior Secondary School. The student said 'Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you, stay calm. We have just received a report that the police are coming. Don't taunt them. Don't do anything to them. Be cool and calm. We are not fighting'. This peaceful line – 'we are not fighting' became a standard. It was displayed on various banners, placards, pamphlets, posters and leaflets after the police had shot hundreds of protestors when the Soweto uprising spread across the country. An example is provided below in the photograph of protesting students from Langa Township in Cape Town in the aftermath of the Soweto march. These are students who, in a show of solidarity, joined their Soweto counterparts as the uprising spread to other provinces in South Africa. Their message captures the spirit of the marching crowd in Soweto.

Although I have cited white daily newspapers such as *The Star*, *Rand Daily Mail* and *The Argus* and used them for primary evidence, white journalists were barred from entering African townships. It is critical therefore to note the abuse of African journalists who worked for *The Star* and *Rand Daily Mail* whose white editors censored their original submissions. According to James Saunders, African journalists were continuously subjected to a humiliating degree of editorial interference. Nat Serache, an African journalist from Soweto who worked for *The Rand Daily Mail*, felt that his copy of the June 16 uprising was being butchered by the politically biased white editors. One of the white journalists, Patrick Laurence claimed at the time that 'blacks were less inclined to question eyewitness accounts and were more likely to give credibility to the police brutality. White reporters in supervisory positions were more critical'. Mike Dutfield later informed Les Payne in an interview:³⁰

I collected the blacks' stories and wrote articles for the white edition of the newspaper. The black reporters were out in Soweto risking their necks and I was back in the office getting credit for the stories in the paper. For a while it was getting hostile. The blacks did not like the set-up, and I do not blame them.

29 *The Argus*, 16 June 1976.

30 J. Saunders, *South Africa and the International Media: A Struggle for Representation, 1972–1979* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 176. See also L. Payne, 'Most Facts Off-limits to South African Press', *Newsday*, 6 February 1977.



Solidarity with Soweto students. These protesting students were from Langa High School, Cape Town. The students' message to the apartheid regime is clear: 'We are not fighting, don't shoot. Just release our fellow students'.

Later, Harry Mashabela, one of the African journalists who worked for *The Star*, wrote a book about the uprising basing it on his eyewitness account.³¹ According to Percy Qoboza, the editor of *The World* newspaper, the responsibility of keeping South Africa and the outside world informed about what was happening in Soweto fell on the shoulders of black journalists such as, among others, Sophie Tema, Willie Bokala, Joe Thloloe, Mothobi Mutloatse, Gabu Jan Tugwane, Mashabela and Serache. African journalists were traditionally consigned the role of unsung gatherers of facts who turned over their notes to white journalists, who generally, with the aid of white editors, received all the credit for the story.³² This is the main reason why the book *Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976* (1998) relies largely on *The World* newspaper for primary evidence and archival material.

Violent police confrontation and the crowd

The white police who led the violent confrontation with the crowd saw themselves as the lawfully constituted authority defending white minority rule against the

31 H. Mashabela, *A People on the Boil: Reflection of Soweto* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987).

32 Saunders, *South Africa and the International Media*, 175.

attacks of, what they believed was, a tyrannous crowd of African students. This can be inferred from the report filed by African journalists about the first shot fired at the demonstrators. The report, written by Jan Gabu Tugwana was published in the morning newspaper, *The Rand Daily Mail* of 17 June under the headline 'First Shots Fired in White City'. On June 16, Tugwana was in the company of Nat Serache, a fellow journalist at *The Rand Daily Mail*, and together they covered the demonstration and were accompanied by Zweli Sizane. Another report about the same incident was written by Serache and was published in the same edition of the newspaper.

Tugwana and Serache both wrote that shortly after 8.00am, they noticed two students hoisting placards referring to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and mentioning the prime minister, John Vorster. One placard read: '50-50 Afrikaans and 50-50 Zulu for Vorster' and the other had a similar message: 'If we must do Afrikaans, Vorster must do Zulu'.³³ A car driven by a plain-clothed policeman, carrying two white and one black member of the police force, stopped near the two students. One of the white policemen who was clearly flabbergasted by the message, got out of the car and chased one of the students, but could not catch up with the demonstrator. He then produced a pistol and fired two shots in the air and one directed at the fleeing student – but did not hit him. Seemingly, the white policeman who was probably a white supremacist, was shocked when African students had the temerity to demand that B.J. Vorster, the white Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa, should be subjected to the very same regulation that applied to African students. After all, the students might well have argued, Vorster should by rights learn isiZulu and proclaim this indigenous African language, which was and still is the most widely spoken language in South Africa, as an official language. Both the protesting students and the agitated white police understood the politics and power of language in apartheid South Africa. Serache further noted that later during the day the same policeman was seen arresting a woman in Orlando after she shouted, 'power' when a military helicopter from a military base nearby Baragwanath Hospital landed outside Orlando Police Station.

According to the official record, Colonel Kleingeld led a group consisting of 48 policemen, 40 of whom were black and 8 were white. The police squad was transported in four police cars, three heavy vehicles and two patrol vans with dogs. Before they left Orlando East Police Station, revolvers, pistols, three automatic rifles, ammunition and tear-gas grenades were issued to them. All the black policemen were handed riot batons referred to by Joaquim Antonio Saude, a lieutenant in the South African Police, stationed at Orlando East, as 'kierries'.³⁴ Only the white policemen were allowed to carry guns. At a press conference on 20 June 1976, Michael Kaufmann of *The New York Times* asked Jimmy Kruger why the police had not used rubber bullets, and the reply from the racist justice minister was that rubber bullets 'make

33 'First Shots Fired in White City'; and 'Police Fired – then I Saw Four Children Fall', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

34 Cillie Report, 113.

(African) people tame to the gun'.³⁵ As highlighted in Sam Nzima's documentary photograph, the retreating students did not wield dangerous weapons which could be used to counter the police's heavy firepower. They used readily available stones and bricks as ammunition and corrugated iron rubbish bin lids as shields. The cornered students did not run away from the well-armed police and their response was not an act of cowardice but symbolised bravery, valour and active resistance against police brutality. That is why most of the post-mortems indicate that these fearless students were not shot in the back, running away. The police bullets easily pierced through the students' shields and the wounds inflicted were on the front of the body, facing the police gunfire. These were not bullets fired above the heads of the protesting students. Alf Khumalo, a photo-journalist working for the *Sunday Times* wrote that he arrived on the scene at about 11.00am when the confrontation between the police and students had already commenced in Orlando West. He began his column by noting that there were 'small bodies writhing in pools of blood in the dust. Screams of anger and pain. These are my memories of a day I will never forget'. Khumalo remembered looking at the young students (mere children) in their school uniforms and wondering how long they would stand up to the well-armed police squad that was firing at them. Suddenly a small boy dropped to the ground next to him but the other students were unfazed and did not scatter or run away from the scene. Khumalo



Photograph by Sam Nzima.

The mood of defenceless students changed after they were attacked by gun-toting police. Photograph by Sam Nzima.

35 Jimmy Kruger's insensitive statement, cited in Saunders, *South Africa and the International Media*, 168.

emphasised that what frightened him more than anything else was the attitude of the young students; they seemed oblivious to danger. They continued to run towards the police – dodging and ducking the bullets.³⁶

Sergeant Hattingh, who accompanied Colonel Kleingeld to Orlando West from the Orlando East Police Station gave evidence to the Cillie Commission that he had aimed his gun directly at the protesting crowd. His first shot was intended to prevent an attack by the students and the other five were aimed at the legs of people who were bearing down on him. Hattingh shot Hastings Ndlovu at point blank range and the bullet struck him on his forehead, between the eyes. Hattingh claims that he did this, because, according to him, Ndlovu charged at him with a brick in his left hand and a kierrie in his right. However, in his official statement, signed under oath, Hattingh confirmed that there were no warning shots fired into the air when he killed Ndlovu. The armed white policemen simply fired at the crowd. The black police were only armed with batons (or *kierries*). Hattingh elaborated:³⁷

At this point, I heard the command ‘Take up your weapons and FIRE’. I saw Lt. Col. Kleingeld [Kleingeld] fire a volley of ammunition to the right of the crowds and other members also fired. I, myself, stood up and pulled out my firearm. A tall, thin Bantu man with a brick in his left hand and a knobkerrie in his right hand came storming at me. I fired directly at him to stop him from attacking me. I saw him fall on the tarred road. I fired another 5 shots at the legs of the assailing crowd. I didn’t see anyone else fall. After the volleys of ammunition that we fired, the crowds fell back. We were commanded to retreat to the open piece of ground where there are no houses ... The firearm that was issued to me is a Webley 38 Revolver, no. A.4729... On the 23/06/1976, at the State Mortuary in Johannesburg, I identified the corpse of a Bantu man [Hastings Ndlovu] as the person whom I shot on the 16/06/1976.

Hattingh’s report and eyewitness account signed under oath late in June 1976 when his memory was still fresh highlights an important point in terms of the site where Hastings Ndlovu was shot. He alludes to the fact that there were no houses in the vicinity of the incident. The implications are that this violent incident could not have taken place in Vilakazi Street but could have taken place in Khumalo Street around the vicinity of the Orlando West bridge where there are no houses. According to evidence provided by both Colonel Kleingeld and Hastings Ndlovu’s father, Elias, this is the area where police had assembled en-route to Vilakazi street during the morning.

Colonel Kleingeld, the leader of the police squad, informed the Cillie Commission that after using his pistol, he fired about 20 shots in a few bursts over and in front of

36 *Sunday Times*, 20 June 1976. The angry students later confronted Alf Khumalo while he was photographing various scenes. A young girl hit him on the head with a rock. He was dazed but still on his feet but then the students saw reason and led him away to a place of safety. However, his camera was stolen.

37 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Martinus Johannes Hattingh. All translations of the police statements from Afrikaans to English are by Leonor van Niekerk.

the rioting crowd from an automatic rifle.³⁸ But from the various sworn statements submitted by the police, we have reports which contradict Kleingeld and confirm that police fired directly at the crowd. In his statement Lieutenant Coenraad Frederick Johannes Brand wrote that Lieutenant Colonel Kleingeld was armed with a Sten gun and he (Brand) was armed with a 32mm pistol ‘which apparently was not working properly’. According to him, Kleingeld shot a volley of ammunition into the street in front of the crowd of children. But then Lieutenant Colonel Brand failed to explain to us the natural laws of physics and applied mathematics which have to do with trajectory and motion. This simply means that if you fire a bullet on the ground, that is, a tarred road, it will change its direction and ricochet – and in the process it will assume an upward motion at a given angle. Indeed due to the sudden change of motion the bullet will travel at a greater speed and the direction will be towards the crowd. Brand also wrote that because the police were also under attack from the rear, where the crowd was pelting them with stones, Kleingeld also fired a volley of ammunition in that direction. In both cases the children retreated. Brand noted that there were more than a thousand unruly children between the ages of 12 to 20 years who confronted the police. He opined: ‘Our lives were in danger and I believe that these children wanted to kill us.’³⁹ But not a single policeman was killed by the crowd on 16 June 1976.

In his sworn statement, Kasparus Johannes Daniel Mathee elaborated the point that when the police confronted the marching students, Kleingeld fired ‘approximately four shots into the air, above the crowd and his warning shots had no effect on the crowd, it seemed as if this just swept them more, because they were approaching us faster’. Probably explaining the death of Hastings Ndlovu, Mathee asserted that he heard a round of shots being fired directly on the crowd by his group and witnessed one of the crowd fall. He added that:

The male who fell was clearly one of the leaders because he was right in front of the group, and had a knobkerrie in his left hand and a brick in his right hand. He also motioned continuously with his arms and spoke to the crowd.

According to Mathee, when the student leader fell to the ground, the crowd hesitated for a moment. After this incident, Captain Loubser then shouted to the police squad, ‘Charge!’. They stormed the crowd and the masses retreated and it looked as if they intended giving up their protest. But the crowd did not give up and the police squad retreated. Mathee claimed that on the other side of the road he ‘saw the body of the Bantu man who had been shot [Hastings Ndlovu], he had a bullet hole between his eyes ... in his forehead. It looked as if he was dead’. He also noticed that the victim was ‘dressed in grey pants and a black top.’⁴⁰ On re-joining the retreating police squad,

38 Cillie Commission Report, 118–121. On Hastings Ndlovu, see Hlongwane et al. *Soweto 76: Reflections of the Liberation Struggle*, 66–70. He was shot by the police at the Orlando West bridge.

39 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Coenraad Frederick Johannes Brand.

40 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Kasparus Johannes Daniel Mathee, 25 June 1976.

Mathee then noticed that the crowd of school children and those he defined as ‘adult Bantoes’ had gathered in Vilakazi Street near Phefeni Junior Secondary and Orlando West High School. The police squad then left the vicinity of the Orlando West bridge and went to Vilakazi Street where it confronted the crowd again. In his statement Mathee maintained he was armed with a 7.65 pistol and that he fired three shots at the leaders of the group: ‘I don’t know if anyone was shot’. But he also said that, ‘one stone-thrower, a male, approximately twenty years old and dressed in a plaid shirt, continuously and accurately threw stones at us from behind the surrounding walls of house no. 6912’. In reaction, Mathee fired one shot directly at him when he reappeared to throw a stone, but he did not know whether he was on target. He added that to contain the crowd, Kleingeld ‘fired a number of shots with a Sten gun in front of the western, southern and eastern groups of assailants that had formed’. At this point the crowd dispersed and the eastern group retreated to the area below the Moema Street crossing. On 23 June 1976, together with his colleagues, Mathee identified Hastings Ndlovu’s body and pointed it out to Lieutenant Grobelaar at the state mortuary in Johannesburg.⁴¹

Sergeant Edgar Modise who was one of the African policemen who formed part of the police squad from the Orlando East Police Station wrote that as an African member of the squad he was not armed with a weapon, which were only issued to white police officers. As the police confronted the crowd at the gate of Orlando West High School, Modise noticed that most of the children had stones and other projectiles in their hands and were walking menacingly towards the police. In a conservative tone, Modise always referred to the African students as ‘unruly children’ and this is understandable. He emphasised, ‘it was obvious to me that the children were unruly, a number of them made the Black Power sign and repeatedly shouted ‘Black Power’. He estimated the crowd at approximately 1 000 ‘children’ (students) gathered at the gates of the two schools in Vilakazi Street and his statement inferred that Kleingeld tried in vain to address the crowd at various times but he was simply ignored. The unruly students were all throwing stones and these:

fell around us, in front and behind us and on police vehicles ... at this stage, we were in grave danger, and I believed that the children were intent on killing us. The stones were large enough to kill a person who got hit, and the children were hurling them violently’.

Modise witnessed that Kleingeld fired shots with a Sten gun, ‘but it appeared to me as if he was firing in the ground in front of him’ – confirming Mathee’s statement. He was joined by Captain Loubser, Assistant Officer Mathee and Sergeant Woest who all fired pistol shots towards the crowd. Modise saw ‘a Bantoe youth of approximately 23 years of age, clad in grey pants and black jersey, crumple down to the ground’ after these shots were fired by his white colleagues, and that the victim was ‘dragged into the crowd by the children’. He emphasised that this youth was ‘permanently in front of other children with an object in his hand’. According to Modise, this youth

41 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Kasparus Johannes Daniel Mathee, 25 June 1976.

was clearly ‘the instigator and incited the other children with words and gestures and the Black Power sign’. The crowd retreated after the shots were fired. Later, on 23 June 1976, Modise was one of the policemen who identified the body of Hastings Ndlovu at the state mortuary. He described the deceased as the one, ‘who I knew from sight was the instigator who led and instigated the children’. Modise’s statement corroborates those made by Hattingh and other colleagues’, statements about the death of Hastings Ndlovu, except the exact spot where he was shot and killed by the police. He was shot at the Orlando West bridge not in the vicinity of the two schools in Vilakazi Street.⁴²

Perhaps the most descriptive and harrowing account of the confrontation is that provided by Kleingeld. When confronted by students at Vilakazi Street, a first look at the group convinced him that the school children seemed ‘*opgesweep*’ (excitable/pent up) and aggressive, and that it would be impossible to talk to them. During the inquest into the deaths of the victims of the uprising, police described the crowd as a ‘*waansinnige horde*’ (a crazed, insane horde) and a ‘*geweldige oormag van waansinnige, moordlustige en totaal onbeheerbare skare plunderaars en oproermakers*’ (a violent, overwhelming force, a mob of deranged, murderous and totally uncontrollable plunderers and agitators).⁴³ From their aggressive stance, Kleingeld surmised that the marching students were out to damage property and even to endanger life.⁴⁴ According to evidence recorded in the Cillie Report, Kleingeld appealed to the students to disperse, first in Afrikaans, then even in broken isiZulu. But the students had grievances which could no longer wait. They surged forward with their clenched fists held high. One of their leaders, Hasting Ndlovu, urged them forward. According to Kleingeld’s evidence recorded by the Cillie Commission, Ndlovu was an out-and-out ‘*opskoter*’ (agitator) armed with a stick and brick:⁴⁵

Hy het geskree en baie ander het saam gepraat en geskreeu, maar omdat ek nie Bantoetale magtig is nie, kon ek nie verstaan wat gesê word nie (He shouted and many others clamoured and shouted at the same time, but because I have no command of Bantu languages, I did not understand what was being said).

Hector Pieterse’s autopsy report compiled by Hans Bukofzer on 22 June 1976 confirmed that police had used deadly force to fire at the unarmed crowd which was not initially anticipating or threatening violence – as is vividly shown in the documentary photographs. They only armed themselves with stones and bricks after the first fatal shootings were carried out by the police. Bukofzer, who was the principal district surgeon and a lecturer in Forensic Medicine at the University of Witwatersrand, confirmed that Pieterse died of a gunshot wound in the kidney. He also confirmed that the 12-year-old Pieterse died of two wounds from 1 cm and 2 cm

42 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Edgar Modise.

43 NASA, SAB, K345, Volume 19 (Justice), Case No. G/O 1371/76, Magistrate’s Court for the Transvaal District, Soweto, Inquest by Judge H.S. van Zyl, *Geregtelike Ondersoek van James Barron en Andere*.

44 NASA, SAB, K 345, Volume 85, SAP, File No.: 2/2/1/12/12, Part 4, Testimony of Kleingeld.

45 Report of the Cillie Commission of Enquiry, Volume 3, 6.

G.P.S.14751-1973/74-5 000-100 (M.S.)

REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
DEPARTMENT VAN GESONDHEID
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

VORM (Gesondheids) I
(voor gebruik, Januarie 1960)
FORM (Health) I
(as amended, January 1960)

Lykskouingsnommer. (1) 2492/76.
Post-mortem Serial No. (2)
Beswyfsel nom. (3)
Label No. (4)

VERSLAG OOR 'N REGSGENEESKUNDIGE LYKSKOUING
REPORT ON A MEDICO-LEGAL POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION

Aan die Landdros van (1) **JOHANNESBURG.**
To the Magistrate of (2)

Ik, (3) **HANS BUKOPZER**, sertifiseerde Nemes-
si, (4) do hereby certify—

(i) dat ek op (1) **Johannesburg**
that at (2)

op die **22nd** dag van **June**, 19 **76** begynende om **10h00** **11116**
on the day of , commencing at

die liggam van **bantu** (1) **male** (2) **child** (3);
I examined the body of (4) (5) (6) (7);

(ii) dat die liggam vir my geïdentifiseer is (1)—
that this body was identified to me (2)—

(a) deur **Sergt. C.J. Bornman of SAP-Medico-Legal Laboratory** : en
by of : and
(b) deur van
by van
as die van (3) **Body No: 2492/76**
as being that of (4)
wie se ouderdom na bevestiging **22 jare** was:
whose reputed age was

(iii) dat die liggam ook vir my geïdentifiseer is (1)—
that this body was also identified to me (2)—

(a) deur **See attached affidavit by Sergt. Bornman**
by of
as die van
as being that of : en
(b) deur van : and
by of
as die van
as being that of

(iv) dat die vernameste lykskouingsbevindings in verband met hierdie liggam die volgende was (1): **See schedule.**
that the chief post-mortem findings made by me on this body were (2):

(v) dat, as gevolg van my waarnemings waarvan 'n lys hieronder volg ek besluit het—
that, as a result of my observations a schedule of which follows, I concluded—

(a) dat die dood (1) **16/6/76** voor my ondersoek plaasgevind het; en
that death had occurred (2) prior to my examination and

(b) dat die oorsaak/oorstake van die dood (1) **GUNSHOT WOUND OF KIDNEY, LIVER? LUNG &**
that the cause/causes of death was/were (2) **OMENTUM.**

Gedoneer te **Johannesburg** op hede die **4th** dag van **August** 19 **76**.
Dated at : this day of

Handtekening **H. B. S. Ch.** Kwalifikasie (3)
Signature: **Principal District Surgeon, Johannesburg. Lecturer in Forensic**
Amptelike (1) **Medicine, Witwatersrand University.**
Designation (2)

Vir instruksies betreffende die voltooiing van individuele paragrawe van hierdie verslag moet afdeling 2 A. 19 van vorm Ges. I (a) geraadpleeg word.
For instructions as to the completion of individual paragraphs of this report, section 2 A. 19 of form (Health) I (a) should be consulted.

The medico-legal post-mortem results shown in the two images above are evidence that Hector Pieterse died from massive internal injuries. For original documents, see NASA, SAB K345, Volume 99.

2492/76

2

LYS WAARNEMINGS
SCHEDULE OF OBSERVATIONS

ALGEMEEN—
GENERAL—

1. Persoonlike besonderhede. Skynbare ouderdom (1)
Personal particulars. Apparent age (1)

Lengte (1) Height (1)	----- m.	Massa (2) Mass (2)	----- kg.
Leggaansbou (3) Physique (3)	Average.	Voedingstoestand (2) Nutrition (2)	Average.

2. Spesiale identifiserende kenmerke (1)
Special identifying features (1) **nil.**

3. Sekondêre postuure veranderings (2)
Secondary post-position change (2) **nil.**

4. Uitwendige voorkoms van liggaam en toestand van ledemate (2)
External appearance of body and condition of limbs (2)

1. **A 1cm bullet entrance wound on the right side of the back just below the right renal angle.**

2. **A 2cm bullet exit wound on the left antero-lateral aspect of the neck.**

TRACK: Passes right to left, markedly upwards and forwards, enters the right abdominal cavity where it transfixes and mutilates the right kidney, transfixes the right lobe of the liver, transfixes diaphragm, transfixes the lower lobe of the left lung, transfixes ribson fascia on the left, lacerates the left common carotid artery and emerges through wound no: (2).

KOP EN NEK—
HEAD AND NECK—

5. Skeël
Skull **and scalp intact.**

6. Skeëlinhoud (2)
Intracranial contents (2) **The brain is pale.**

7. Oog-, neus- en oorholtes (2)
Orbital, nasal and aural cavities (2) **normal.**

8. Mond, tong en farinks
Mouth, tongue and pharynx **normal.**

9. Nekstrukture (2)
Neck structures (2) **normal.**

bullets.⁴⁶ When giving evidence to the Cillie Commission, most of the police claimed that they feared for their lives because they were outnumbered and outflanked by the ‘hordes’ of marching students and that they had to use live ammunition and direct their shots at the crowd of protestors because as far as Jimmy Kruger believed, rubber bullets ‘make [African] people tame to the gun’.

Reports from the South African Police and from African journalists about what happened on 16 June 1976 contradict one another. Like the various sworn statements submitted by his colleagues, Joaquim Antonio Saude gave evidence that on 16 June 1976 all members were summoned to the charge office by the Orlando Police Station commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Kleingeld and white members were issued with .38 revolvers and six rounds, while others were given batons, commonly called *ķierries*. They proceeded to Orlando West in police trucks, vans and cars, in the direction of Orlando West High School which borders Phefeni Junior Secondary School. Saude wrote that they stopped approximately 150 yards away from the high school and were ordered by Kleingeld to get out of the vehicles and he suddenly noticed a crowd of about 1 000 students in front of the school yard with stones in their hands. Kleingeld and some white officers went to speak to the crowd but the students shouted: ‘Get away, we don’t want you here!’. The police contingent’s brash attempt to address the crowd was not well received because at that moment stones were thrown at them and while the crowd threw the stones, Kleingeld fired a few shots in the air to frighten the students. According to Saude, Kleingeld also fired some shots in the air. The shots did not scare the crowd – it ‘just came back for us. As I looked back I noticed some students behind us as well on our right-hand side. We were then half surrounded by the students’.⁴⁷ Apparently, at this point the police felt that the crowd was about to overpower them and that their lives were in danger. In his report dated 23 June 1976, Saude insisted that Kleingeld did not give an order for the police to open fire but he noted in his report that Kleingeld, Sergeant Botha and some of the other white policemen fired some shots, and one of the students fell to the ground, possibly Hector Pieterse, because Saude’s evidence corresponds to both the time and the exact place where he was shot near the Orlando West High School gate in Vilakazi Street. Saude further elaborated on the student who was shot and the crowd ‘which was out to kill’:

I can’t say by whom he was shot. As the situation got worse, Lt. Colonel Kleynhans [Kleingeld] ordered us back to the trucks and while we were falling back, some of our members got injured by the stones. They also damaged the vehicles with the stones. Lt. Col. Kleingeld then fired some shots on the ground and I fired some shots in the air with my service revolver .38 No 308245. I never aimed at anybody. In my opinion they were out to kill us. We just managed to get away with the vehicles. Some of the members, I can’t say who they are, sustained injuries. I fired altogether 12 rounds with my service revolver, but did not wound or kill anyone.⁴⁸

46 NASA, SAB K345, Volume 99.

47 NASA, SAB K345, Volumes. 85–86, Police statement by Joaquim Antonio Saude, testimony under oath, 23 June 1976.

48 Ibid.

But the report by one of the policemen differed in certain aspects from those submitted by Saude and Jimmy Kruger. Hattingh simply stated, 'we fired into them. It is of no use to fire over their heads'. Sophie Tema, the journalist who rushed the wounded Pieteron to the nearby Phefeni clinic, painted a different picture to that provided by Saude and other police reports. In her eyewitness account published in *The World* on 17 June 1976, Tema, who was standing behind the police lines in Vilakazi Street, emphasises that the confrontation began when the police threw a teargas canister into the large crowd of students who were taunting them and waving placards. A crowd of thousands had gathered at Phefeni Junior Secondary School and Orlando West High School, singing the Sesotho version of '*Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica*'. She estimated that there were about thirty policemen who arrived in ten police vehicles. The majority were unarmed black officers, but the white policemen were armed with revolvers. The crowd immediately became angry after the teargas canister was thrown at them and the students reacted by throwing stones at the police. Tema insisted that at no stage did police warn the crowd to disperse and in fact she said there seemed to be no communication at all between the students and the police. When the crowd began throwing rocks, a white policeman immediately pulled out his revolver, pointed it at the students and fired it. As soon as that shot rang out, other policemen began firing at the crowd.⁴⁹

According to Tema, the panic-driven crowd dispersed and she saw one student who she estimated was about twenty years old, hit in the chest and fall and other students rushed him to the nearby Phefeni clinic. Small crowds of students kept running out of Orlando West side streets from various directions and stoning the police before running off again. She then saw a young boy who she thought was six or seven years old fall with a bullet wound, 'he had a bloody froth on his lips and he seemed to be seriously hurt so I took him to the Phefeni Clinic in a press car but he was dead when we arrived'.⁵⁰ This was the 12-year-old Hector Pieteron.

In his report for *The Rand Daily Mail* on 17 June 1976, Nat Serache corroborated most of Tema's eyewitness account. His article opened with a sentence about the police throwing teargas canisters and firing gunshots directly into the crowd of about 10 000 students demonstrating outside Orlando West Junior Secondary School in Vilakazi Street. Serache estimated that the number of students from all parts of the sprawling township was 30 000 and that only 10 000 had gathered at Orlando West while the rest were still on their way to Vilakazi Street en route to present their grievances to the regional offices of the DBE. Serache opined that the age of the marching students ranged from seven to nineteen years and thought that the majority of the students were from secondary schools and high schools with only a few students from primary schools. He further noted that during the march, 'senior pupils on several occasion warned the boys and girls not to be violent'. Like his colleague from

49 'World Car Rushes Shot School Riot Victim to the Clinic', *The World*, 17 June 1976. See various newspaper reports in S.M. Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan, 2017), second edition.

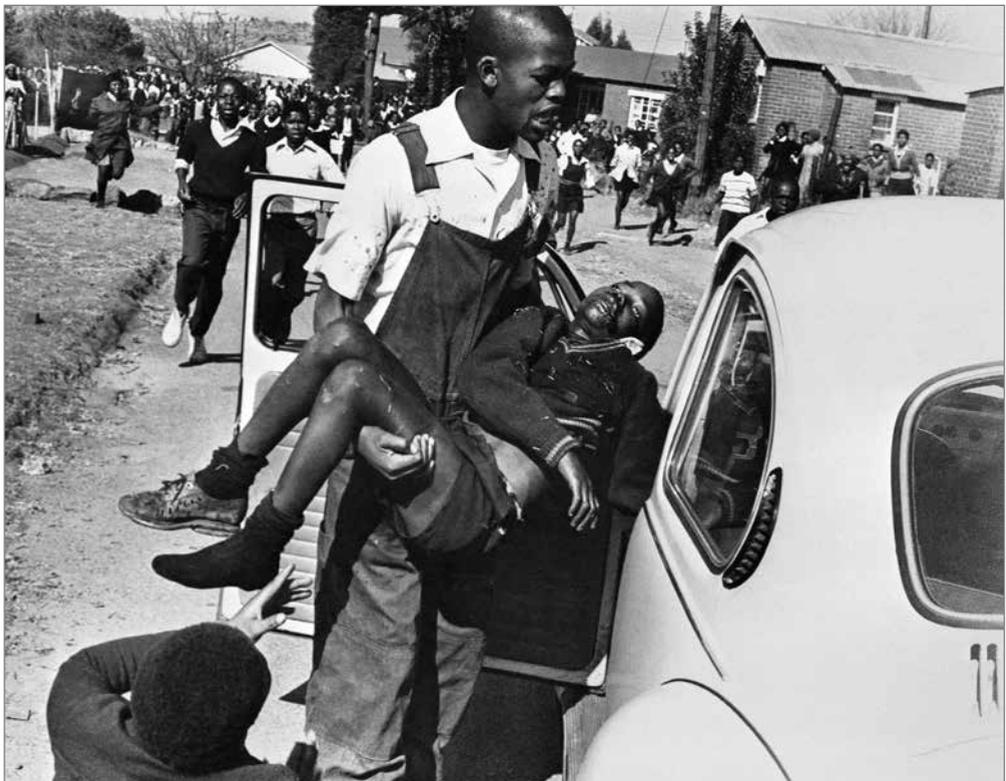
50 Ibid.

The World newspaper, Serache alluded to the fact the 10 000 students who had massed at the gate of Orlando West Junior Secondary School were singing ‘*Morena Boloḡa Sechaba*’ when police arrived in vans and with dogs.⁵¹ He elaborated:

I did not hear any order to disperse before they threw teargas canisters into the crowd of singing students. The children scattered in all directions while some were dazed and blinded by the teargas. The pupils then regrouped and then the police charged again and they [the students] threw stones at the police.

It was at this point that the armed police fired a few shots, some in the air and others into the crowd and Serache wrote that he saw four students fall. It was also at this juncture that the white editor of *The Rand Daily Mail*, ‘butchered and murdered’ Serache’s report by suddenly describing the crowd of African students as a ‘mob’ that killed a police dog and a white man. Hence we have:

The mob then charged the shooting policemen and when a police dog was let loose it was stabbed with knives. As it lay writhing on the ground it was beaten with stones



Photograph by Sam Nzima.

Antoinette Sithole and Mbuyisa Makhubo and the badly injured Hector Pieterse board Sophie Tema’s Volkswagen.

51 ‘Police Fired, then I Saw Four Children Fall’, *The Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

and bricks. A White man was dragged from a West Rand Board vehicle, beaten with stones, clubbed with sticks and left dead. He was later picked up by students and thrown into a rubbish bin. Some remarked: 'That is where he belongs'.⁵²

Surely the white editor's hand is visible in this report. He provided an unemotional account of the police shootings, and the four Africans who were shot. This contrasts markedly with his description of the killing of the police dog and the white man. The editor used adjectives and descriptive language designed to make an impact on white readers of the *Rand Daily Mail*.⁵³ The name of the West Rand Administration Board official was J.N.B Esterhuizen who was accompanied by the then nameless Hamilton Mtambo who was badly injured but survived – he is not included in this newspaper report.⁵⁴ Hattingh's sworn statement on the killing of the dog differs from the account in the *Rand Daily Mail*. The dog also has a name. The report reads as follows:⁵⁵

I then discovered a police patrol dog Cherokee lying dead in the road, in front of house no. 7294, Vilikazi Street. Smoke still came from his body. He had been burnt. There were signs that he had been hacked to death. The dog belonged to Bantu Constable Mamihano.

Hattingh recorded his sworn statement more than a week after he had killed Hastings Ndlovu. He went to the mortuary on 23 June 1976 to identify his body but could not be bothered to find out more about his name or his identity. According to his report, he just identified the 'corpse of a Bantu man'. He was nameless.

Most of the sworn statements by policemen describe the singing of freedom songs and shouting of slogans by the crowd as nothing else but a deafening, loud noise which they did not understand, except of course, the slogan 'Black Power', and the clenched fist 'Black Power' salute. Hattingh wrote: 'while we stood there, I observed schoolchildren leaving the school grounds and taking up positions among the houses. I heard the children shouting but could not hear what they were shouting'. He then observed: 'the crowd was about 50 metres in front of us. They shouted and waved placards; some danced and jumped around. All the while, they continued to move towards us. From this distance, they began to throw stones and bricks at us'. Jacobus Johannes Gerber elaborated that on the morning of 16 June 1976 he went directly to the Naledi School and on arrival he found that:

All the schoolchildren were in the street protesting. There were approximately 800 to 1 000 schoolchildren taking part in the protest. I remained a distance away from them. When they saw the police vehicle they gave the Black Power sign. I also noticed that some of them picked up stones.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 See Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprising Routes', 24.

55 NASA, SAB K345, Vols 85–86, Police statement by Marthinus Johannes Hattingh.

But then Gerber noticed something else which is not evident in the documentary photographs that captured the mood of the crowd before the confrontation with the police: 'I then noticed that there were adults, *tsotsis* [thugs, criminals] and youths [including urchins] among the schoolchildren'.⁵⁶ Coenraad Brand noticed 'a huge crowd of children in front of us armed with stones and sticks. They made the Black Power sign and kept shouting in a language that I did not understand'. Kasparus Mathee's sworn statement, similar to the one compiled by Gerber, is not corroborated in the documentary photographs. According to him, 'the crowd consisted mainly of schoolchildren, but they were being incited by adults'. He is of the view that there were many adults among the children.

Conclusion

The narrative of the 16 June 1976 uprising was dealt with by analysing the anatomy of the crowd of marching students on that fateful day. In doing so I was able to discover, firstly, what this tells us about the ideologies at play amongst the students, and secondly, who took the leading role in the march. However, my primary aim was to gain insight into the issue that marked the breaking point, the reason why they abandoned the classroom in their thousands and took to the streets to make their voices heard. I did this by re-examining the placards and banners that the students carried on that day, and making a close study of the documentary photographs of the events. Further, I revisited the recorded oral testimonies of participants and observers. I also engaged with the narratives of various representatives of the political administration such as Judge Cillie who headed the commission of enquiry into the uprising; the police reports on events; as well as the complex media coverage and the role of editors in interpreting the writings of black journalists who were able to reach out to the protesters in ways that were impossible for most journalists because they were barred from entering Soweto to witness the upheaval.

It cannot be denied that on the actual day of the march, older and senior students from various schools took some measure of control. They went from school to school, collecting students from primary and junior secondary schools to persuade them to join the march. Dan Mofokeng, a former student at Naledi High recalls:

We marched that morning, very energetic and blocking the traffic and everything ... We marched from Naledi High to Thomas Mofolo, collecting others. There was also Batswana Junior Secondary around there and others. We were collecting other junior secondary schools, Tladi, Moletsane, right through around Phefeni Station there. We were collecting almost everybody. It was a very huge march ... it was very peaceful because nobody got injured, nothing was broken, nothing ... actually our

56 NASA, SAB K345, Volumes 85–86, Police statement by Jacobus Johannes Gerber, 9 September 1976.

aim and the aim of the organisers or the student leaders then was to go to Orlando Stadium to discuss about the issue of ... how we could organise ourselves, etc.⁵⁷

What is unclear from the students' oral testimonies is the final destination of the march. In oral testimonies and newspaper reports there is agreement that students were expected to march from various schools in Soweto to Phefeni Junior Secondary School in Vilakazi Street. The most critical question therefore, is what was the plan of action once the marching students reached the Vilakazi Street precinct? Eyewitness accounts are divided between two viewpoints. There are those who argued that a mass rally was to be held at the Orlando Stadium on 16 June 1976. Others maintained that from Vilakazi Street, students intended to proceed with the march to their final destination – the regional offices of the Bantu Education Department – at the time located in Booyens. The intention was for students to voice their grievances and hand over a memorandum on students' concerns to the education authorities.

Another point of debate is on the build-up and the march to the Orlando West precinct, where it is estimated that about 10 000 to 15 000 students had congregated. There are divergent views on the exact time at which the conflict between students and police broke out. Some oral testimonies record that tension rose and 'things went wrong' from about 8:00am. But this perspective fails to note the fact that most students had left their schools after the morning assembly at around 8:00am and could not have reached Vilakazi Street – except of course students who attended schools nearby, such as those at Orlando West Junior Secondary and Orlando West High. A journalist writing for *The Star* of 15 June 1996 maintains: 'By 6:00am thousands of pupils had gathered on Vilakazi Street outside Phefeni Junior School.'⁵⁸ Another eyewitness (a photographer) recalled that, 'I arrived at Orlando West about 11:00am.'⁵⁹ But all these testimonies agree that the day ended tragically when students who had set off to stage a peaceful march were fired upon by the police; some were killed and others injured. What then led to the shooting? Journalist Nat Serache wrote in the *Daily Mail* of 17 June 1976 that:

A contingent of police, most of them black, stood a little away facing the demonstrators. A white police officer picked up what seemed like a stone and threw it into the crowd. Some students started picking up stones. As the shot rang out the demonstrators scattered in all directions. Some ran onto a hill behind the school while others fled into side streets. Yet others remained standing ... A black police sergeant was still explaining to a group of parents: 'There will be no shooting. These children are not fighting anybody, they don't want Afrikaans', when a police officer opened fire. I saw two boys who were shot in the legs. They were helped into

57 Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum, interview with General Dan M. Mofokeng, conducted by Ali Hlongwane and Sifiso Ndlovu, 2005.

58 *The Star*, 15 June 1996.

59 Alf Khumalo, Untitled article, *Sunday Times*, 20 June 1976.

taxis. As the police retreated over the Orlando bridge, the children regrouped, but they turned their anger on white and black policemen.⁶⁰

The following issues are apparent when we analyse the anatomy of the marching crowd. There were three categories of marching students:

The senior student leaders

This group consisted of mainly high school students who were part of the official planning of the march. They were members of the planning committee that met in Orlando East on 13 June 1976 and were the main co-ordinators responsible for addressing, giving necessary information and commanding fellow students during the march. They were also responsible for the compilation of the memorandum reflecting students' grievances and other pressing issues. This memo was to be handed over to the relevant Department of Bantu Education officials.

The junior student leaders

This was the second tier of leadership roped in from various schools, probably to attend meetings held after the 13 June meeting. These were clandestine meetings held on 14 and 15 June. The junior leaders were mainly school representatives from other parts of Soweto. They were requested to help co-ordinate and pass on the message about the planned march on 16 June 1976 to their respective schools, particularly those schools that were still completely unaware of the planning process and that a planning committee had met on 13 June. This category of student leaders knew what was supposed to take place on 16 June, but knew very little about the whole set-up because they were not members of the inner core group that included Tsietsi Mashinini, Sibongile Mkhabela, Murphy Morobe and Seth Mazibuko, among others. One example of students who were in this category is Thailane Ngobeni whose oral testimonies have been collected by the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum.

Ordinary student marchers

These were students from primary and secondary schools who joined the march without the knowledge of what was really happening. The prime example here is Hector Pieterse whose sister, Antoinette Sithole, said in an interview that Hector had probably joined the marching students whose route began at Morris Isaacson and proceeded down Limakatso Street in Central Western Jabavu on the way to collect students from Thesele Secondary School, where Antionette Sithole was a student. This same group also included secondary school students such as myself, who knew what the march was about because we had been on a go-slow strike at Orlando West Junior Secondary School since March 1976 and went on strike publicly in May 1976.

60 Nat Serache, 'The Peaceful Demo that Exploded', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

We were joined by students from other higher primary and secondary schools in Soweto.

What is apparent from collected oral testimonies is the fact that students' viewpoints are multi-faceted. The following observations can be made from their testimonies:

- The planned march was intended to be a peaceful procession by the students. They could not anticipate how the police would react;
- Some schools continued with their normal day-to-day teaching programme;
- Some school principals were sympathetic, siding with the students and they did not hesitate to release their students from the classrooms. This was probably because as victims of apartheid themselves they understood the political situation and the frustration the learners experienced. Most pupils were released soon after the morning assembly and were instructed to go home – but probably ended up joining the march;
- Some of the school principals refused to release their students to join the march. This was probably because they were more conservative and felt they should keep to the standing orders of the Department of Bantu Education. This is a complex issue because these school principals did not necessarily support the racist education policies of the apartheid government. This was more than likely a bread-and-butter issue for them. One example of such a principal was the head of Ndondo Primary School in Moroka (Rockville);
- Some school students and principals knew about the planned march in advance – even before 16 June. An example is Orlando West Junior Secondary School;
- The march was well co-ordinated. The student leaders knew exactly where each group from a particular area should meet up with another group. Students went from one school to another, collecting fellow student marchers who shared a common route. They were also informed on the progress made by other groups and hence were aware of police reaction in Orlando West prior to reaching their destination;
- There were a number of smaller, unplanned marches, but these students intended to join up with other marchers along the main routes;
- Marching students included both female and male students, and marchers were of varying ages, coming from primary, secondary and high schools;
- In schools where principals were antagonistic, student leaders forced their way inside to release their fellow learners. An example of a school where this happened was Vuwani Secondary School;

- Where schools were situated in awkward locations, student leaders and their respective groups had to split up and ask those at these particular schools to either join the march or suspend the lessons; and
- Where students in a particular group of marchers felt that following the planned routes was too circuitous, they took a shortcut through open fields.

The march was not merely a male-dominated historical event. The stories of the uprising reveal that young women and girls, far from being ‘just in the background’, as their male counterparts would have us believe, were central to the uprising and the march. Although their relative and real number in the crowd are impossible to determine, their voices were, indeed significant. In documentary photographs taken that day their faces feature just as prominently as those of boys and young men. The available testimonies underscore how the presence of young women and girls in the uprising has often been sidelined by history’s focus on the male leadership of the student march, and on those who have traditionally been heard, tried and persecuted. However, at the level of leadership and institutional organisation the youth movement seems to have been dominated by young men and boys – an analysis echoed in most of



National Archives of South Africa

Happy and playful young pupils at Leratong Primary School.

the historical literature and collective memory. Nevertheless behind these prominent names there were young women who not only left their mark on the student

movements of the day but who were on the streets and amongst the demonstrators. Sam Nzima's documentary photograph of Antoinette Sithole alongside Mbuyisa Makhubu who is carrying her brother's limp body shows clearly that women and girls shared the pain and the persecution of that dreadful day. Of 662 people in detention on 30 September 1977, at least 62 were women and girls. Women and schoolgirls were also recorded among the dead. To conclude, we cannot recover the voices of those who were silenced by death.⁶¹ This chapter is about recognising the various students, including those who were killed, as makers of liberation history.



National Archives of South Africa

Uncaring white policemen minding their own business and the body of a lifeless young woman during the 1976 uprisings, Alexander township, Johannesburg.

61 For an in-depth discussion about the role of women in the Soweto uprising see Pohlandt-McCormick, 'Doing Violence to Memory'.



Bailey's African Photo Archives

Hector Pieterse's family at a graveside wreath-laying memorial in 1978, two years after his death in the Soweto uprising



Sam Nzima (front right) is seen here with the late Percy Qobosa (left), editor of *The World* and the late Eddie Mohodisa, a journalist colleague. They were being briefed for next day, 16 June 1976 (Heidi Smith)