

The Soweto Uprising



PART 1: SOWETO¹

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Introduction

To explain the Soweto uprising different authors place emphasis on various factors. Some highlight structural changes in the economy and society, including political changes brought about by apartheid; some stress the emergence of youth subcultures in Soweto's secondary schools in the 1970s; some emphasise the transformative role of Black Consciousness and its associated organisations; others give prominence to revolutionary theory and stress the role of the various liberation movements; some underline the ideological role of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at selected schools; and others insist on educational, epistemological and pedagogical factors that fostered resistance through the 'autonomous' actions of parents and students. All these important causal factors need to be taken into account when analysing the historical origins of the Soweto uprising.

There are different types of texts connected to the historiography of the uprising, for example academic historical texts and oral history testimonies.² Like historians, political scientists are interested in the Soweto uprising. Others portray the uprising in

1 Acronym for South Western Townships.

2 See the various texts on the Soweto Uprisings, including S.M. Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprising: Counter-memories of June 1976* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1998); P. Bonner and L. Segal, *Soweto: A History*, (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1998); P. Bonner, 'The Soweto Uprisings of June 1976', in South African History Project, and Institute for Justice and Reconciliation publication on *Turning Points in History: People, Places and Apartheid*, Book 5 (Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2004), chapter 2, '25 Years Ago in Soweto'; *The Star*, 16 June 2001; S. Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 2001); A. Majeke, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprisings: Education, Law, and the Language Issue in South Africa', PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 1994; H. Pohlandt-McCormick, "I saw a Nightmare..." Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprisings, June 16, 1976', PhD thesis, Minnesota University, 1999; P. M. Cillie: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from 16th June to the 28th February 1977; N. Diseko, 'The Origins and Development of the South African Student Movement (SASM): 1968–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 1, 18, 1992; K.A. Hlongwane et.al., *Soweto 76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles - Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16, 1976* (Johannesburg, Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2006).

imaginative literature and literary theory; the uprising is also covered in various multi-media and artistic forms that include television documentaries, films, photography, and art.³

This chapter does not exhaustively explore the sources mentioned above or the multi-causal factors dealt with in other chapters of this volume. The focus here falls mainly on the socio-economic structural changes affecting Soweto; the role of Afrikaner nationalist ideology; educational and epistemological issues; the relevance and centrality of Afrikaans to the uprising; and the role of the South African Student Movement (SASM). The discussion relies on archival material and oral history testimonies including those of teachers, whose distinct voices have been overlooked in most historical narratives about the uprisings. The chapter ends with a look at the spread of the uprising beyond Soweto, with special reference to the Witwatersrand townships of Alexandra, Thembisa, Katlehong, Vosloorus and Thokoza.

Soweto youth in the early 1970s

Studies about township youth are limited in focus. In the 1970s and 1980s they tended to concentrate on gangsters, thug life or student activists.⁴ Studies about township student activists, specifically, lean heavily on generational theory that was imported and adapted to the South African situation; they rely on Harold Wolpe's notion of the 'school as a politically protected space' relatively shielded from the repressive state apparatuses. This argument is unconvincing, however, because it was impossible for apartheid-inspired Bantu Education to provide a protected space. The argument differs markedly from the reality in African schools. Moreover, attending school was not compulsory for African students and, therefore, parents were not obliged to make their children go to school. During a parliamentary debate, 'Punt' Janson offered the following defence of this policy:

If we were to introduce compulsory education today [in 1975] from the age of seven, it would mean that a total of 97 000 teachers and as many classrooms would have to be made available. This is calculated on the basis of one teacher for 30 pupils, a basis which is in line with those of the other departments. The cost involved is R126 million in respect of salaries, and R330 million to provide the classrooms which will have to be made available to these people⁵

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- 3 See for example A. Mokadi, *Narrative as Creative History: The 1976 Soweto Uprisings as Depicted in Black South African Novels* (Johannesburg: Sedibeng Publishers, 2003); H. Mashabela, *A People on the Boil – Reflections on Soweto* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987); M. Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982); M. Tlali, *Amandla* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980); Bonner and Segal, *Soweto: A History*. See also M. Ngema's play *Sarafina*. On poetry see S. Sepamla, *The Soweto I Love* (Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1977). See also, for example, the following two feature films: *A Dry White Season* and *Cry Freedom*; on documentaries see the SABC documentary, 'Two Decades ... Still June 16'.
- 4 C. Glaser, 'When are They Going to Fight? Tsotsis, Youth Politics and the PAC' in P. Bonner and others, *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935–1962* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1993); C. Glaser, 'Youth Culture and Politics in Soweto, 1958–1976', PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1994; C. Glaser, 'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis: School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2, 1998; J. Seekings, 'Quiescence and the Transition to Confrontation: South African Townships, 1978–1984', PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1990.
- 5 *Hansard* (South African Parliamentary House of Assembly Debates), 6 May 1975, column 5477.

The poverty in which most African families lived had far-reaching implications for many children. As a result, the boundaries were not always clear between childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The youth of 'school-going age' spent their days on the streets doing odd jobs and playing, but mostly taking responsibility for their siblings and homes while their parents were at work from early morning until late at night. Many had to raise cash for their families as hawkers (selling fruit, peanuts and other goods on trains and at various railway stations) and others worked full time as providers. Child labourers included 'spanner boys', who helped fix cars and those who sold coal and firewood, as Soweto had no electricity. Some of Soweto's youth belonged to various sports clubs including youth recreation clubs made up of arts, drama, dance groups and choristers. Others were involved in religious activities. Antoinette 'Tiny' Sithole, Hector Pieterse's sister, recalls: 'I was in a church choir ... at St Paul's, near Crossroads in White City but in other youth clubs and things I was not involved, and I know some of the youths would go ... later in the afternoon ... to the club houses, some would dance, do drama or whatever.'⁶ Sibongile Mkhabela reminisces as follows about her high school days in Soweto:

The church was central to our family life. We were part of the then popular and dynamic Pimville district of the Methodist Church in Africa ... The YWCA had facilitated a positive reawakening among young people. It was exciting to listen to people such as Dr Ellen Khuzwayo, the then president of the YWCA, Bro Tom Manthata of the Black People's Convention, George Wauchope and other South African Student Organisation leaders who were organising students through the work of institutions such as the YWCA and convening seminars which addressed the political and social issues of the day. It was as a result of these seminars that young minds began to shift more and more towards a critical awareness then promoted by, and linked to, the philosophy of Black Consciousness ... We were feeling the impact of the activities of SASO as well as the University Christian Movement and Students Christian Movement. Through my links to the YWCA and other township youth clubs, I was exposed to seminars at the St. Aingers Ecumenical Centre and the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre. My schoolbooks started to bear slogans such as 'Black man you are on your own', 'Black and Proud', 'Black is Beautiful' etc.⁷

Unemployed youth formed street gangs with names like the *Hazels* or the *Vikings*, each controlling its own territory. But another category of Soweto youth involved youngsters who were focused on education.⁸ Life in places like Orlando East was dicey. Murphy Morobe recalls having to take tough decisions around 1974 either to join the gangs or become a serious student:

6 Interview with Antoinette Tiny Sithole, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu for the Hector Pieterse Museum, 20 June 2001.

7 Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, 26.

8 On schools and gangsters see Glaser, 'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis'.

In Orlando East, where I stayed ... up to ten gangs operated in the area, very vicious ... always involved in scams ... The worst form of drug I think that was available then was really dagga. They hadn't discovered these fancy things ... like crack, acid and so on ... Some of the gangsters [were] influenced a lot by American war movies ..., especially those that were based on the Second World War events, Kelly's Heroes. There was a gang called Kelly's Heroes, the Bansins Gang – the Bansins wore a particular type of gear, you know the gabardine ... You had the ZX5 gang – ZX5 that was in the sign of the Swastika ... you had the Kwaitos gang [and] you had the Vikings.⁹

Morobe decided to do something meaningful with his life and future.

When I had to make my decision about where to go for my final years of high school, one of the greatest things that influenced my decision were the gangsters. My decision was I need to go away to a place far from the gangsters – in my own area the gangsters I would associate with or hang out with would be the Green Berets – and territorial issues there. You couldn't just walk freely from one section to the other of the township without being accosted, or even assaulted. So I made my choices. One of my choices was that I'm not going to Orlando High School, even though Orlando High School was a very good school and nearby ... Morris Isaacson High School had ... a very strong reputation for... being focused in terms of education. So Morris Isaacson's reputation was one of the main attractions for me, apart from the fact that it was going to be an opportunity to spend my day time hours away from Orlando East, being a different location in Central Western Jabavu, CWJ. Basically it meant that I should take double transport to school and Morris Isaacson High School was a very strict school.¹⁰

Yet not even the 'protected space' of Morris Isaacson could shut out the heat from the cauldron of student life in South African schools. According to Hyslop, school upheavals have a long history in South Africa that goes back to the nineteenth century, most of them in missionary boarding institutions. By 1974, student upheavals began to shift from boarding to urban day schools and student movements emerged. Township schools across the country were awakening politically and developing well-articulated demands on educational issues.¹¹ In Soweto, young teachers from Fort Hare, Turfloop, and Zululand Universities guided school students. They were often linked to SASO. Some of these politically conscious teachers were graduates of various teacher-training colleges as well. For Fikile Ngcobo, an English language teacher at Orlando West Junior Secondary School in 1976 who had graduated from

9 Interview with Murphy Morobe, conducted by Ben Magubane and Greg Houston, 4 March 2004, SADET Oral History Project. See also Glaser, 'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis'.

10 Interview with Murphy Morobe.

11 J. Hyslop, 'School Student Movements and State Education Policy: 1972-87', in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen (eds), *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (Oxford: James Currie, 1988); J. Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999).

one of the teacher training colleges, political conscientisation went as far back as her childhood days whilst growing up in Sophiatown:

I grew up in an environment at times when I saw politicians from the ANC, Mandela himself and Oliver Tambo when they were still lawyers. I could see those people meeting within Sophiatown ... and there was a newspaper, *New Age* it was called, and I would read *New Age* ... When the ANC went to have its own meetings, we as little children would follow the masses to the square where they went and we would be listening to this '*Mayibuye iAfrika*' and all the things they said ... I know *New Age* influenced me ... I was able to read English then and I could sit in the toilet and read the newspaper and everybody could look for me and I'd still be reading. And, of course, how people were removed from Sophiatown ... So I think with me it really started in those days. But the much more clearer political influence came with the Steve Bikos in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As much as I wasn't an active member of the Black Consciousness Movement I believed strongly in it ... I could understand the politics; I was reading the history ... I was a teacher by then. I could understand the need for being proud of myself, being proud, being able to accept myself as I am and do things for myself and start being involved. So Biko's philosophy had a great bearing on me and how I then started applying myself as a working person, as a teacher and actually being able to listen to what students had, what younger people had, which direction they were taking, whether they believed in themselves as blacks.¹²

There are thus multi-faceted layers of identities, and not just juvenile delinquency, concerning the youth in Soweto and other black townships. Weighing heavily upon township residents, however, were the difficult socio-economic conditions under which everyone lived.

Socio-economic changes and resultant impact on Soweto

The main propagators of the socio-economic structural analysis 'thesis' include Philip Bonner and Helena Pohlandt-McCormick. Bonner argues that between 1954 and 1960 over 50 000 houses were built in Soweto. The rate of this building slowed down in the early 1960s and stopped completely in 1965. In addition, after 1960 the government began to restrict and even remove the minimum rights enjoyed by urban Africans, who were told they could enjoy political and civic rights only in 'homelands' like Transkei and Bophuthatswana. The policy shift in 1960 resulted in state revenue and resources being redirected from African urban areas to the homelands. Between 1962 and 1971 no new secondary schools were built in Soweto. The number of African children enrolling at primary schools expanded more rapidly than the resources allocated

12 Interview with Fikile Ngcobo conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu for the Hector Pieterse Museum, 15 July 2001.

to the education sector, with some classes comprising more than 100 students. Not surprisingly, teachers were forced to teach double sessions each day.¹³

With the passing of the Bantu Homelands Citizen Act in 1970, the apartheid regime took a decisive step to strip urban Africans of their South African citizenship. The act compelled all Africans to become citizens of whatever ethnic homeland from which they were supposed to have originated, whether or not they had set foot there in their lifetime. The Minister of Bantu Administration had powers to prohibit the employment of Africans in any specified area, or in any specified class of employer or employment. Enforcement of Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act became vicious and, to accommodate Africans endorsed out of the white areas, whether from towns or farms, the government accelerated what it referred to as 'Bantu' towns and resettlement villages in the homelands. But the shortage of labour and skilled African workforce undermined apartheid policies.¹⁴

During 1971 there was a rapid shift in the position of business towards a more engaged attitude on the question of education and training. The recession of 1968–1969 had forced business into a reappraisal of future strategies as it had become clear that the lack of black employees with suitable education and training had now come to the crunch. In 1971 the government backed down on the Physical Planning Act restrictions in the employment of African labour in urban industry. The establishment of new industrial areas was deregulated, except the Southern Transvaal, and even there industries which were 'locality bound' or 'white labour intensive' were exempted from labour controls. Thus by late 1971 the basis was laid for important changes in state labour and education policies. A decisive shift came early in 1972, when the government finally accepted that spending on urban African schools would be financed from state consolidated revenue funds and no longer linked to black taxation.¹⁵ Circumstances on the ground contradicted this particular policy, however, leading to considerable disgruntlement among urban Africans.

Bowing to business and economic pressure and creating a volatile situation, in 1972 the government reversed its policy of building no new secondary schools in townships like Soweto and introduced the concept of Junior Secondary schools. There was a phenomenal increase in attendance at secondary school level for Africans in general. The enrolment of 178 959 in 1974 increased to 389 066 in 1976, a 140% increase in two years. Between 1972 and 1974, as many as 40 new schools were built in Soweto alone and secondary enrolments grew from 12 656 to 34 656, a jump of nearly 300%. All this vastly contributed to a school-going youth consciousness and solidarity.¹⁶

Massive increases in oil prices, due to the Arab-Israel conflict, in 1973–74, combined with rapid inflation, pushed the world economy into deep depression. In 1974 only

13 Bonner, 'The Soweto Uprisings'; Bonner and Segal, *Soweto: A History*; Pohlandt-McCormick, 'I saw a Nightmare', chapter 2; See also *Hansard*, 6 May 1975, column 5478.

14 Bonner, 'The Soweto Uprisings'; Bonner and Segal, *Soweto: A History*; Pohlandt-McCormick, 'I saw a Nightmare', chapter 2.

15 J. Hyslop, 'Social Conflicts over African Education in South Africa from the 1940s to 1976', PhD, thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990, 424.

16 Bonner, 'The Soweto Uprisings'; Bonner and Segal, *Soweto: A History*. See also Pohlandt-McCormick, 'I saw a Nightmare'.

0.53% of the gross national product was expended on so-called 'Bantu' education. This meant an amount of R102 million out of a gross of over R19 000 million. In 1975 a sharp drop in the gold price aggravated South Africa's economic difficulties. During the economic downturn of 1975, African schools were starved of funds. For every R644 the government spent on a white student, R42 was spent on an African student. A cash-strapped government attempted to save money by reducing its expenditure on the African majority, and above all on the residents of the African townships. All township services and amenities suffered, including the schools.¹⁷

In a further attempt to save money the Bantu Education Department decided to reduce the number of school years from 13 to 12. In 1975 Bantu Education policy makers decided to drop the last year of primary school, Standard 6 (Grade 8). At the beginning of 1976 pupils completing Standard 5 were able to proceed directly to secondary school. In that year, therefore, Standard 5 and Standard 6 graduated into secondary schooling together. In 1976, 257 505 pupils enrolled in Form 1 (Standard Seven), the first year of secondary school, but only 38 000 students could be accommodated. Overcrowding reached new heights. Educational standards declined further. The injustices of Bantu Education were becoming increasingly intolerable.¹⁸ As an example, to ease congestion, some of the Form 1 and Form 2 classes at Phefeni Junior Secondary School were transferred to rented classroom space in Orlando East's defunct Khanya Primary School, next to the Orlando Football Stadium. These makeshift arrangements exacerbated an already intolerable situation as the physical structure of Phefeni Junior Secondary School, had not been adequate in the first place. It was an old primary school building commandeered to accommodate the growing number of junior secondary school students. The original primary school pupils had been transferred elsewhere around the Orlando West precinct.

The sudden growth in the number of secondary and primary school pupils meant that a major change had taken place in the structure of Soweto's population, particularly that of its youth. The following table compiled from parliamentary debates in the House of Assembly is provided by Pohlandt-McCormack:¹⁹

Year	Primary Schools	No of Pupils	Secondary Schools	No of Pupils
1972	196	131 582	19	12 656
1973	207	144 866	21	14 731
1974	220	142 270	32	18 281
1975	223	143 020	38	25 598
1976	249	137 157	41	34 656

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. See also *Hansard*, 6 May 1975.

¹⁹ Pohlandt-McCormack, 'I saw a Nightmare', 79; *Hansard*, 21 January to 24 June 1977, column 155-56.

According to Bonner, structural changes do not automatically lead to new socio-political consequences. Political changes occur when people begin to think and behave in a different way, that is, when consciousness, cultures and identities change. Such changes occurred in Soweto during the 1970s and provided the link between structural changes and political action. What emerged as a result of the growth of secondary schooling was a new subculture in Soweto – a new collective identity. The impetus among African youth came from schooling under apartheid.

The Broederbond and the promotion of Afrikaans²⁰

Goke-Pariola argues that language is related to power in many ways. Indeed, access to language is often a prerequisite to power, regardless of whether a social group is mono- or multilingual. Analysing the historical development of Afrikaans, we become aware of the connections between language use and unequal relations of power.²¹

In their seminal book about the Broederbond, the secret society behind Afrikaner ascendance that was formed in 1914, Wilkins and Strydom note that the policy of forcing more Africans to use Afrikaans was articulated in a secret policy document of September 1968 titled 'Afrikaans as a Second Language for the Bantu'. The Broederbond discussed the importance of imposing Afrikaans on Africans and noted considerable progress in this regard: 'Two years ago in our monthly circular we drew attention of members to the importance of using Afrikaans to Bantu. That idea and the hints given with it created widespread interest and have borne fruit. As a result, most right thinking Afrikaans speakers today address the Bantu in Afrikaans whenever they meet them.'²²

During 1968 the discussions triggered by the circular had moved in a portentous direction. The Bantu Education Department's executive council meeting of 21 March 1968 declared:

The Babanango division is of the opinion that Afrikaans as spoken word is neglected in Bantu education. Broeders in responsible circles have confirmed that much has already been done to give Afrikaans its rightful place, but that

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- 20 On the Broederbond see I. Wilkins and H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikanerbond*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1978); I. Wilkins, *The Broederbond* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979); T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 1991). See also T.D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom, Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
- 21 A. Goke-Pariola, *The Role of Language in the Struggle for Power and Legitimacy in Africa* (Lewiston: E. Mellen, 1993); R. Bain, *Exploring Language and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); J.E Joseph and T.J. Taylor (eds.), *Ideologies of Language* (London: Routledge, 1990); P.T. Roberge, 'The Ideological Profile of Afrikaans Historical Linguistics' in Joseph and Taylor, *Ideologies of Language*, 131-149; Z. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); J. Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); D. Laitin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- 22 The section involving the Broederbond archival documents is largely based on I. Wilkins and H. Strydom, *The Super Afrikaners*, chapter 13. See also I. Wilkins, *The Broederbond*. It is difficult for a researcher to access the Broederbond archives.

there were many problems. It is recommended that Executive refer this issue to *Broeders* in the department with the request that serious attention should be paid continuously to the use of Afrikaans in Bantu education.²³

The following claims about language, education and the political economy are reflected in one of the Broederbonds' documents:

- By far the majority of people in the Republic speak Afrikaans, 2.25 million whites plus 1.5 million coloureds... against 1.25 million English speakers.
- Bantu workers make far more contact with Afrikaans speakers, for example in the mines, industry, farming, commerce etc.
- Bantu officials and teachers mainly come into contact with Afrikaans speaking officials and principals.
- Experience has shown that Bantu find it much easier to learn Afrikaans than English and that they succeed in speaking the language purely, faultlessly and without accent. There are even a few Afrikaans-speaking Bantu communities.
- Both lecturing and administrative personnel at the Bantu universities are almost 100% Afrikaans speaking.
- Afrikaans is a language true to South Africa which for many reasons can serve the peculiar requirements of this country.
- White hospital personnel are mainly Afrikaans speaking.
- The police, with whom Bantu make a lot of contact, are almost all Afrikaans speaking.
- The white personnel of the Railways are predominantly Afrikaans speaking.²⁴

The Broederbond also recognised African schools as strategic sites where Afrikaner hegemony could be implanted by using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, observing in its September 1968 secret policy document:

- According to available figures about 3.5 million Bantu live on white farms ... English is seldom used on farms.
- A further 4 million Bantu live in urban areas where a majority of these workers have a good or reasonable knowledge of Afrikaans. The ordinary Bantu worker's knowledge of English is poor. It is only domestic servants in English households that develop without Afrikaans.
- There are presently 38 000 Bantu teachers in the employ of the Department of Bantu Education. Of this number it can be said that (a) almost all can read Afrikaans; (b) about 80% can also write it and teach it as a school subject in primary schools; (c) about 15 000 had Afrikaans as a language up to standard 8 and speak and write at a fairly cultivated level; (d) about 500 Bantu teachers teach Afrikaans as a subject in secondary school up to Standard 8 and matric; (e) while the majority of Bantu teachers speak English well, a good knowledge

23 Wilkins and Strydom, *The Super Afrikaners*, chapter 13.

24 Ibid.

of Afrikaans has become a status symbol to them. Unwittingly they make a contribution to the promotion of Afrikaans among their people.

- There are presently 2 million Bantu pupils taking Afrikaans as a school subject from Sub-standard A to Standard V. The quality of teaching depends on the teacher's knowledge of the language and ranges from good to poor. At the end of 1967 about 80 000 pupils wrote Afrikaans as an examination subject for the Standard VI public exams and about 90% passed; the standard is about the same as for Afrikaans lower in English medium schools.
- There are about 70 000 Bantu pupils taking Afrikaans as a high school subject and in 1967, twenty one thousand (21 000) wrote it as an examination subject for the Junior Certificate public exam and 70% passed. About 2 000 wrote it as a matric subject and 50% passed. At secondary levels the standard though is like Afrikaans lower in white schools.
- In all primary schools Bantu pupils learn, whenever possible, two subjects through Afrikaans medium.
- Throughout school, Afrikaans is a compulsory language.²⁵

'From the foregoing we can deduce that because of the Government's Bantu Education policy, Afrikaans is slowly but surely gaining an important place,' the document concluded. Broederbond determination to entrench Afrikaans among African communities persisted into the 1970s. In circular 3/70/71, *Broeders* were urged to 'establish Afrikaans as a second language among as many Bantu as possible'. The following year, circular 3/71/72 encouraged *Broeders* to donate books to African schools and the subsequent positive response was commended. Further suggestions were mooted:

If there are any more donations the nearest inspector of Bantu education must be contacted. Members are also requested to use their influence to persuade employers to make Afrikaans reading matter like newspapers and magazines available to employees. The Bantu are increasingly becoming readers of English newspapers and magazines, and we can make a contribution to change this pattern.²⁶

Afrikaans and the road to revolt

The enforcement of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools was accelerated during the early 1970s. The Minister of Bantu Education, M.C. Botha, also the Minister of Bantu Affairs and Development, and his deputies, 'Punt' Janson and A. Treurnicht, were prominent members of the Broederbond. Treurnicht was a former chairperson of the Broederbond. In 1973 the Department of Bantu Education issued a policy document, Circular no. 2 of 1973, entitled 'Medium of Instruction in

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Secondary Schools (and STD 5 classes) in White Areas'. Section A of the circular, referring to 'Policy to be applied and arrangements to be made in the white areas', accorded both English and Afrikaans 50:50 status as official languages of instruction from the last year of primary school until completion of high school.²⁷ The following year, in 1974, the Regional Director of Bantu Education in the Southern Transvaal issued a regional circular about the implementation of the language policy. The regional circular No 2 of 1974 addressed to all school principals clearly stated that Std 5, Forms 1 and 2 students were to use English as a medium of instruction when studying 'General Science, Practical Subjects (Homecraft, Needlework, Woodwork, Metalwork, Art and Craft and Agricultural Science)'. Afrikaans was to be used as a medium of instruction for 'Wiskunde (Rekenkunde) and Sosiale Studie' classes. These students also enrolled for three language classes, that is, vernacular (isiZulu or seSotho), Afrikaans and English.²⁸

In Soweto schools, mother tongue had been the medium of instruction at junior primary prior to 1975. In 1976 the Secretary for Bantu Education instructed some higher primary and junior secondary schools to implement Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. In 1975, Form 1 students in all junior secondary schools were learning in English. When in 1976 the Department of Bantu Education enforced Afrikaans in selected schools, the affected African pupils were required to adapt to learning in two 'foreign' languages within two years, first English in 1975 and then Afrikaans in 1976. Most students from Soweto are multilingual and are proficient in more than one indigenous African language and, therefore, a sizeable number were fourth or fifth language speakers of both English and Afrikaans. The language issue affecting selected schools in Soweto brought important and complex epistemological factors to the fore. If one changes from one language to another, the reality that was created through the first language, that is, mother tongue, is completely lost. As a result, African pupils who were compelled to use Afrikaans relied on rote learning. Bantu Education Minister M.C. Botha would later concede this fact following the uprising, when he said: "The introduction of a "foreign language" as a medium in the primary school was a backward step educationally with which the department would not like to be associated: Concept formation and understanding at this stage takes place best through the vernacular."²⁹

Most teachers in African schools were of the opinion that even without the exacerbation brought about by misguided language policies, Bantu Education did not promote the production of critical thinkers. Hence rote learning and cramming were the only skills really being developed and assessed by the Bantu Education system. The questions students were supposed to ask in the classroom were purely for purposes of clarification, not for critical analysis and analytical interpretation of

27 This important circular is part of the Appendix in Majeke, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprisings'.

28 Office of the Regional Director of Bantu Education Southern Transvaal Region, Regional Circular No 2 of 1974, 'To All Principals: Southern Transvaal Region: Uniform Approach in Schools'. A copy of the circular is available at the Hector Pieterse Museum.

29 *The World*, 18 June 1976, 'Botha Defends Language Rule'.

content. The teacher was thus above questioning and this did not equip students with a range of intellectual and learning skills. Fikile Ngcobo explains the transmission approach involved thus:

You had a teapot full with tea. There's this empty mug or empty cup which is the student and all you do is pour into it until it is full. How it gets full, how it feels when it gets full was just one thing that never was thought of and, of course ... I think we did a disservice of not being able to accommodate students and that's where ... the frustration of students began because ... there were things they knew but teachers felt they knew them better and would never do any listening.³⁰

On the strained relationship, the tension and the loss of trust between the teachers and the students, Ngcobo comments:

Students looked at you and smiled, but it was not an ordinary smile and you spoke to teachers and they told you: 'We don't know what is happening around here.' You could sense the tension and, of course ... there had been quite a number of talks, dissatisfaction about the instructions that had been got by the principals and it had been in the newspapers that everything must be taught, that there should be a switch and especially mathematics to be taught in Afrikaans. I think that's what actually made everybody go berserk.³¹

About the problems raised by the sudden switch to Afrikaans, she remarks:

We had special Afrikaans teachers, teachers who had specialised, or who knew Afrikaans and taught Afrikaans as a language subject. But to suddenly come to teach your Social Studies, which is Geography and History, in Afrikaans, to teach your Hygiene/Health or the Science subjects in Afrikaans and to teach Mathematics in Afrikaans just did not make sense and the teachers themselves were very uncomfortable because they didn't know the language.

In frustration, Ngcobo says, teachers at Phefeni Junior Secondary petitioned the Department of Bantu Education; she adds:

It had to be delivered because teachers there were just feeling 'no way can we do it'. I remember I hadn't signed that petition because I had been away and mine was to add my name onto that petition to say it just does not make sense to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. But ... we knew what it meant for us. If we could just go ahead, there was also fear of treading into troubled waters because that would have meant trouble for us, too. We would have been seen [as] not wanting to do our work, let alone instigation ... The schools seemed to be running normal but the students were not normal. And they had protested, actually as you entered a classroom you could get

30 Interview with Fikile Ngcobo.

31 Ibid.

the anger, they voiced it out but they were surprised (at our passivity) ... It was easy for the authorities to get rid of you for not wanting to do your work ... Anybody ... saying 'this is wrong' would have been aligned with being within, bringing a political ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement into the classroom. The ANC was banned, you wouldn't hear of the ANC then; there was just no ANC. Whatever happened, happened under the ambit of the Black Consciousness Movement.³²

Ngcobo explains the obfuscation that afflicted teachers and students at her school in Phefeni Junior Secondary as a result of the new language policy:

They were phasing out English as a medium of instruction. That in itself was confusion because they had the same teachers to teach them from Form 1 to Form 3. You can imagine if a person has to teach Form I in a different language, which is not a first language to that person, it's a second, third or whatever it is. And then also start teaching another foreign language, foreign in terms of it not being the mother tongue of the teacher for the same subject at another level ... How do you then deal with continuity, how do you then relate to your different classes ... what you were teaching and start reminding the student in Form 3, 'remember I started with this in Form I, this is what I said' ... because now it's a whole language switch? So it wasn't just the problem that the students had. It was also the problem for the teacher. The teacher had to take through all these pupils and make a success of that and yet he or herself had not been taught to use ... (Afrikaans) as a medium of instruction ... in terms of teacher training for secondary and high school ... The medium was English.³³

The more difficult the subject was, the more insurmountable the problem became. Mathematical sciences were a challenge to the pupils because they were taught the basic concepts in their mother tongue during four years at lower primary school. As an example, some learned arithmetic, that is, *izibalo*, from Sub A to Standard 2 in isiZulu. Then they used English at higher primary school, with teachers periodically reverting to mother tongue/vernacular in order to explain difficult concepts and to drive a relevant point home. In 1975, first year junior secondary school students were taught mathematics in English. Then the following year, they were compelled to learn mathematics in Afrikaans. Our mathematics teacher at Phefeni Junior Secondary was never trained to teach mathematics in Afrikaans. She was trained professionally in English. We felt the sudden changes in our teachers, observing differences in quality over the two years, 1975–76. Our teachers were no longer confident, enthusiastic and articulate in front of the classroom.³⁴

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Personal recollections.

Elliot Ndlovu, a mathematics teacher and school principal at Lophama Junior Secondary School in Orlando East, explained these problems. His son was Hastings Ndlovu, the first student to be killed by the police during the Soweto uprising. Elliot Ndlovu had to adapt his teaching style. His teaching style now involved translating English into Afrikaans and vice-versa, not a good teaching method but a survival teaching strategy. Thys De Beer, the Soweto circuit school inspector, came to evaluate progress. Ndlovu describes the encounter as follows:

In 1976 De Beer came to my school whilst I was teaching mathematics. He says: *'Meneer, kyk jong, hoe ver is jy?'* (Sir, how far are you with your syllabus?). *Ek se: 'Ek is baie ver, ... kom luister'* (I say: I am very far, ... come and listen). He came in my class to listen and observe. I went on with my lesson in Afrikaans. I was not struggling ... I simply translated what I learned at school in English into Afrikaans ... So when I taught mathematics to my Form Ones in Afrikaans I was actually teaching in English and then translate everything into Afrikaans ... So when De Beer got into my class he found me during the Afrikaans translation stage.³⁵

De Beer was convinced that implementing the Afrikaans language policy at Elliot Ndlovu's school was a success: 'He got to his car and went back to the school board offices and castigated the school board members for lying to him about the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. He asked them to come to my school and find out the truth ... I was in all sort of trouble.'³⁶ A furious school board chairman visited Elliot Ndlovu to complain. Ndlovu explains:

The school board chairman came by car and asked me: *'Lelibhunu ulenzeni?'* (What have you done to this Afrikaner?). *Ngithi* (I say): 'No, I went on with the lessons whilst he was at my school and ... after that he said "*Dankie*" and he went back to his car and left.' The school board chairman said: 'No, man, *uphuma lapha kimi, uthi* (he is from my place and says): 'I am convinced that Afrikaans can be used as medium of instruction'. I said in return: 'Does he mean one swallow makes a summer? Does he know what I did to get to that standard? He did not ask me!' ... De Beer was convinced that it could be done ... I said: 'I taught them in English and then from there I translated everything into Afrikaans!'³⁷

All this brought to the fore the acrimonious relations between the school board and the authorities.

Intervention by teachers, school boards, journalists and homeland leaders

African parents, journalists, school principals, teachers and even homeland leaders opposed the imposition of Afrikaans in African schools. On 3 January 1975, the

³⁵ Interview with Elliot Ndlovu, conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu for the Hector Pieterse Museum, 21 July 2001.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

African Teachers' Association of South Africa (ATASA) submitted a memorandum to the Department of Bantu Education protesting the ruling that from 1975 Afrikaans and English should be used on 50:50 bases – the ruling was actually implemented in 1976 at selected schools.³⁸ The memorandum, signed by H. Dlamlenze, ATASA general secretary, requested the Minister of Bantu Education, to reconsider the proposed regulations. ATASA described the government's ruling as cruel and short-sighted; it did not make sense to base the education of any child on the assumption that the child would be restricted to a particular area for life. It was wrong to choose the language of instruction on the basis of whether a particular locality or area was predominantly Afrikaans or English speaking. ATASA argued that Africans preferred English because it was used internationally for commercial, diplomatic, intellectual, artistic, educational, and communication purposes.³⁹

Three days later, on 6 January 1975, *The World*, the newspaper with the widest circulation in Soweto, endorsed ATASA's position in its editorial:

Why should we in the urban areas have Afrikaans – a language spoken nowhere else in the world and which is still in a raw state of development, in any case – pushed down our throats? The implications of this new directive are too serious to leave now. We urge parents to join forces with teachers all over the country and fight the directive. The Government must be left in no doubt at all about how seriously we view their highhanded action ... The situation can only deteriorate further unless the new regulations are scrapped.⁴⁰

The Department of Bantu Education dismissed all such protests. M.C. Botha disclosed in parliament on 5 May 1975 that the matter had received careful consideration at a meeting between chief ministers from the various homelands and Prime Minister B.J. Vorster. He explained that the government was not prepared to accede to the request of homeland representatives to scrap the regulation. In addition, Botha continued, the government could not conceivably approve English as the only medium of instruction, if this 'should be the wish of some of the homelands'. The government held the view that both English and Afrikaans, as official languages, should be used if the relevant 'Bantu language is not used for this purpose'. The following day, when opposition members of parliament asked 'Punt' Janson, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, whether his department had consulted African parents concerning the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, he replied:

[B]etween 60% and 65% of the White population are Afrikaans-speaking. However, we agreed to give full recognition to the two official languages. A Black man may be trained to work on a farm or in a factory. He may work

38 Personal recollections.

39 *The World*, 3 January 1975, 'Language Row: ATASA Protests'. See also S.P. Lekgoathi, 'African Teachers' Associations in the Transvaal: From Militant Challenge to Moderate Protests, 1950-1976', mini Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1991.

40 *The World*: editorial, 6 January 1975, 'Scrap Dual Language Ruling'.

for an employer who is either English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking and the man who has to give him instructions may be either English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking. Why should we now start quarrelling about the medium of instruction among the Black people as well? ... No, I have not consulted them and I am not going to consult them. I have consulted the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa ... The leaders of the various homelands can in due course decide what they want to do in their own homelands where they are the masters. However, as far as the white areas are concerned this is a decision that has been taken and I am going to stand by it.⁴¹

This self-serving argument became inflexible policy, leading inexorably to confrontation.

From the Cillie Commission (set up to investigate the uprising) and newspapers such as *The World*, we can reconstruct the chronology of events leading to the Soweto uprising from the beginning of 1976.

Minutes of a meeting of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board on 20 January 1976, held at Moruto-Thuto Lower Primary school, state that the circuit inspector, who was white, had ordered the school board, made up of African parents and teachers, to enforce the teaching of social studies and mathematics in Afrikaans. The remaining subjects were to be taught in English. He told the school board that taxes paid by Africans were sent to the various homelands for educational purposes there. In urban areas, he said, the white population paid for the education of the African child. Therefore, the Department of Bantu Education had the responsibility to satisfy the English and Afrikaans communities. The only way to satisfy these white groups was to enforce the medium of instruction in African schools on a 50:50 basis. The school board replied that it was not opposed to the principle as such but as parents they had the right to choose the medium of instruction. The dictatorial and combative circuit inspector stated, in reply, that the school board had no such right and had no choice but to implement the directives from the Department of Bantu Education.⁴²

After the agitated circuit inspector had walked out of the meeting, the defiant school board adopted English as the medium of instruction, following a motion by K. Nkamela, seconded by S.G. Thwane. The meeting further resolved that all the principals under the board's jurisdiction be informed about the decision. An acrimonious struggle developed between the Bantu Education Department and the rebellious Meadowlands Tswana School Board, resulting in the dismissal of two board members, A. Letlape and J. Peele. The remaining members resigned *en masse* in protest at the dismissals. This issue went as far as parliament. On 27 February 1976, 'Punt' Janson, told parliament that Letlape and Peele had been dismissed in terms of regulation 41 (1) of Government Notice R429 of March 1966. Chief Lucas Mangope,

41 *Hansard*, 6 May 1975, column 5506–5507.

42 *The World*, 5 March 1976, 'Meeting on Schools Language Issue'; *The World*, 8 June 1976, 'Parents Stand Firm in Language Row'; *The World*, 11 December 1976, 'School Sacking will not Lead to Withdrawal'.

Tswana homeland leader, took up the matter with the government in late February 1976. Thereafter, he issued an ambiguous statement, informing the school board they were free to choose the medium of instruction, in consultation with the Department of Bantu Education.⁴³

The World again challenged the government. In its editorial on 25 February 1976, it declared that, 'whether the South African government likes it or not, many urban African parents are bitterly opposed to their children being forced to learn in Afrikaans'. The newspaper dismissed 'God-like decisions by white officials – even cabinet members – on matters of vital importance to blacks' and rejected the old racist dictum that 'whites know what is best for blacks', propagating in its place the principle of African parents deciding what was best for their children.⁴⁴

The Meadowlands Tswana School Board convened a public meeting at the beginning of March 1976. Simultaneously, Mangope and the Department of Bantu Education issued statements to the effect that, 'schools may still apply for exemption on the grounds that they do not have teachers qualified to teach Afrikaans'. Together with this statement, however, the Bantu Education Department issued an order that those classes using Afrikaans must continue until it had investigated the situation. Noting the confusing messages, one vexed principal responded:

Here we are already into March and I am utterly confused about what to do. I am applying for exemption from the Afrikaans rule because many teachers just are not qualified to teach in this language. As for the children – I have seen how some of them are struggling with English. To have Afrikaans on top of this is just too much.⁴⁵

During a meeting on the weekend of 6–7 March 1976, held at Thutolore Secondary School in Zone One, parents from Meadowlands upheld their decision to reject Afrikaans. Furthermore, they instructed S.L. Rathebe, the urban representative of the Bophuthatswana homeland government, to pursue the matter with the apartheid government. Elizabeth Mathope, one of the parents, told the meeting: 'We pay for the education of our children and we should determine their education.'⁴⁶

In February and March 1976, urban representatives of other homelands also became involved and appealed to their homelands to intercede on behalf of dismissed school boards and against forced transfers of teachers. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Chief minister of KwaZulu, addressed a meeting in Soweto in March 1976. Late in April 1976, ATASA met the Secretary for Bantu Education, to whom they presented another memorandum. The teachers' organisation was promised a 'new deal'. *The World* cautiously noted that past experience had taught African parents to be wary of all 'new deals' from the South African government and expressed a 'wait and see' attitude.⁴⁷

43 *The World*, 5 March 1976, 'Meeting on Schools Language Issue'.

44 *The World*, 25 February 1976, 'Asking Too Much of Our Kids'; *The World*, 13 February 1976, 'Now I Know Why Teachers Want to Get Out'; *The World*, 21 May 1976, 'The School Boards are Toothless'.

45 *The World*, 25 February 1976, 'Asking Too Much of Our Kids'; *The World*, 13 February 1976, 'Now I Know Why Teachers Want to Get Out'; *The World*, 21 May 1976, 'The School Boards are Toothless'.

46 *The World*, 8 June 1976, 'Parents Stand Firm in Language Row'.

47 *Ibid.*

Some Soweto school principals succumbed to pressure from the authorities. Sibongile Mkhabela described Mr Gqibithole, the principal of her school, Dr Vilakazi High School, as more interested in being seen as a ‘good boy’ by the Department of Bantu Education. He was determined to keep politics out of the school premises and keep a vigilant eye on the activities of the students. He was also ‘prone to rages that often sent him chasing pupils around the school yard while screaming, “Skunk”’; when Afrikaans was recommended as a medium of instruction, Gqibithole was among the first principals to agree to implement and test the language policy.⁴⁸

According to Colonel J.J. Gerber of the South African Police, from information received from his intelligence sources, as early as March 1976 pupils in Soweto had begun passive resistance against Afrikaans.⁴⁹ At Phefeni Junior Secondary, one of the pilot schools chosen to implement the 50:50 language policy, students in Form 1 and Form 2 commenced passive resistance inside the classroom in March 1976. Then they set up a committee of class representatives, headed by 15-year-old Seth Mazibuko, to discuss the language issue with Charles Mpulo, the school principal, and other teachers. This was an initiative to set up an inclusive structure that would take up student grievances to the school board, circuit inspectors and regional representatives of Bantu Education. Mazibuko says:

We drew up our petition and we went to see our principal and our principal had his hands tied up and he said: ‘I cannot do anything otherwise you just have to do this.’ And in our presence (he) phoned the inspector De Beer, [who] told him: ‘You are not going to be told by children what to do, you are running the school and I am an inspector in that school, and there is a minister who is controlling me so the three of us, dear principal, have a role to play. Afrikaans! Afrikaans! Afrikaans!’⁵⁰

The students then decided to utilise their afternoon periods, allocated for sports and study, to hold meetings. They discussed the disheartening feedback and other classroom issues, such as low marks in the various subjects that used Afrikaans. During these afternoon sessions they also held classes, with some ‘knowledgeable’ student assuming the role of teacher and translating what the students had learnt in Afrikaans into English. Ultimately, they decided to forsake passive resistance and to go public through overt protest. When the Phefeni Junior Secondary students went on strike on the 17 May 1976, *The World* reported the incident under the banner, ‘Anti-Afrikaans Pupils go on Strike in Soweto’. Here is an extract:

Students threatened to beat up their headmaster and threw (Afrikaans) textbooks out of classroom windows in a demonstration against being taught some subjects in Afrikaans. The 600 students from Phefeni Junior Secondary School, Orlando West, then went on strike and refused to attend any classes.

48 Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, 25.

49 See the Cillie Commission report.

50 Cited from video interview of Seth Mazibuko in the documentary *Soweto A History* by P. Bonner and Angus Gibson.

In a violent display of pupil power yesterday the students also demanded the re-instatement of Mr Mahlangu, chairman of the school board, whom they claimed had been sacked because he was against using Afrikaans for teaching. The demonstration started after the morning assembly when students from Form One and Form Two refused to go to their classroom ... Some let down the tyres of the principal's car. They then confronted the principal, Mr S. C. Mpulo, and demanded that he call the school inspector. They said the inspector should come and explain why difficult subjects were taught in Afrikaans ... The head went away and when he came back he told the students that the inspector had refused to come.⁵¹

On 19 May 1976, a committee of class representatives presented a five-point memorandum protesting against the use Afrikaans to the school principal. They planned to stage a march to their school board offices at Diepkloof.⁵² Their counterparts from nearby Belle Higher Primary School also went on strike in solidarity. The following day, pupils from Emthonjeni and Thulasizwe Higher Primary Schools in Orlando East joined the class boycotts. De Beer, the circuit school inspector, stated that the Bantu Education Department was unconcerned and 'doing nothing about the matter'. On 24 May 1976, the striking students were joined by students from Pimville Higher Primary School and Khulangolwazi Higher Primary School in Diepkloof and on 1 June 1976 the seventh school, Senaoane Junior Secondary School, joined. The strike was spreading to different regions in Soweto.⁵³

Concerned parents held emergency meetings with school board and homeland representatives. On 22 May 1976, a meeting of parents, Orlando-Diepkloof Zulu school board members, and *Inkatha ye Sizwe* members, led by Gibson Thula, the urban representative of KwaZulu, held a meeting at Phefeni Junior Secondary School. The meeting decided that students should return to school while the matter received urgent attention. But the striking students largely ignored this plea. On 3 June 1976 pupils at Emthonjeni, Belle, Thulasizwe, and Pimville returned to class. They had been told apparently that lessons in mathematics and social studies would be suspended for the time being.⁵⁴ But students from other schools steadfastly continued with their strike action.⁵⁵ By this time the affected schools had formed a co-ordinating committee, which sought help from senior high school students that were not affected by the Afrikaans directive such as Naledi, Orlando West, Morris Isaacson and Orlando High. At Phefeni Junior Secondary the senior (Form 3) students excluded themselves initially from these processes as they were using English as a medium of instruction. But subsequently they too were drawn in.

51 *The World*, 18 May 1976, 'Anti-Afrikaans Pupils go on Strike in Soweto'.

52 *The World*, 19 May 1976, 'Kids Keep up Strike: Big March Planned'.

53 *The World*, 24 May 1976, '16 000 Pupils Keep up Strike'; *The World*, 25 May 1976, 'New School Joins Strike'; *The World*, 1 May 1976, 'Seventh School Joins the Strike'; *The World*, 21 May 1976, 'The School Boards are Toothless'; Cillie Commission Report

54 *The World*, 3 June 1976, 'School Strike Over: Hundreds of Kids Return to Classes this Morning'.

55 *The World*, 20 May 1976, 'Strike School in Deadlock'.

The Soweto uprising and the role of SASM, BCM, ANC and PAC

The 1977 Political Report adopted by the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the SACP reached the following conclusion on the Soweto student uprising:

The events in what has become known as the Soweto revolt are not isolated happenings; they have their roots in the crisis which has been building up at every level of socio-economic structure ... The intensity of the Soweto events reflects the development over the years of these people's reactions to the growing crisis of apartheid. At the political level, unbroken efforts by our Party and a whole liberation movement, headed by the ANC, maintained that spirit of resistance, and helped lay the foundation for the growth of the heightened revolutionary mood which is in evidence. And, amongst large numbers of the new militants thrown up by the activities, there is a growing awareness of the liberating ideas of Marxism-Leninism and a search for the correct politics of social revolution.⁵⁶

In 1985 ANC president-in-exile, Oliver Tambo, voiced the opinion that the ANC had been ill prepared when the Soweto uprising began, concluding that:

This uprising of 1976-77 was, of course, the historic watershed ... Within a short period of time it propelled into the forefront of our struggle millions of young people ... It brought to our midst comrades many of whom had very little contact with the ANC, if any ... Organisationally, in political and military terms, we were too weak to take advantage of the situation that crystallised from the first events of 16 June 1976. We had very few active units inside the country. We had no military presence to speak of. The communication links between ourselves outside the country and the masses of our people were still too slow and weak to meet such (a challenge) as was posed by the Soweto uprising.⁵⁷

Tambo also placed in perspective the role ANC members played, particularly its networks in South Africa:

An outstanding role in this situation was, however, played by those of our comrades who were inside the country, many of them former Robben Island prisoners. Through their contact with the youth, they were able to make an ANC input, however limited, in the conduct of the bloody battles of 1976-77 ... Among them we would like to select for special mention the late Comrade Joe Gqabi, former Robben Island prisoner ... [who was assassinated] because [enemy agents] could see that the seeds he had planted among the youth in Soweto 1976, hardly a year after his release from prison,

56 'The Way Forward from Soweto', Political Report adopted by the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, April 1977, *African Communist*, no. 70, 1977.

57 Oliver Tambo, 'Black Consciousness and the Soweto Uprising', in A. Tambo (ed.), *Preparing for Power: Oliver Tambo Speaks* (London: Heinemann, 1987).

and in the subsequent years, were bearing bitter fruit for the oppressors and, for us, magnificent combatants for the liberation of our country ... The participation of the comrades we have spoken about, in assisting to guide the Soweto uprising, once more emphasised the vital necessity for us to have a leadership core within the country, known by us and in touch with the people, dedicated, brave, with clear perspectives and thus able to lead.⁵⁸

Before Joe Gqabi was released from Robben Island, Henry 'Squire' Makgothi, John Nkadimeng and Robert 'Malume' Manci ran an effective ANC underground cell in Soweto that they had formed after their release from prison in the early 1970s. In 1975 Stanley Mabizela and Moses Mabhida, who were then based in Swaziland as members of the ANC underground, contacted them. Mabizela and Mabhida (together with Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma) instructed Soweto-based cell members to establish an underground route into Swaziland in order to infiltrate MK cadres in and out of South Africa. Manci and colleagues achieved this task and enrolled Joe Gqabi, who joined their underground cell after his release in 1975. By 1975, Soweto students such as Naledi Tsiki and Mosima 'Tokyo' Sexwale had joined the ANC underground. Tsiki and Sexwale were among the cadres infiltrated in and out of South Africa by the Soweto-based underground network.⁵⁹

Billy Masetlha, Tebello Motaponyane and Murphy Morobe, among others, confirm the existence of this ANC underground network in Soweto. Murphy Morobe remembers:

When I was an affiliate or I was a committed Black Consciousness activist ... there was something you really wanted to know ... that related to the banned organisations. And it was really in 1973/74 that I began slowly to be exposed to the ideas of the African National Congress, mainly through Radio Freedom, when some of us [with] short wave radios ... would ... listen to Radio Freedom. My friend, Super Moloji, had an uncle who was a SACTU stalwart, comrade Elliott Shabangu ... You listen to Radio Freedom and then once in a while you will luckily run across a copy of *Sechaba* or *Msebenzi*. If you are luckier you will stumble ... upon a copy of the *African Communist* ... In 1974 we began a process to resuscitate SASM ... myself, Amos Masondo ... Billy Masetlha, Super Moloji, Roller Masinga and Mosala. And in those days it was very difficult. But then ... the situation in the Portuguese colonies turned in ... 1973/74, culminating in the independence (of Mozambique) and of the pro-FRELIMO rallies ... in 1974. Those events actually raised the level of consciousness and awareness to a very new dimension.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the official version of the PAC is that Zeph Mothopeng guided the Soweto uprising. He was a resident of Orlando West and a teacher in Soweto

58 Ibid.

59 Interview with Robert 'Malume' Manci, conducted by S.M. Ndlovu, 8 and 14 March 2001; and interviews with John Nkadimeng 13 March, 18 March and 27 May, 2001 conducted by S.M. Ndlovu, SADET Oral History Project.

60 Interview with Murphy Morobe.

during 1976 who also co-ordinated the PAC underground in Soweto.⁶¹ Sithembele Khala (Orlando High School) and Dan Mofokeng (Naledi High School) worked with Mothopeng as part of the PAC underground operating in Soweto in the 1970s. Mofokeng had been recruited by Naboth Ntshunsha, who was the chairperson of the PAC branch in Jabulani, Soweto, and Khala had been recruited by John Ganya, who led the PAC branch in Chiawelo, Soweto.⁶² Ganya, Ntshunsha and Mothopeng were the core of the PAC's Soweto Unit. Ganya occasionally went to Kimberley to brief Sobukwe on developments. On various occasions, he also linked up with the Central Committee of the PAC in Dar es Salaam.⁶³

The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) has its own views about the origins of the Soweto uprising and credits SASM and BPC with sparking events. AZAPO argues that events prior to June 16 1976 show that no one other than the students, under the leadership of SASM, can claim responsibility for the uprising. All black organisations that were operating aboveboard in that period were doing so under the broad banner of Black Consciousness. The BPC, through its secretary general Thandisizwe Mazibuko, participated in all meetings convened by the Tswana School Board, together with Thomas Manthata in his capacity as an official of the South African Council of Churches. According to AZAPO, at the time of the outbreak of the uprisings the BPC and the Tswana School Board had engaged the services of a lawyer to work on an interdict against M.C. Botha.⁶⁴

This chapter presents a more complex view of events than each liberation movement does and attempts to go beyond point scoring.

Soweto's school-going youth and activists generally belonged to student organisations like SASM – that according to Nozipho Diseko had come into being in 1968, not in the early 1970s as often claimed. In its infancy, SASM adhered to no particular ideology. In 1968 students from Diepkloof Secondary School brought together young people from various organisations in Soweto like the Y-Teens, Leseding and Youth Alive to establish the movement, initially named the African Students' Movement. With Black Consciousness gaining ascendancy in the early 1970s, SASM embraced it as its philosophy. By the end of 1974, however, disenchantment with BCM led some students to establish links with the ANC. According to Diseko, at first the relationship was informal but became structured by 1976 with the release from Robben Island of prominent ANC leaders like Joe Gqabi. Working through key SASM members, such as Tokyo Sexwale and Naledi Tsiki, the ANC was able to establish units in Soweto to which some young people were drawn.⁶⁵

61 See A.K. Hlongwane, 'To Independence Now, Tomorrow the United States of Africa: The Story of Zeph Lekoame Mothopeng: 1913-1990', MA mini-dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2002.

62 See interviews of S. Khala (in Johannesburg), 3 March 2004 and D. Mofokeng (in Pretoria), 3 November 2003 for the Hector Pieterse Museum, conducted by S.Ndlovu and A.K. Hlongwane.

63 A.K. Hlongwane, 'Umaf'avuke Njengesambane: The PAC in the Era of the 1976 Uprisings', unpublished paper, 2005.

64 Azanian People's Organisation, 'June 16 1976, Background and Aftermath', <http://azapo.org.za>, 2005.

65 Diseko, 'The Origins'.

In 1976 student leaders such as Murphy Morobe,⁶⁶ Sibongile Mkhabela, David Kutumela⁶⁷ and Tsietsi Mashinini were affiliated to SASM and, through the efforts of Zweli Sizane⁶⁸ and Billy Masetlha, among others, were also connected to BCM. On 28 May 1976, SASM held a conference in Roodepoort. During the conference Aubrey Mokoena, a member of the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the Black Parents Association (BPA), delivered a speech about Black Consciousness, in which he raised the issue of Afrikaans.⁶⁹ Student delegates passed a resolution, proposed by V. Ngema and seconded by T. Motapanyane, against the use of Afrikaans and expressed support for students boycotting classes. The minutes of the General Students' Council read:

The recent strikes by schools against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction is a sign of demonstration against schools' systematised to producing 'good industrial boys' for the powers that be ... We therefore resolve to totally reject the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, to fully support the students who took the stand in the rejection of this dialect (and) also to condemn the racially separated education system.⁷⁰

After the May 1976 conference, SASM contacted Seth Mazibuko and other leaders of the co-ordinating committee from junior secondary and higher primary schools. This group, with help from SASM, called a meeting at Orlando East on the 13 June 1976. Mazibuko testified thus during his trial in 1977:

On the 13.6.76 I was attending this meeting. Various schools of Soweto were present at this meeting; therefore there was a large attendance of the meeting. The main speaker was a man called Aubrey [not to be confused with Aubrey Mokoena who was not present] who explained to us what the aims and objects of SASM were. He also discussed the use of Afrikaans as a means of tuition or language and called upon the prefects of our schools to come forward and to explain what the position was there. I stood up and told the congregation that the Phefeni [Junior Secondary] School refused to use Afrikaans and they had boycotted classes during May 1976. Aubrey then enquired how could other schools support us in our stand as they were writing exams and Phefeni was not ... Don [Tsietsi] Mashinini suggested that a mass demonstration should be held on 16.6.76 by all black schools ... The election for the new [Soweto region] committee for SASM was then held. The following members were then elected to the committee: President, Don Mashinini of Morris Isaacson; Vice President, Seth Malibu; myself, Secretary; a female student from Naledi High School – I do not know what

66 National Archives, Pretoria, SAB K345, vol. 148, part 19, file 2/3, Testimony of Murphy Morobe.

67 Ibid., Testimony of David Lisiwe Kutumela,

68 National Archives, Pretoria, SAB, K 345, vol. 99, part 3, Testimony of Zweli Sizane.

69 National Archives, Pretoria, SAB, K 345, vol. 148, Testimony of A. Mokoena.

70 T.G. Karis and G.M. Gerhart, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising' in *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–1979* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1997), 569.

her name is [Sibongile Mkhabela]... Aubrey also explained that all prefects and the monitors would be formed into an Action Committee.⁷¹

This committee subsequently met on 15 June 1976 to consolidate strategies regarding the planned march on 16 June 1976. Mazibuko's involvement in the planning of pre-16 June 1976 events highlights the participation and support of BCM and ANC, through SASM. Although SASM leaders belonged to two camps – those who were BCM aligned and those who were ANC aligned – common purpose prevented a schism. Masetlha, SASM secretary in 1975/6, confirms that SASM specifically targeted Phefeni Junior Secondary School:

At the end of my term as SASM secretary general, May 1976, we had a conference where ... a programme of action was drawn ... to deal with this apartheid and really ... make sure that nationally ... the programme unfolds ... [SASM] assigned a committee that was led by Motapanyane to start an action group, which must begin in Soweto because at that time we identified a school in Orlando West/Phefeni, which had been on strike for about six weeks and [as our contact] Seth Mazibuko who was to go to prison, the youngest in his generation to go to up that [relationship].⁷²

Murphy Morobe describes how SASM first became involved in the boycott movement that began at Orlando West Junior Secondary School (also known as Phefeni Junior Secondary School):

Now this Orlando West Junior Secondary School [Phefeni Junior Secondary School] was on boycott at the time, in 1976, I think early 1976. I think even with Belle Higher Primary School in Orlando West there had been some disturbances there ... We were walking at Orlando, just past Orlando West High School – neighbouring the junior secondary school, and we met one comrade there, who ... had just started teaching at Phefeni Junior Secondary School, Nozipho Mxakathi, Joyce ... Joyce Nozipho Diseko [her married name] ... then said to us: 'What are you guys doing about this?' I can't remember who I was walking with, whether it was Zweli or Super ... We decided to take this issue and introduce it onto the SASM agenda for discussion. And once it got into the agenda, things then started happening from there ... With the first meeting that we called, we did not even have to preach a lot to get people to come to attend the meeting where we were going to discuss the response to this problem that was taking place at Orlando West [Phefeni Junior] Secondary school.⁷³

Sibongile Mkhabela describes the decision-making process by SASM as follows: 'At the DOCC on June 13th ... this is when and where plans were made for a three-day

71 National Archives, Pretoria, Cillie Commission. SAB K345, vol. 148, part 19, testimony of Seth Mazibuko. See also court evidence of Aubrey Mokoena, SAB, K345, vol. 148. On Mazibuko, see also H. Pohlandt-McCormick, 'I saw a Nightmare', chapter 6.

72 Interview with Billy Masetlha, conducted by Ben Magubane and Greg Houston, 22 January 2004, SADET Oral History Project.

73 Interview with Murphy Morobe.

boycott and demonstration on June 16. SASM did not really control the meeting, it called it, it convened it ... it created the platform ... So we came together at DOCC and it was at this meeting that we resolved to have a peaceful demonstration.⁷⁴ Masetlha, Morobe and Mkhabela avoid representing students as mere instruments of some external will and power. An inclusive action committee formed at the beginning of June 1976 and made up of primary, secondary and high school students coordinated the student march on 16 June. Some of the members were Seth Mazibuko (Phefeni Junior Secondary School), Isaiah Molefe (Belle Higher Primary School), Tsietsi Mashinini and Murphy Morobe (Morris Isaacson High School), and David Kutumela (Naledi High). The action committee consulted other organisations and individuals of note in the community – people like Tom Manthata, Sammy Tloubatla and Aubrey Mokena who had been teachers in some high schools in Soweto.

Events as they unfolded on 16 June 1976

The weekend before the march, a meeting was held between students and some BPC members to finalise strategy. The student action committee plan was to stage a peaceful march – with students from all over Soweto congregating at Orlando Stadium and then proceeding to the regional offices of the Department of Bantu Education to deliver a memorandum reflecting student grievances. The principal route passed through the Orlando West precinct because of the symbolic role of Phefeni Junior Secondary School. The students had decided at their meeting on 13 June that they would march by ‘any route leading to Phefeni Junior Secondary School’ to demonstrate their solidarity with students on strike. Once gathered at Phefeni Junior Secondary School, on their way to the Orlando Stadium, Tsietsi Mashinini would address the students. Morobe reminisces: ‘Our original plan was just to get to Orlando West [Junior Secondary School], pledge our solidarity, sing our song and then we thought that is it, we have made our point and we go home ... Neither did we expect the kind of reaction that we got from the police that day.’⁷⁵

Most parents were unaware of plans for the demonstration. Elliot Ndlovu, the father of 16-year-old Hastings Ndlovu, a Form 3 student at Orlando North, who was killed, remembers:

On June 16 1976 I woke up as usual. I did not know anything, these kids were too secretive. We were using some of the facilities at Emthonjeni Primary School [in Orlando East] across the road because my school did not have a photocopy machine and I was also the Maths teacher ... When we were at Emthonjeni I could see there was trouble in Orlando West ... I said to one chap, Shabangu, who was a principal at Zifuneleni School: ‘Man, do you see this trouble?’⁷⁶

74 Cited from the SABC television documentary, ‘Two Decades ... Still June 16’, in Pohlandt-McCormick, ‘I saw a Nightmare’; See also Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*.

75 Cited from video interview of Murphy Morobe in the documentary, *Soweto: A History* by P. Bonner and Angus Gibson.

76 Interview with Elliot Ndlovu conducted by S.M. Ndlovu.

In the morning his son had been acting strangely but Ndlovu took little notice and was still not unduly worried when by 7.30 pm Hastings had not yet come home:

I said to myself, this chap leaves first for work, that is my other son Leslie; then ... he is the second to leave; then I am the last to leave. But that day this chap [Hastings] is still around has not left for school in Mzimhlophe. I ask him why he has not left for school already. He said: 'No papa, I will be moving out just now.' And then I left him. When I got back home this chap has not made fire [on the coal stove]. That was his job to make fire and he will get pocket money every Friday so that he will go to the bioscope and so on ... But it is already ... 7.30 pm.⁷⁷

Colonel Kleingeld, the policeman who shot Hastings Ndlovu at point blank range and was absolved of any responsibility, recalls: 'I received a telephone message on the evening of the 15th, there were rumours about school children who were going to gather near a high school and from there apparently they intended to march to Johannesburg on account of the language issue.'⁷⁸

Hastings Ndlovu was in a procession of students on their way to Orlando Stadium. He met his fate when the students met a police contingent led by Kleingeld at the old Orlando West Bridge. These police were stationed at the Orlando [East] Police Station. Kleingeld submitted the following testimony to the Cillie Commission:

As we came directly opposite the street where they were moving, they immediately started throwing stones and moving towards us. At this stage it was clear to me that they were aggressive. It would not be possible to try to speak to them. Because I could see that the children appeared excited and were behaving very aggressively, I deduced that the purpose of the march was to destroy property and to endanger lives ... They were now so close that I was hit on the left thigh. The windscreen of my vehicle was shattered. The crowd was approximately 50 metres from us. I threw three [tear gas] canisters into the crowd in an attempt to stop their attack and disperse them. The tear gas had no significant effect on the crowd and further stoning was let loose on us ... With the law on Riotous Assemblies in mind, I put both ... my hands up in the air and shouted 'Wait' and in the Bantu language 'Khatle' (sic). It was unlikely that anybody would hear. Because the tear gas had no effect on the crowd, it was now decided to launch a dog and baton attack to disperse the crowd. The purpose was to push the crowd back until help arrived. The police returned to the vehicle after the attack. I saw that one of the dogs had been beaten to death. I also saw that we were completely surrounded. Stone throwing came from all directions. The only solution to protect our lives and property was to shoot warning shots in the air. A total of twenty rounds were fired by me with the sten gun. I put five shots over the heads of the crowd. The

77 Ibid.

78 Cited from video interview of Kleingeld in the documentary, *Soweto: A History* by P. Bonner and Angus Gibson.

crowd was approximately 30-40 metres from us. I did not give an instruction to fire. However, some police were shooting out of desperation. I myself never saw that a person was dead or injured. I later heard that the leader or agitator was indeed dead and removed by a vehicle.⁷⁹

Kleingeld also said:

I came down from the western side towards the school (Orlando West Junior Secondary) ... I stopped my car approximately 100 metres away from the students ... I threw three canisters of teargas myself but only one canister exploded ... it was obvious to me that these chaps will do the same to us what they have done to this dog of ours and I fired five shots in from and in the direction of the crowd ... the minute I moved trying to get into the car they stormed us and then I decide to keep them away with a machine gun.⁸⁰

Malcolm Klein, a black medical officer in the Casualty Department of Baragwanath Hospital, remembers how at about 10.00 am he went to the doctor's break room for a welcome respite after attending to the morning rush of patients. A few moments later, a nursing sister from the casualty department charged into the room with a look of utter distress on her face. The nursing sister summoned him and rushed out of the room:

I followed her and was met by a grisly scene: a rush of orderlies wheeling stretchers bearing the bodies of bloodied school children into the resuscitation room. All had the red 'Urgent Direct' stickers stuck to their foreheads that allowed them to bypass queues and admission procedures ... I stared in horror at the stretcher bearing the body of a young boy in a neat school uniform, a bullet wound to one side of his head, blood spilling out of a large exit wound on the other side, the gurgle of death in his throat. Only later would I learn his name: Hastings Ndlovu.⁸¹

After years of attending to mutilated victims with grisly injuries from assaults with all manner of sharp and blunt objects, Klein thought that nothing could penetrate the emotional barriers he had learned to erect. But he was not prepared for the sight of uniformed school children riddled with bullets and 'the terminal breaths of a youth whose life I was powerless to save. Despite my medical training, I could do little more than observe as life ebbed from his fragile frame.'⁸² With the exception of one child with a bullet wound to the thigh, all the children had been shot above the belt.

79 See National Archives, Cillie Commission, for Kleingeld's testimony. On testimonies by Elliot Ndlovu and Kleingeld see also Pohlandt-McCormack, 'I saw a Nightmare'; and the SABC television documentary, 'Two Decades ... Still June 16'.

80 Cited from video interview of Colonel Kleingeld in the documentary *Soweto: A History* by P. Bonner and Angus Gibson. See Pohlandt-McCormack, 'I saw a Nightmare', on various inconsistencies in Kleingeld's evidence.

81 M. Klein, 'Hastings and Hector: Completing the Record of June 16th', a record compiled and submitted to the Hector Pieterse Museum in 2005. Klein now lives and works as a medical doctor in the USA and compiled his recollections after a visit to the Hector Pieterse Museum. I thank Ali K. Hlongwane, the chief curator at the museum, for forwarding Klein's record to me.

82 Ibid.

Adding insult to injury, the police sought to prosecute those shot for ‘rioting’. According to Klein, the police request to compile a list of all victims with bullet wounds admitted to the hospital was relayed to the doctors by the hospital administrator in charge of the Casualty Department. The doctors refused to comply. The police then demanded that the admitting clerks compile the list and document the patient’s complaint on their admitting chart. On the clerks’ suggestion, the doctors agreed that the clerks would document the patient’s complaint as ‘abscess’, and the doctors would refer the patients to the surgeons for ‘drainage of abscess’. In this way, Klein and colleagues protected an unknown number of patients from being victimised twice by police brutality.⁸³

Hector Pieteron, a 13-year-old student at a higher primary school in White City and the symbol of the Soweto uprising, was among the first students to be shot dead by the police at the gate of Orlando West High School. His sister, Antoinette Sithole, recalls:

Actually where my school was [Thesele Secondary School in Central Western Jabavu] ... there’s a row of schools, it’s a lower primary, it’s a higher primary, it’s a secondary school. So when you go that way and you’re going ... south, obviously you are going to pass the primary school. Hector was in the primary school. I think it was just curiosity because I had to ask: ‘How did the children get involved because we were targeting high schools and secondary schools?’ I was told that they were so curious, teachers tried to stop them but they couldn’t. So Hector joined me because he saw the uniforms of the schools involved in the march. ‘My uncle is there, my sister is there, why can I not join?’ Something like that.⁸⁴

Antoinette and Hector joined the long march through Central Western Jabavu, White City, Mofolo South, and Dube Village to Orlando West:

Pandemonium broke out after the marching students had reached Orlando West. This was after the police had fired teargas into the crowd ... and as I was at the pavement, wondering what’s going on ... Then I saw my brother on the opposite pavement. And it looked as if he was from hiding, so he was coming out to the streets. I was shocked but I said to myself: ‘What can one do?’ ... And then I thought he was looking at me. I waved. I got no response. Then I said: ‘Hector!’ ... He heard me and he came to me and I said to him: ‘What do you want here?’ He was a very shy person. He just smiled and I said to him: ‘You stop smiling and stay right here next to me because I don’t understand what’s going on now.’ ... When we hear a shot we would run and hide ourselves ... All those speeding cars, police cars, dogs barking – we could hear that. But as soon as there’s no sound we would come out from hiding.⁸⁵

83 Ibid.

84 Interview with Antoinette Sithole conducted by Sifiso Ndlovu.

85 Ibid.

Antoinette further recalls her brother's shooting, and meeting Mbuyisa Makhubo for the first time, as follows:

As we came out from hiding, I was scared and I said: 'It seems this is going to go on and on. So what can one do?' I was thinking very hard and I forgot about Hector ... We came on foot. That's another problem. Even if you want to go home, how are you going to go home? So I was thinking about that ... I looked around ... thinking maybe he's still hiding. He's small. Maybe he's still hiding, he's still frightened ... I told myself that I'm not going to move from that place. He might come looking for me. Let me stay here. While I was there, thinking about that, I could see a group of boys, about three or four, at a distance ... They were struggling and other students who were hanging around on the pavement were going to that scene ... I want to go there but I don't know how because I'm thinking of Hector that he might look for me and not find me ... I was very scared. It's almost about seven minutes and Hector hasn't come out. My heart was beating so fast but I tried to get hold of myself. As they came closer, the gentleman ... whom I knew later [as] Mbuyisa Makhubo ... lifted ... a body and, as he lifted it higher, the first thing that I saw was the front part of Hector's shoe. Then I said: 'Those shoes belong to Hector!' I just said that and I just went to the scene. Mbuyisa was already running. And on the way when we were running I asked him: 'Who are you?' This is my brother, I've been looking for him.' I didn't know how to explain myself.⁸⁶

After the murder of Hector Pieterse and Hastings Ndlovu, unarmed and furious students continued pitched battles with the police, who were using live ammunition and teargas. Parents had to rush home from work extremely worried about the safety of their children.

The Cillie Commission report has been used here to reconstruct the events that took place that day:

- 07h45:** Col. J.A. Kleingeld, Station Commander of the Orlando Police Station ordered all available policemen to be on stand-by. A Black sergeant who was sent to inspect saw several groups of marchers. The march was proceeding along Xorile Street from north to south. The sergeant notified the Orlando Police Station that children were marching in the streets.
- 07h50:** Brig. S.W. le Roux, Divisional Commissioner for Soweto, received information concerning the marchers from the local Chief of Security and ordered six station commanders to send out patrols.
- 08h00:** Scholars carrying placards gathered at the Naledi High School, Tebello Motapanyane led the student march to Orlando West past Thomas Mofolo

⁸⁶ Interview with Antoinette Sithole. For information on Mbuyisa Makhubo see 'Paths of Dignity', interview with his mother, Nombulelo Makhubo, *The Star*, 16 June 2001.

Secondary School and the Morris Isaacson High School. Scholars from the Tladi, Moletsane and Molapo Secondary School also arrived and took part in the protest march ...

- 08h30:** Col. Kleingeld requested reinforcements and issued revolvers and pistols to his men. With 48 policemen, 40 of whom were Black, he went past the Orlando Stadium to Uncle Tom's Hall, where scholars had gathered ... At this stage, Brig. Le Roux realised that the situation was explosive. He had too few men – between 300 and 350 – at his disposal to control the situation ...
- 10h55:** A West Rand Administration Board (WRAB) official, J.B. Esterhuyzen, was driving along Khumalo Street (Orlando West) when he was attacked by youths. He tried to escape from his car, but was surrounded by youths and beaten to death. During this period delivery vehicles, government buildings and cars were pelted with stones and set on fire. Trains were also attacked.
- 11h20:** As word of police brutality spread around Soweto, WRAB was launching a new sheltered employment workshop at Orlando East. The function was attended by among others Dr L.M. Edelstein, the chief welfare officer. Word reached them of the uprisings and Edelstein left by car for the youth centre in Central Western Jabavu. By then his car had been damaged by stones. He ran to his office and locked the door. Another WRAB official, R. Hobkirk, was trapped in another office. The protesters forced their way into Edelstein's office, and dragged him outside. Hobkirk escaped and was protected by members of the local community. Edelstein was beaten to death. Two 18-year-old scholars, K. Dhlamini and L.J. Matonkonyane, were later charged with the murder of Edelstein but acquitted.
- Noon:** Police refused white journalists entry into Soweto. They obtained information about the uprising from their African colleagues.
- 12h15:** An unsuspecting African social worker from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development was hosting a white woman student researcher. Students on Orlando West Bridge stopped their car and threatened to assault the researcher. She was protected by well-disposed students and placed in the care of a local clergyman.
- 12h30–1300:** SABC camera crew and newsmen were allowed to accompany police patrols in Soweto. Bottle stores at Phefeni/Orlando West were looted and set on fire. WRAB buildings were also targeted. Police continued to use tear gas and live ammunition to control the situation.
- 14h00:** A large contingent of para-military police reinforcements arrived at intervals as looting and arson continued with criminal elements/*tsotsis* taking advantage. A senior police officer undertook an inspection flight by helicopter over Soweto. People were scattered and gathering in several places. There was chaos; vast parts of the area were under smoke, with buildings and cars on fire. Three

white medical doctors were trapped at Mofolo; a vehicle was sent to their rescue.

14h30-17h00: As the burning and looting continued, wounded and shot people continued streaming to Baragwanath Hospital and various local clinics. Medical staff was overwhelmed. The police seemed to be shooting without warning and indiscriminately. Looting, arson and violence continued. WRAB offices and its bottle stores at Orlando West and Orlando East were set on fire. So too were the WRAB offices in Meadowlands and Diepkloof. Arson and looting continued at Nhlazane, Moroka/Rockville, Mofolo, Chiawelo, Senaone, Zola, Moletsane and Jabulani. Post offices and the White City library, the clinic in Senaone and the Mapetla hostel were attacked. The police arrested a number of people and more people were wounded and killed. At 15h30 Colonel Theunis 'Rooi Rus' Swanepoel arrived in Soweto with three officers and 58 policemen. They divided into two task forces. The force under Swanepoel came up against the protesters around Uncle Tom's Hall. The crowd numbered about 4 000 and was dispersed by the police who fired at them.

17h00-20h00: Violence, death and arson continued. Burnt motorcars are used to block roads and railway tracks, as police used rail and road to gain access to other parts of Soweto.

At 19h00 police were split into smaller groups, and assigned specific tasks. Major-General W.H. Kotze, divisional commander for the Witwatersrand, accompanied by a number of armed men, went by car from Moroka police station to Jabulani police station, as radio communication between the two stations was poor.

21h00: A meeting of the Soweto Parents' Association was held in Dr Motlana's consulting rooms to discuss the events of the day. Along with Motlana, Winnie Mandela, T. Motapanyane, a student, and R. Matimba, a teacher, were among those present. Mandela suggested that a mass funeral for police victims be held on Sunday 20 June. The service was later prohibited.

From the official records, the para-military police who had arrived in Soweto during the day were given orders to shoot to kill; law and order was to be maintained 'at any cost'. The police shot dead another 11 people before that day. Ninety-three more people were shot dead by police over the next two days. The Soweto Parents' Association (SPA) called a meeting to discuss plans for a mass funeral for the victims of the uprising and for providing financial aid to afflicted families. The SPA was formed on 21 July 1976 as an umbrella organisation of representatives from SASM, SASO, the Post Primary Principal's Union, Black Social Workers Association (BSWA), Black Community Programmes (BCP), YWCA, YMCA, Parents Vigilante Committee, South African Black Women's Federation and the Institute of Black Studies. Almost all the representatives were residents of Soweto, even though some

of the organisations were national in character. The name changed to Black Parents' Association (BPA), whose first secretary was Aubrey Mokoena; it embraced parents in other affected areas such as Alexandra Township as protest expanded to various other areas.⁸⁷ The Johannesburg Magistrate's office turned down BPA chairman Rev. Manas Buthelezi's application for permission for a mass funeral. Minister of Police Jimmy Kruger declared: 'It is known that black power organisations are behind the move to hold the service.' There was division in the BPA executive over whether to proceed in spite of the ban. A compromise was reached in the decision to arrange one symbolic funeral – that of Hector Pieterse. Noting the police disrespect, abuse of power and interference in a 'private' family affair, Antoinette Sithole further recounts:

Hector was to be buried the next week and they said: 'No ways, we are still investigating.' Hector died on the 16th of June 1976 but he was buried on the 3rd of July because the police didn't allow us to bury him. They would give funny and stupid reasons, they would say: 'We are waiting for the station commander to do this and that.' ... They said to us we cannot bury Hector, they would arrange the burial ... Anyway, my grandmother knew Afrikaans very well, so it was easy for her to talk to them ... 'No ways, we have been waiting for so long, we tried to be patient with you but in our culture we don't do this. So you've killed my grandson, now you're giving us rules, it's better to kill us all.' That is how the day came for us to bury Hector ... In our culture, when somebody is dead, people would come and sympathise, sing and whatever ... So Winnie used to come, Dr Buthelezi, Murphy Morobe, Dr Motlana, but late at night at about 10.00pm or 12 o'clock. They knew that the police are gone now ... They would come and sort of arrange how the funeral is going to go about ... The police who were looking at my grandmother's house, spying, ... came and took me to the police station and asked me questions about people who are coming to the house. And I said: 'We've got neighbours coming, they bring cakes, they sympathise, they sit there with my mother and my grandmother, there's nothing more.' So that was it!⁸⁸

Mrs Matokolo, Hector's grandmother, said the following about Hector: 'Oh, he was a naughty boy, like any boy at his age, but I knew one thing, though. He always came back straight home from school.'⁸⁹ But one day, on 16 June 1976, Hector Pieterse did not come home.

Martha Ndlovu, Hastings Ndlovu's mother, told the following story during Hastings's funeral:

[W]hen this child was born my hubby Elliott said 'this boy is going to be great in life' and named the boy Hastings. But following our African

87 National Archives, Pretoria, SAB K345, vol. 148, testimony of Aubrey Mokoena.

88 Interview with Antoinette Sithole.

89 *Drum*, August 1976.

tradition I gave him a second name, Bongani, which means 'be thankful'. I remember very clearly that when his father named him Hastings, I jokingly said that like Lord Hastings the boy will go down in history. It was a remark I made lightly. Little did I realise then that one day that prediction would be true ... I take courage of the fact that Africa and Africans came forward to console the Ndlovu family in their dark hour of grief. How he died is a pride to all Africans. As a mother I searched for him until I found Hastings. How beautiful was his corpse. Here's what a mother's lot becomes painful. You look for a child thinking you will find him alive. You are told go to the mortuary to identify his body. Oh Lord, help me forget these things. Teach me to forgive. How long am I going to suffer through memories of the things he used to say, how he used to read to me, how he used to talk, how he used to complain about his pet hates in life? Let it not be long because every day brings memories. Many years will pass before we mothers can forget about our loved ones whose lives were cut short by bullets.⁹⁰

Police killings were indiscriminate. On 17 June, Onica Mithi was walking towards Baragwanath Hospital with her cousin, Martha, and with her eight-year-old daughter, Lilly. They saw a group of youths running towards them. When Onica heard shooting, she fled with her daughter and cousin. Onica saw Martha fall first, and then Lilly. Martha had been shot in the leg. As Lilly was trying to help her, the police also shot her. Onica says: '(Lilly) never gave the "Black power" sign and was not part of a crowd when she was shot.' The autopsy revealed that the bullet had entered 'the centre of her back and passed through her heart and right lung, leaving an exit wound of 4 cm and 2 cm in her chest'.⁹¹

Staff at Baragwanath Hospital and at various health clinics around Soweto – including private medical doctors such as Nthato Motlana – played a commendable role in helping victims who had been shot and assaulted by the police. At Baragwanath, the staff stayed at their posts while shots were fired from nearby roads and teargas wafted into operating theatres. The commitment of nurses, kitchen staff, cleaners, ambulance staff and porters was exemplary. According to a report in the *Star* newspaper, 'everybody behaved as if this sort of thing happened every day'.⁹²

Thys De Beer, the Soweto circuit school inspector, remained unmoved by the grave situation. He believed that the government should reinforce its hard-line approach regarding Afrikaans. During a press interview on 18 June 1976, De Beer was quoted as saying: 'We thought that if we sat it out the strikes would peter out and parents would force their children back to school ... I told the school principals earlier, and I still believe, that if we gave in to "student power" on this issue, they will in no time be demanding something else.'

90 *Drum*, September 1976.

91 National Archives, Pretoria, SAB K 345, vol. 190, part 4, exhibit 129, testimony of Onica Mithi; SAP 3478, Autopsy Report 2498/76, government mortuary, Johannesburg. See also Pohlandt-McCormack, 'I saw a Nightmare'.

92 *The Star*, 18 June 1976, 'Baragwanath (Hospital) Bears the Brunt'.

On 2 August the Students' Action Committee held an emergency meeting. The Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) was formed the same day, with each high and secondary school represented by two members.⁹³ Tsietsi Mashinini, elected president, issued a memorandum declaring the SSRC the 'voice of the people', as the authorities were refusing to negotiate with the BPA. The memorandum also demanded the release of detained students. The SSRC enjoyed wide support and student leaders who had been relatively unknown before the uprising became powerful in Soweto. Alerting fellow students through the *World* to meet up in classrooms, the SSRC mobilised large numbers of students to organise boycott and stay-away campaigns amongst Soweto's workers. From 2 to 4 August 1976 the SSRC convinced two-thirds of Soweto's work force to stay away from work in Johannesburg. In the process, much damage was done and trains and busses were set alight. Also, a clash ensued between the residents and hostel dwellers, whom the students had failed to consult. The SSRC agreement with shebeen owners to close temporarily for a two-week period led to a dramatic drop in Soweto's crime rate. Students launched clean-up campaigns to deal with the litter piling up in Soweto's streets. The legitimacy of the SSRC was acknowledged by adults in Soweto and by the press. They had persuasive power – 52% of people in Soweto were under 25 and 63% under 30. Police raided classrooms constantly in an attempt to capture student leaders. Despite some dissatisfaction, most business sectors such as the shebeen, taxi and soccer industry were willing to negotiate and co-operate with student leaders in their campaigns. A period of mourning was declared over Christmas, when all of Soweto wore black for one week and spent no money on gifts and celebrations. Sympathetic taxi drivers drove Mashinini around Soweto on SSRC business.

The Soweto uprising spread to urban centres, rural areas and homelands. Students throughout the country went on strike in solidarity with the Soweto students. Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Police, announced in the House of Assembly on 22 June 1976 that the pattern of the riots [uprisings] that spread to the East Rand, the West Rand, the University of the North, University of Zululand and Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg, had followed that of Soweto. This pattern was to 'destroy buildings by ire, to plunder, to throw stones and objects, to set vehicles alight and attack their own people'.⁹⁴ By the end of February 1977 the official death toll, as recorded by the Cillie Commission, stood at 575 – including 75 coloured, two white, two Indian and 496 African people. Many areas were affected including 22 townships in the Transvaal, 16 areas around Cape Town, four townships in Port Elizabeth and nine other towns.⁹⁵

93 *The World*, 3 August 1976, 'Pupils Form New Body'; See also S.M. Ndlovu, *Counter-memories of June 1976*.

94 *Cape Times*, 22 June 1976; *The World*, 17 June 1976, 'Riot – Kruger Speaks'.

95 Bonner, 'The Soweto Uprisings'. Statistics are provided by the Cillie Commission. These figures are not cast in stone and should be revised by historians and others.

PART 2: ALEXANDRA AND KATHORUS⁹⁶

By Noor Nieftagodien

Although Soweto was undoubtedly the epicentre of the 1976 uprising, the brutal response by the police to the students' peaceful march ignited a general revolt across the country. After 16 June one township after another engaged in open revolt. It took only one day for students from Alexandra to organise solidarity action with their comrades in Soweto and for the uprising to engulf other townships in the vicinity of Soweto.

Initially the revolt took the form of solidarity marches with the students of Soweto but quickly transformed into more generalised struggles against Bantu education and apartheid. There were many similarities in the form and political content of the uprising in different townships: they were mainly student-led; symbols of apartheid, especially beer halls, became the primary targets; police repression was severe, which resulted in large numbers of casualties; and Black Consciousness emerged as the unifying ideology of the student movement. In addition, the introduction of Afrikaans was a common immediate cause of student discontent. The effects of the structural crisis of Bantu education were in evidence everywhere. Overcrowding, lack of resources, unqualified teachers and the poor quality of education characterised township schools and were among the principal underlying causes of student discontent everywhere.

Although the struggles in other townships generally copied the template established by the Soweto uprising, there were also local variations that were shaped by local actors and circumstances. Possibly the main difference between Soweto and other townships was that the struggles in these other places neither reached the same levels of intensity nor were as protracted as in Soweto. The level of organisation, the role of workers and hostel dwellers and the role of the police also varied significantly across the townships.

Alexandra

More than any other township on the Witwatersrand, Alexandra, some 16 kilometres north of Johannesburg central business district and between 30 and 40 kilometres from Soweto, exhibited the worst signs of urban decay. Deteriorating conditions in township schools, including massive overcrowding, lack of basic facilities and poor standards of teaching had reached their zenith in Alexandra, where education was in a particularly parlous state as a result of the state's decision to remove families from the township to places like Diepkloof and Meadowlands in Soweto. There were 13 schools and only one secondary school, the Alexandra Secondary School, which only went up to Standard 8 (or Junior Certificate). Leepile Taunyane, who was the principal of Alexandra Secondary School until 1975, believes the Department of Bantu Education never intended to introduce matriculation because the Catholic School already catered for matric classes.⁹⁷ The Catholic School could not meet the

⁹⁶ Kathorus: acronym for Katilehong, Thokoza, and Vosloorus.

⁹⁷ Interview with Leepile Taunyane, 27 October, 2003.

growing demand for matric, however, which meant that beyond Junior Certificate most Alexandra students commuted to schools in Soweto and other nearby townships such as Thembisa. The itinerant life-style of Alexandra youth enabled them to absorb disparate influences and to spread these among youth throughout the Witwatersrand. The Department of Bantu Education allowed Alexandra Secondary School to have a matric class only when the Catholic School relocated to Diepkloof.

Overcrowding was most endemic in Alexandra schools. Victor Kgobe was at Mazambane Primary School in the early 1970s and says the school was too small to accommodate all the students. They used a number of satellites sites, he says, and 'identified church sites'.⁹⁸ When Alexandra Secondary School moved into new premises in 1960, it experienced a massive influx of students. Mr Taunyane remembers: 'As soon as we got to the new building in 1960 the school grew phenomenally. It just grew and grew and I suppose even those fellows who had been sitting at home and not getting any accommodation at schools just decided, well there's space now somewhere, there's a school and I am going back.'⁹⁹ By the early 1970s the school was experiencing terrible overcrowding, with 60 students in a class. As a result, the Form 1 classes were held in a hall at the Alexandra Stadium and additional teachers were employed at the school's expense.

Alexandra schools were also in varying states of disrepair and terribly under-equipped. Victor Kgobe explains: 'We didn't have desks. Most of us actually sat on the floor. There were a lot of broken windows; they were not being fixed ... There were not enough toilets ... And we basically didn't have laboratories.' Students also resented what they perceived to be a conservative and 'top-down' governing structure for education in the township. At school level, 'the principal will instruct the teachers and the teachers will basically instruct the students'.¹⁰⁰ According to Sylvester Ndaba, who became a key figure in the 1976 uprising in Alexandra, student activists despised the Alexandra School Board:

Look, it was a typical Bantu Education set up where the principal wielded power ... There was one School Board that controlled the entire Alex ... Mr. Khoza was the chairman of the Alexandra School Board. Now remember if you are the chairperson of the then School Board that meant you were working for the system, you see. And if you work for the system, we as the youth saw you as an *impimpi* – a sell out ... It was not elected, it was appointed by the government ... They would appoint certain people within the community to serve as School Board Members. And those School Board Members were supposed to be the representatives of ... the parents of Alex. But no, it was the other way round; they were singing the masters' voice, you see. They would perpetrate and perpetuate these systems as far as the

98 Interview with Victor Kgobe, 21 May, 2003.

99 Interview with Leepile Taunyane.

100 Interview with Victor Kgobe.

apartheid regime was concerned. So they were hated – let me tell you they were basically hated.¹⁰¹

These views reflected the growing radicalisation of students, many of whom had come under the influence of Black Consciousness (BC) that by the early 1970s was having great impact on young activists. Siphso Kubekha was aware of BC supporters at school and was impressed by prominent BC leaders. At the time, however, he was ‘not very political. I was just an ordinary person.’ Joe Manana first became involved in the youth organisation of the Lutheran church; his mother wanted him to become a priest. He learned about BC and with other supporters set about not only, he says,

[to] conscientise people politically but also to politicise people in terms of ... having confidence to say that you know this is their country. They should take the risk of being themselves because if you are self-reliant you are in a position to be creative. I was not a student by then but I was lucky to mix with students. I managed to go to their conferences now and then in Hammanskraal [and] in the University of the North.¹⁰²

These young activists immersed themselves in Black Consciousness literature and debated key texts by Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Malcolm X. Wally Serote, a leading poet of the BC era who had been raised in Alexandra, also inspired Alexandra’s growing BC adherents, who often organised cultural activities to conscientise the community. Prior to 1976, however, there was not much focus on building local organisations, partly due to the relatively small number of activists involved in overt political work and, partly because of the prevailing climate of fear. June 1976 marked a decisive turning point in the focus and fervour of political activists.

On the afternoon of June 17, a few students erected a barricade on 6th Avenue. This isolated incident gave little forewarning of the impending eruption in Alexandra. The following day Alexandra witnessed one of the most intense and bloody days of the 1976 revolt. Once again excerpts from the Cillie Commission report have been used to provide graphic details of that day’s dramatic events:

- 08h00:** In Wynberg, looting and arson occurred at Indian shops, and at the WRAB inspectorate offices and bottle stores. Motor vehicles were attacked and set on fire.
- 10h00:** Bottle stores and other shops had been looted by the rioters ... About 150 men and women took part in the looting. The police opened fire on the looters. The six wounded and the four dead were all between the ages of 16 and 25 years.

101 Interview with Sylvester Ndaba, 9 July 2003.

102 Interview with Joe Manana, 7 June 2003.

- 10h30:** Police patrols encountered unruly behaviour everywhere. Groups of people were milling about, the Black Power salute was given, and a defiant attitude was adopted towards the police.
- 10h59:** A shot was fired at the official motor car of Col. Slabbert.
- 11h05:** About 200 Black men and women and tsotsis, together with a number of Coloured men and women, attacked Green's fish-and-chips shop ... The police were commanded to open fire and shot dead a fleeing Black man and woman.
- 11h55:** About 200 Blacks and Coloureds ... stormed two shops in Vasco da Gama **Avenue.**
- 12h55:** During the afternoon, the police received reports that Blacks travelling around Alexandra in motor vehicles were inciting others to violence.
- 13h00:** A number of vehicles, including PUTCO buses, were set on fire.
- 16h07:** The Mimosa Café in London Street was looted and set on fire by youths. The police had to threaten the looters with rifle fire five times before they beat a retreat ... The police vehicles in the street were pelted with stones.
- 16h23:** A group of about 150 looters, who were giving the Black Power salute, taunted the police in Selbourne Avenue. Four of them were arrested. They were found to be in possession of a dagger, a hatchet, a knife and a knob-kierie.¹⁰³

For Khulu Radebe, who was doing Standard 4 at Alexandra's Pholosho Primary, 18 June 1976, was to become a turning point in his life:

Colleagues hooked me into the struggle, unaware that I was going to be involved my entire life in the struggle, you know, young as I was. I remember that day when we were taken out of our classrooms. We moved from 12th Avenue ... I remember one police Valiant ... that was used by two white policemen. I remember I threw a stone ... Our intention was to go straight ... but we decided to go ... back to 1st Avenue ... The young ones were told to go home ... but we were anxious to be part of it, you know ... My parents were looking for me ... And then after that there was lot of police in Alexandra. But I remember the first incident where the police started to shoot; it was at the beer hall – at 3rd Avenue ... There was a church there, Lutheran Church, [where] six of us were hiding ... We said: 'No, there's this beer hall in 7th Avenue ... No one is guarding it, you see, let's go burn it.' So while we were throwing stones there suddenly there was lot of people, I don't know where they came from. Then we ran to 12th Avenue. There was a Chinese shop there at the corner of Selbourne and 12th Avenue, so it was looted.¹⁰⁴

103 Cillie Commission, vol. 2, 31–5.

104 Interview with Khulu Radebe, 4, May 2003.

As soon as the students embarked on their march, the police despatched two platoons, under the command of Colonel G. Slabbert, to the township. Until midnight Alexandra was engulfed in an orgy of violence such as Radebe describes. In one incident on Selbourne Street, the police opened fire on a group of 150, some of whom were looting a bottle store, killing four and injuring several others. Next to Soweto, Alexandra experienced the most violence from the police, who admitted to killing 29, making 18 June the most violent day in the township's history. The following day a further five bodies were found in different parts of the township. Selwyn Talaza, the son of an Anglican Church minister, and Japie Mankwe Vilankulu, a BC exponent, were among those killed.¹⁰⁵ Police brutality in Alexandra was so severe that three riot policemen were charged with assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm. It was alleged during their trial that they had dragged people from cars, assaulted them and tore up their permits, and then demanded R25.¹⁰⁶

Demonstrations continued on Saturday 19 June, although with considerably less violence on the part of the police. There were also fewer participants on the marches. As a result of the weekend, schools could not be used as centres of mobilisation and parents exerted some restraint on the angry youth. Everyone appeared to be shell-shocked by the intensity of the violence of the previous day, especially the severity of police reaction to the demonstrations.¹⁰⁷

As in Soweto, students in Alexandra first attacked the obvious symbols of apartheid such as beer halls and the WRAB offices. The demonstrations were remarkable also for the unity displayed between African and coloured students, even though they attended segregated schools. Some of the marchers turned their attention to looting shops on First Avenue, as Radebe testifies. This aspect of the demonstrations assumed racial overtones when Indian and Chinese-owned shops were attacked. Several of these establishments were burnt down. Demonstrations and marches continued in the following weeks but on a smaller scale.

When the schools reopened after the mid-year break, Soweto and Alexandra emerged as pivotal sites of the students' struggles. It soon became evident that a very close relationship had developed between the student leaders of the two townships. The bonds between residents of the two areas had grown immeasurably because of the forced removals and, as has also been mentioned, many Alexandra students attended high schools in Soweto – especially in Diepkloof and Orlando, which were at the heart of the Soweto revolt – and were directly involved in the Soweto revolt. Some of them invariably became leading figures in the student movement in Alexandra. On the whole, however, students in Soweto were much better organised than their comrades in Alexandra. By contrast, Alexandra activists found it more difficult to replicate the organisational successes of their counterparts, the township network of SSRCs as well as organised support from parents. Alexandra student leaders were unable to sustain the same level of mobilisation as in Soweto.

105 *Weekend World*, 4 July 1976.

106 *The World*, 15 March 1977.

107 Cillie Commission, vol. 1, 152-3.

The second half of the year was marked by student attempts to organise themselves and to sustain a level of community mobilisation. July was relatively quiet but August witnessed a new upsurge of political activism. The SSRC called for a stay-away on 4 August to demand the release of students who had been detained. The strike was reasonably well supported in Alexandra.¹⁰⁸ Over the following six days the township again experienced an upsurge in student action directed mainly at the police, schools and PUTCO. On 6 August PUTCO decided to withdraw its service from the township. Throughout this period regular attempts were made to burn down schools.

The uprising in Alexandra reached a climax on 9 August. Alexandra High School and Kadide Primary School were set on fire. The Cillie Commission report summarised the events on that day: 'Rioting was rife throughout the residential area. Buses and police vehicles were pelted with stones; rioters erected barricades in the streets, intimidation of workers was general.' When the SSRC called a second strike for the 23-25 August, few workers from Alexandra heeded the call. Similarly, the strike on 7 September was poorly supported. The uprising had clearly run out of steam among Alexandra residents.¹⁰⁹

The state had also regained some measure of control over the township and was confident enough to launch a massive 'mopping up operation'. On 13 September, the police swooped on suspected student activists and striking workers. *The World* reported the police crackdown as follows:

It is estimated that over 900 people in Alexandra were arrested yesterday in what police described as a 'clean-up'. The police launched a crackdown on children and adults found in the township during the day. They went from house to house looking for people not at work or school. The house-to-house search followed the stay-at-home strike in Soweto yesterday ... A police spokesman said the massive arrests were intended to 'clean up the township of loafers'.¹¹⁰

An attempt to mobilise support for a five-day stay-away at the end of October enjoyed very little success. Similarly, the campaign by some students to disrupt end-of-year examinations failed to muster significant support. Unlike their counterparts in Soweto, most students in Alexandra wrote the final exams.¹¹¹

A group of student leaders then began to make an effort to build a sustainable student organisation in the township. At about the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, the Alexandra Students League (ASL) was established to co-ordinate student struggles in the township. The first executive of the ASL included Sylvester Ndaba (president), Hlome Mbatha (chairperson), Steve Tau, Jackie Seroke, Zebelon Cebekhulu and Matoto Mtjalela. There was also a woman activist named Eunice because, Sylvester Ndaba explains, 'We had to have a woman amongst us – a girl.

¹⁰⁸ *The World*, 4 August 1976.

¹⁰⁹ Cillie Commission, vol. 1, 152-3.

¹¹⁰ *The World*, 14 September 1976.

¹¹¹ *The World*, 6 January 1977.

Even now it was not a concept like today – addressing the gender issues. But it was important that she was there because she was ferocious and very, very vocal.’¹¹² Sylvester Ndaba was involved in student politics in both townships. At the time he was a pupil at Orlando North, the school attended by Hastings Ndlovu, who was killed with Hector Pieteron, Ndaba was commuting between the two townships and effectively acting as a point of contact for activists from both areas.

The leaders of the ASL set themselves a few objectives in early 1977. The first was simply to avoid detention ‘not to get picked up by the system’:

[B]ecause the easiest way to kill an organisation, according to the system at the time, was [to] nab the ringleaders [and] the whole thing would fizzle out. So we needed to sustain the organisation – in sustaining the organisation we had to look after its founder members. So we then decided we’re not going to call it the Alexandra Students Representative Council (ASRC) because we had the Soweto Students Representative Council. And we also knew that the SSRC was being infiltrated by the system – the informers within the system. So the moment we called it the ASRC we would have to be subsumed by the SSRC and then expose ourselves. We were going to call it the ASL.¹¹³

The ASL also tended to operate like a political party. Membership was tightly controlled and restricted:

Before you joined us ... we investigated you for 14 days ... Surveillance in the true sense of the word! In the morning where do you go? We would exchange, we would go into shifts ... between three and four hours ... We would know your girlfriend, we would know your hobbies, we would know everything about you. After fourteen days – at the time we thought we can establish a pattern of who you are, who are your friends, your contacts, etc. – we would then accept or reject you based on the findings of the committee.¹¹⁴

Ideologically the ASL aligned itself to Black Consciousness. It viewed its major task as being to conscientise people, along BC lines. Sylvester Ndaba recalls:

The slogan ‘black is beautiful’ ... ‘I’m black and proud’, was prominent in all our speeches ... The one person that ... articulated this very well was Steve Biko, with his BCM concepts. To us it was not a concept, it was something that you had to live through ... You have to see that you’re black and you’ve got to understand that it’s not a mistake. And we’re not going to be playing ... docile.¹¹⁵

The leaders of the ASL, like student activists everywhere, came under pressure to leave the country and to join one of the armed wings of the liberation movements. Police

112 Interview with Sylvester Ndaba.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

harassment and the prospect of detention made exile an increasingly viable option for student activists. Internally, however, ASL leaders decided after considerable debate that the time was not yet right for armed insurrection. Ndaba further explains: 'The SAP ... had all the necessary power, money, [and] armoury you can think of. So we knew from the beginning that we can't take them on. And the good thing about having realised that we can't take them on militarily [was that] we did not have ... to delude ourselves that we are not afraid.' In ASL thinking, the main task was to build organisations, mobilise internal resistance and prepare the ground for future insurrection. As Ndaba explains:

The guys that left need to come back and we have to prepare the ground for them because now remember the whole thing was spiralling. Now guys were leaving the country like it was getting out of fashion. People were being killed, people disappeared and we were saying we need to keep the fort, the fires burning at home, so that the guys that had gone out ... should know we're waiting, we're preparing the environment.¹¹⁶

The ASL sought the support of key adult figures in the township, especially among church leaders and teachers. Priests such as A.P. Moleleki (Methodist), Ndaba (Lutheran) and Sam Buti (NGK) and teachers such as Siphon Zunga and Mrs Noge were regularly consulted. So, too, was Marjorie Manganyi, a prominent community worker. These adults supported their broad objectives to conscientise and uplift their community. Moleleki was especially viewed as a staunch ally and a 'firebrand' who organised discussions at his place on questions such as 'nation-building'. The student leaders also made a special effort to win the support of adults by attending church regularly – most of them had a strong religious upbringing – and by initiating socially responsibly campaigns. Ndaba says:

We cleaned out the streets of the children at night, particularly the nightclubs ... because we were losing a lot of girls to the nightclubs and a lot of crime was happening at these nightclubs. So obviously we were not popular with nightclub owners and shebeen owners. And we went to them ... to say: 'Look, we are having a serious [moral] problem.' It was important to conscientise the people in praising them for who they are. I remember we wrote poems. Jackie Seroke was part of the guys that wrote the poems. It was more about conscientisation and playing a social role. We wanted the parents to know what was happening.¹¹⁷

One of its key social upliftment projects was to raise funds for the crèches on 2nd and 6th Avenues; cultural shows were organised at King's Cinema for the same purpose.

The ASL in 1977 focused on the organisation of a commemoration service for the victims of June 1976. A number of clergy, particularly Sam Buti and A.P. Moleleki,

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

became involved in planning the event. They wrote a letter to the authorities requesting permission to hold the service. The state was extremely nervous about the commemorations and refused permission. More seriously, the security police began to target ASL leaders. In the weeks before 16 June 1977, several attempts were made to detain ASL activists. In one instance Steve Tau was shot at when the police found him at his girlfriend's place. He was lucky to escape with this life. Two days before the commemoration, the police launched a massive manhunt for ASL leaders. The secretary of the school board, popularly known as Sis Lindi, warned them of the impending police swoop and a few managed to find hiding places. Unfortunately, Tau and Hlome decided to stay at their homes and were arrested. Sylvester Ndaba eluded the police by hiding at the home of Hilda Ramawela, a teacher at Ekukhanyisweni.

The shocking detentions did not stop the ASL from going ahead with the commemoration. The state had banned public meetings and the organisers of the Alexandra commemoration were told they could not hold an outdoor meeting. The Reverend Moleleki decided to hold the commemoration service in his church and placed loud speakers outside the church.

The ASLs success earned it constant police harassment. In July, Steven Tau was again arrested, this time with another school comrade, Isidore Mbatha. Alexandra 'erupted into demonstrations' when students got wind of the detention of their colleagues. Hundreds of students marched through the township until the police dispersed them. Several demonstrators were arrested.¹¹⁸

The ASL leaders had hoped that their involvement in various upliftment projects would deflect police attention from their political activities. Despite efforts to evade the police, they constantly faced the prospect of detention. As a result, some left Alexandra while others decided to leave the country altogether. Jackie Seroke moved to Thembisa, where he continued his political activity as a PAC member. Sylvester Ndaba relocated to Diepkloof. The loss of key leaders adversely affected the ASL but did not lead to its demise. From late 1977 the ASL was to play a leading role in the campaign to stop the relocation of residents to the City Deep Hostel, which laid the foundation for the Save Alexandra Campaign.

Part 3: Thembisa

By Noor Nieftagodien and Tshepo Moloji

Thembisa,¹¹⁹ about fifteen kilometres from Alexandra and 40–50 kilometres from Soweto, was established in 1957 as a 'model' township for Africans employed in Kempton Park and its environs. Until the early 1970s the township experienced little political resistance. It was more renowned for its criminal activities. Afrikaans,

¹¹⁸ *The World*, 27 July 1977.

¹¹⁹ Thembisa, not Tembisa, is the correct spelling of this residential area.

introduced at Thembisa High School in 1973, began to shift the focus of some youth to politics. According to Figo Madlala, who was in Form I at the time, the Afrikaans trigger was pulled in 1973:

It was called *Die Landbou*. The teacher who taught us *Landbou* was Mr Molala. First time in the class then he asked us: ‘*Wat is grond?*’ ... [H]ow do you explain what is soil in Afrikaans? And communication was difficult because you have to respond in Afrikaans. Someone said, ‘*Die grond is die ding!*’ (The soil is this thing) [pointing to the ground]. Others said, ‘*Die grond is bietjie things*’ (Soil is these small things). But we could not explain ‘*wat is grond?*’ And that was the first class we had in *Landbou*. We had to say what the textbook was saying about ‘*wat is grond?*’ You were reading what you don’t understand.¹²⁰

Students found Afrikaans frustrating and they soon objected. ‘In fact, there was a dismal failure at the end of the first quarter,’ Madlala continues. ‘And we complained that we want to change the subject to something else because we don’t understand it. They then changed the language from Afrikaans to English in the second quarter.’

At this stage in Thembisa, opposition to Afrikaans was not clearly linked to Bantu education or apartheid. This was to change in 1976. At the start of that year Afrikaans was introduced as the medium of instruction for several subjects, such as geography (*Aardrykskunde*) and mathematics (*Wiskunde*),¹²¹ following a decision taken at a meeting attended by the Transvaal inspectors in January 1974.¹²² Teboho Tsenase, who was in Form II in 1976, remembers the disquiet caused by the introduction of Afrikaans: ‘In 1975 everything was done in English but the rumour had reached us to say Afrikaans is coming. And in 1976 we actually did Geography in Afrikaans. And we were told that ... by the time we reach matric everything will be in Afrikaans. That really pissed everybody.’¹²³

The same thing that happened at Tsenase’s school, Thembisa High School, happened at Boitumelong Senior Secondary School in 1976.¹²⁴ ‘You know because Afrikaans was seen as an oppressive language, generally people hated it,’ a Boitumelong student at the time, Greg Malebo, says. ‘In fact, the majority in our class did not really want Afrikaans. The argument was that ... it was not an international language.’¹²⁵

Student opposition was led by a group of young Black Consciousness activists, who became involved in BCM in 1975. Mongezi Maphuthi belonged to this group and remembers that,

120 Interview with Mike ‘Figo’ Madlala, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, 7 September 2004, Kempton Park, SADET Oral History Project.

121 Interview with Teboho Tsenase, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, 9 June 2004, Tembisa; interview with Greg Malebo, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, 14 October 2004, Tembisa, SADET Oral History Project.

122 Hyslop, ‘Social Conflicts over African Education’, 468.

123 Interview with Teboho Tsenase.

124 Interviews with Greg Malebo and Mongezi Maphuthi, conducted by Tshepo Moloi, 28 September 2004, Tembisa, SADET Oral History Project.

125 Interview with Greg Malebo.

As early as 1975 we started to be involved together with Siphso Mzolo in Alexandra ... We attended the BC meetings, even some funerals, and the PAC events. I remember there was an [event held in honour] of Sobukwe in Alexandra, we went there. We did not have an ideology; we accepted everything that was brought by black people.¹²⁶

BCM attracted several adherents in high schools, among students and teachers, who introduced an alternative syllabus that highlighted the history of African resistance. Malebo remembers the BC influence some of his teachers imparted:

The new guys came, Ralph Mothiba and Mr Masiza, who taught us English. This was the new breed of teachers who were in SASO. During History lessons Ralph Mothiba would talk about African Unity that Kwame Nkrumah spoke about, Patrice Lumumba ... Ralph Mothiba really played an important role in one's political conscientisation.¹²⁷

Some students also had contact with ANC figures in Soweto, although these connections were not always explicit. Madlala was not even aware of this at the time:

In 1975 we were starting to ... discuss political issues ... I was never told that those were ANC people that we were meeting. They never mentioned that they were ANC. But they were giving us some kind of political education and analysis. We learned the history of our struggle from 1906: Bambatha Rebellion; the formation of the ANC Youth League; Luthuli; the Freedom Charter; the formation of the PAC; and the pass campaigns. Our link was with people who were linked to Joe Gqabi in Soweto. We were together with people like Murphy Morobe and others. They were also linked in some way with Joe Gqabi. In Thembisa there was Brunza, Popola, there was Mike, there was Ben Mhlongo, Eddie Dube and Brian Mazibuko.¹²⁸

These political formations remained confined to a small band of activists. The rest of the students, according to Madlala, did not anticipate June 1976. The day after Soweto erupted into open rebellion, however, students in Thembisa moved into action. Malebo narrates:

I remember we read in the *Rand Daily Mail* about what was happening in Soweto and said this is it. There were people who were in the senior classes who took up the leadership ... and there were teachers who were instigating ... We had Kenneth Phasane, Eddie Dube, Ngoako Ramatlodi, Brian Mazibuko and Figo Madlala. We were saying we're affected by Afrikaans as well ... The resolution was that we are going to march. A march was called on Thursday. And during that meeting we had somebody from Soweto, I think, it was Dan Montsisi. And then a committee was formed that was supposed to

126 Interview with Mongezi Maphuthi.

127 Interview with Greg Malebo.

128 Interview with Mike Figo Madlala, 5 November 2004.

direct the march. I'm talking about Kenneth Phasane, Eddie Dube – others I can't remember. The leadership then took a decision that we should write placards. They said we should do the same as we saw in the *Rand Daily Mail* people holding placards written: 'Away with Afrikaans'.¹²⁹

Students marched from Thembisa High School to Boitumelong Senior Secondary School, located in Moriting section. On the way to Boitumelong, however, the students were confronted by the police. Madlala recalls:

We were somewhere in Mashimong section when we were disrupted. The police tear-gassed us and unleashed dogs on us. Students started running helter-skelter ... We got into a toilet. I'm sure we were about 15, if not 20 – in one toilet. It was easy to go in but when we had to get out we couldn't because we were pressing the door out.¹³⁰

The disruption of the march transformed the demonstration into open rebellion, as Malebo elaborates:

Then we went wild. It was like this was organised, and I don't think it was ... I remember, on my own, I went to a bottle store in Leralla – next to Leralla Station – which was owned by what was known as the East Rand Development Boards. I must be honest no one really told me to go there, but I knew that it was the symbol of apartheid. And we came to learn that others had gone to a bottle store in Sedibeng section. It was spontaneous. So we then burnt the bars [and] bottle stores and we took some straights. For the first time we got drunk.¹³¹

They attacked the beer halls because the 'municipality had erected a lot of beer halls', Tsenase says, adding: 'We saw that our fathers on Fridays instead of going home they were going there ... to spend our monies there on drunkenness, instead of helping us get free.'¹³²

The mood had changed dramatically. Students were no longer only opposing Afrikaans but were now resisting Bantu education and apartheid in general. Confrontations with the police also became more intense, as Madlala explains: 'From the 18th the language changed ... People were now talking about Bantu education being a bad system. And as well they were talking about apartheid system. You know, to say we are oppressed as a nation.'¹³³

The Cillie Commission reported that

at 10:00 about 400 pupils from Boitumelong Secondary School fell in with pupils from Thembisa High School, who refused to attend classes ... They

129 Interview with Greg Malebo.

130 Interview with Mike Figo Madlala, 5 November 2004.

131 Interview with Greg Malebo.

132 Interview with Teboho Tsenase.

133 Interview with Mike Figo Madlala, 5 November 2004.

began marching in the direction of the Leralla Bottle Store. According to witnesses some of the protest marchers had at this stage already armed themselves with stones, staves, knives, etc. By the time the marchers reached the bottle store, their numbers had swollen to some 2 000 persons. Part of the crowd smashed the windows of the store and tried to set the place on fire.

According to the Cillie Commission, at 12:00 a group of rioters attacked a café belonging to a Portuguese man at the Oakmoor Railway Station and tried to set the owner's vehicle on fire. He fired shots at the attackers and later C. Lekaba and L. Ntaposwa were found dead at the scene. Two others died in hospital – C. Khoza died in Olifantsfontein on the same day and E. Mabye died the next day. A train was also attacked at Thembisa Railway Station. At the end of the day it was reported that five people had been shot dead by the police.

Student activists were initially surprised by the rapid escalation of the conflict in Thembisa but quickly regrouped. Between 17 and 20 June some students from the two high schools, Thembisa and Boitumelong, met to launch the Thembisa Students Representative Council (TSRC), following the example of their Soweto counterparts. Madlala recalls the leading role the SSRC played in the formation of the TSRC:

On the 18th we launched our TSRC ... We requested a classroom at Ndulwini School, that's where the TSRC was actually launched. The people that conducted the elections, for instance, with regards to our TSRC were Dan Montsisi and Tsietsi Mashinini [both members of the SSRC]. Some of those elected to the executive of the TSRC were Elliot Dhlomo, Ben Mhlongo, Absolom Mazibuko, Brian Mazibuko, myself.¹³⁴

Madlala says student leaders from Soweto 'briefed us on how we have to form it. The people that informed us were Dan Montsisi, Murphy Morobe and Yster. They came to Thembisa more than once. I was the contact – the link.'¹³⁵

The TSRC set itself a few modest objectives. In the first instance, it aimed 'to take issues of students, their grievances to the principal. The body had to represent the aspirations of the students.' Significantly, student leaders were careful not to 'be highly political in spite of the fact that it was formed within the turmoil'. This position demonstrated a tactical awareness, designed to win the TSRC maximum support from the students, as well as not to attract unnecessary attention from the authorities. The police were in no mood, however, to tolerate the existence of organised student bodies. The TSRC suffered a serious blow only four days after its formation when the police arrested hundreds of students, including most student leaders, as Madlala further explains:

Around the 21st we ... meant to have a meeting at school and the police encircled us. About 300 of us were arrested. And some were discharged. Then 105 of us were charged with public violence, alternatively arson. Our

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

cases were then divided into three. Some were charged with three public violence; some with two public violence; and others were charged with only arson. If you were charged with public violence they would always put an alternative charge of arson. So I don't know what happened to it (TSRC) after we were arrested. But it did not exist long.¹³⁶

As a result, the Thembisa uprising dissipated almost as quickly as it had flared up. Resistance was reduced to sporadic acts of violence, such as the bombing of the office of the principal of Sedibeng Primary School on 27 July. When the student leaders were released on 3 August they immediately attempted to mobilise. Madlala recounts:

We went back to school and the leadership had all gone underground. We then established the leadership again. Amongst those that I remember that we elected were myself, Brian Mazibuko and Elliot Dhlomo – just to keep momentum amongst the students. We addressed the students at school again. There were students attending classes while we were having a meeting. Then it was resolved in that meeting that we are going to take them out ... We stoned the school and they came out and some were assaulted. I think there was an attempted arson to the laboratory. But it did not burn completely. And there was disruption.¹³⁷

This was a last desperate attempt to generate mass action in Thembisa. Thereafter, the new leaders at Thembisa High and many other students in the township went into hiding. Several student leaders had concluded in prison that state repression was too much and that it would be better to leave the country. Madlala claims the decision was taken in prison and that they had already established channels to leave undetected. According to Mongezi Maphuthi:

It was a question of saying we were being hunted by the police. We were away from our homes; we were on the run. I ended up going back to Alexandra. From Alexandra I would go to Soweto. This happened until a guy called Matias Cholo – he was in the leadership at Boitumelong – organised that we got to leave the country because we were harassed. Cholo was very close with a guy called Brunza who was from exile.¹³⁸

Their attempts to leave the country were fraught with problems. Maphuthi explains how his group's attempt to go into exile failed owing to confusion and bad planning:

We went to Matias' home, Thami Mnyele was also there. We were about to leave the country. Then a truck came in the middle of the night. This truck was carrying Xhosa-speaking people from eKoloni (Cape). We had been briefed by Matias and others that we belonged to the ANC. So we all jumped into the truck with our belongings. And on the way we then heard these people

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 Interview with Mongezi Maphuthi.

talking about the PAC. They said: 'The PAC stands for Africa for Africans.' On our way we quarrelled with these guys. This was not far from Oshoek. Some people in the truck were saying we are going forward and others were saying no, we are not going forward. We then jumped off the truck and ran into a huge bush. We were running in all directions. It was myself, Joe and Freddie. Freddie was my cousin from Soweto I had recruited. Luckily we got a lift. We managed to get back home. Others were arrested.¹³⁹

Madlala was arrested before he even left his house:

I came back from Natalspruit [Katlehong] but I was not staying at home. On the day that I was supposed to go I left Tsenelong section, where I was hiding, I went home. I wanted to reach my mom before she left for work – just to get money from her and then go. She left me money and went to work. I started packing my bag. I took everything from the bedroom. I was in the kitchen ready to go out. But I had forgotten money on the dressing table. I went back that side in the bed room to get the money. When I came back they were already in the house.¹⁴⁰

On 1 November, students at Thembisa engaged in the final act of resistance of the year when they organised a protest against the writing of school examinations. Pupils who wanted to write the examinations were jeered and intimidated. The examinations were called off and scholars as well as outsiders staged a march in Thembisa. Nonetheless, political activity had virtually ground to a halt. Only a handful of activists continued to meet as a group for political discussions, visiting the families of their schoolmates that had been arrested and comforting such families.

Kathorus

Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus (Kathorus) – also on the East Rand – took up the cudgels on 17 June, in solidarity with the children of Soweto. The uprising on the East Rand was under-reported, however, due to the almost exclusive focus on Soweto. The Vosloorus uprising was, in fact, the first major demonstration of worker and youth unity in action and was significant also for the involvement of hostel dwellers.

As Vosloorus youth marched through the township on the evening of 17 June, PUTCO took the precaution of moving their buses from the depot adjacent to the township hall where they usually parked them to the Boksburg depot in town. On the morning of 18 June, PUTCO drivers had to collect buses from Boksburg. Thousands of commuters waited for nearly two hours before the first buses arrived at 5 am. The workers were incensed and began stoning the buses. PUTCO decided to withdraw all the buses from township routes, effectively leaving the whole Vosloorus workforce stranded. Apartheid planning had left the township without a railway connection,

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mike Figo Madlala, 5 November 2004.

which made residents almost entirely dependent on PUTCO buses. The 30 000 workers, including migrants residing in the large single-sex hostels, decided to stay at home rather than walk to their workplaces in Boksburg, resulting in the first stay-away in Vosloorus. The workers, who were joined by students, gathered along M.C. Botha Avenue, the main road connecting the township to Boksburg, to demonstrate and to show their solidarity with the children of Soweto. They proceeded to other parts of the township, attacking buildings associated with the East Rand Administration Board (ERAB) or the government. In the space of four hours, the beer hall, the post office, the hostel office and the community hall were set ablaze or broken down by workers and students.

In Katlehong and Thokoza, however, the uprising was student rather than worker led. As conflict in Soweto escalated, ERAB officials, police, principals and Urban Council Board (UCB) councillors were recruited onto a surveillance network to monitor each of the townships. Principals were called at regular intervals to ascertain whether there were any disturbances. On the morning of 18 June, the principals in Thokoza reported no obvious problems; in Katlehong one principal noted the presence of unknown persons in the vicinity of the school. The apparent quiet was soon shattered, however, when secondary school students all over the East Rand gathered in mass meetings in their respective schools. From there they marched and demonstrated through the townships. Suddenly the authorities were confronted, not just by isolated incidents in a single township but also by almost simultaneous protests across the region. ERAB immediately withdrew its personnel and effectively handed over the running of the townships to the police. The authorities in Katlehong closed all schools and ordered armoured vehicles to patrol the township.

Although 18 June was a Friday, the weekend break did little to calm down matters. Protests continued over the weekend and on Sunday matters grew worse in Katlehong. Police reports flowed in from all over the region virtually every quarter of an hour. The police diary of events from 20 to 25 June charts these events, often in a vivid way. On the night of 20 June, the police diary records which form part of the Cillie Commission noted :

19h30: Gatsha Buthelezi sighted at Natalspruit Hospital and was being watched by the police. Information about an alleged plan to attack railways and buses on Monday 21 June.

20h20: Unrest at Kwesine Hostel. Ambulance set alight.

21h15: All ERAB staff removed from the hostel.

21h20: SAP also withdraws from the hostel.

22h20: Hostel set alight.

01h30: Police suppress unrest at Kwesine hostel.

The involvement of hostel dwellers in the June 1976 uprising is significant, as existing literature and township lore portray them as having been opposed to student struggles. Their involvement in Katlehong also demonstrates the rapid transformation of the struggle from being against the imposition of Afrikaans to opposition to Bantu

education and the entire apartheid system. Workers, who were shocked and outraged by the state's brutal repression of student demonstrations, easily identified with the broader objectives of the uprising.

Groups of youth in Kathorus also attacked official buildings, houses and vehicles. ERAB officials residing in the township were also targeted. Over the next few days students vented their anger at the most conspicuous and reviled symbols of apartheid exploitation such as beer halls and bars, including Wag-'n-bietjie, Calypso, Last Chance, Pilot and Cyril Victor. In Thokoza and Vosloorus, fewer beer halls were attacked but the ones that were, sustained considerable damage. Although regular clashes occurred between the police and students, there were no reports of killings, even though the police used live ammunition.

A week later, the East Rand police reported that '[t]he situation has calmed down considerably'.¹⁴¹ Despite the apparent return to normality, however, the authorities only decided to reopen schools in mid-July. Even then extra police were deployed at the schools.¹⁴² Students utilised the opportunity provided by the reopening of the schools to mobilise against police action and the detention of their colleagues.

A week after the schools reopened, Tokothaba Secondary School in Thokoza was partly gutted after being set alight.¹⁴³ Throughout August there were marches and demonstrations. On 5 August students at Ilinge Secondary School in Vosloorus – carrying placards that read: 'Why was Herbert shot and Walter detained?' – approached the principal, Xulu, to ask why one of their colleagues had been shot and another detained. Xulu, who was also a councillor, was accused of colluding with the police. Students then marched to other schools and persuaded students to join the protest. Later that month hundreds of Thokoza students marched through the township and ERAB offices in Katlehong were burned.¹⁴⁴ During one of these marches a student, Mokethi Radebe, went missing. The police claimed he was not arrested but his parents were unable to find him. This kind of incident aggravated an already tense situation.

By the end of August it had become abundantly clear that the school boycott in Katlehong would not end soon. Only 150 out of 830 students at Katlehong High School were attending classes regularly.¹⁴⁵ Similar situations existed at the other secondary schools in Kathorus.

By the end of the year most students were neither prepared nor willing to take the final examinations. Attempts by the school authorities to insist on the examinations provoked angry responses. Students at Ilinge Secondary School in Vosloorus expressed their feelings about the situation in a handwritten letter left under the door of their principal's office:

141 *The World*, 25 June 1976.

142 *The World*, 23 July 1976.

143 *The World*, 30 July 1976.

144 *The World*, 13 September 1976.

145 *The World*, 25 September 1976.

Dear Xulu you blady cell out. Just continue with that exam of yours. You'll suffer within a minute. It means you're happy with those who were detained. You cell out. We will be there tomorrow, you must make up your mind otherwise that school of yours will [go] into flame today at night. Please those exam papers we want them we will burn them in front of you, you cell out. Xulu you're busy writing, other people are suffering in detention.¹⁴⁶

Scores of students were arrested on charges ranging from sabotage to distributing pamphlets. In November, 13 Katlehong students appeared in court on charges of incitement and sabotage. They were accused of inciting students from Katlehong Secondary School to march to the police station to demand the release of detained students and of burning ERAB offices in Hlalatse and Tsolo sections, destroying a tractor and looting about twelve shops. A witness, Mavis Tsibanyoni, testified that two of the accused, Elliot Radebe and Carel Manake, had told students to burn the buildings but not to use violence against individuals. She recalled that students sang, *Nkosi Sikelel'i iAfrika* and 'Kruger shall never go to heaven'. When they met the police, teargas canisters were shot at them, causing pandemonium.¹⁴⁷

In what was probably the biggest trial in the region, 57 people from Katlehong and Daveyton, another East Rand township, were charged with public violence in the Germiston regional court. The ages of the accused ranged from eight to 47, a span that effectively refuted the authorities' claim that only youth were involved in the uprising. In another trial, seven Katlehong students were found guilty of producing and disseminating Black Consciousness pamphlets.

In the aftermath of the June 1976 uprising, Katlehong students embarked on a number of initiatives to organise themselves in schools. In the latter part of 1976, a number of attempts were made to establish student representative councils in the secondary schools. In Vosloorus, Rankele Ratswane and his colleagues formed a branch of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which he says ran 'religious items at school' and debates. '[W]e were visited by other students from Soweto with the influence obviously of activists,' he adds. 'Moses Mochadibane ... actually invited them to come and empower us politically to a certain extent. At one state we initiated to form Lesedi Youth Organisation.'¹⁴⁸

Black Consciousness had made an impression on many students. Other than the SCM, however, the political support for Black Consciousness ideas did not immediately translate into organisational gains for BCM. That would only happen towards the end of the 1970s.

146 *Die Vaderland*, 5 November 1976.

147 *The World*, 19 and 24 November 1976.

148 Interview with Rankele Ratswane.