The Struggle for Education in Apartheid South Africa 1955-1994

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ABSTRACT

During the years of apartheid, 1948-1994, the National Party set about building a mass education system. In 1948, there were just 580,000 black students in South Africa, most in private missionary schools. By 1973 there were 3,300,000 students, the tradition of independent missionary education destroyed, the number of students rising year on year. On one level this massive rise in students seemed to bring South Africa in line with wider global history, as governments around the world turned to education systems to help meet the needs of modern industrial society. But the National Party's interest in mass education had little in common with the history of turning peasants into citizens. The Bantu Education system sat at the heart of apartheid's most reactionary ambitions, forcing Africans to return to the Bantustans to receive an education in which mother-tongue language instruction would bind them to their supposed tribal identities in perpetuity. Yet it soon became clear that these institutions possessed a capacity to betray their masters' intent; for a period, black parents and teachers took substantive possession of the schools and managed to bend them to their own purposes. What exactly these purposes were has been obscured by the backward glance of the history of the struggle against apartheid.

More specifically, what has been lost, and what this dissertation aspires to retrieve, is the distinction between resisting apartheid and aspiring for one's children to be educated. For while the struggle for liberation and the struggle for education overlapped at times, they were also distinct. And the history of Soweto's schools is in many ways the history of a tussle between these two imperatives. Moving chronologically, each chapter explores the very different ways Sowetans dealt with the tension. The end result is a new bottom-up history that differs from the well-known political narrative of the fight against apartheid for which Soweto is so famous. The common thread that ties each chapter is how much people's investment in education shows determination to keep a sense of control over their lives in extraordinary times. During the final decade of apartheid this sense of control unravelled in the face of sustained insurrectionary violence. The state education system that was left standing in 1994 was hollowed out. Liberation was thus coupled with pain and a deep sense of loss.

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Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.

- Matthew, 12:25

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960s, street maps of the Johannesburg region did not feature Soweto. Where Soweto should have been, a convention in these maps placed a large inset depicting Johannesburg's downtown financial district in ever more blown-up detail. This covering was not because there was anything peculiar about Soweto's streets that made mapping them difficult. Indeed, the opposite was true. Soweto's streets were perfectly suited to be included in a traditional roadmap because it was on architectural drafting boards and in the offices of urban planners that Soweto's streets had been so methodically planned out.[1] Soweto did not feature because at the height of apartheid rule in South Africa it was such an awkward fact that this was true. By covering Soweto's streets the inset made space for the apartheid fiction of Africans as a people cast off from modernity, bound to their rural homes and timeless traditions. Cities, so the lie that governed South Africa during these years had it, were centres of white civilisation.[2]

In 1976 *The Street Guide to the Witwatersrand* broke with that convention though, unveiling a great mass of closely abutting neighbourhoods, or townships in the South African lexicon, with names like White City, Moroka, Chiawelo, Dube and Jabulani. Built entirely during the course of the twentieth century, these neighbourhoods appear on the map like a rough patchwork quilt, tied at the seams by two major transport routes, a railway line that entered from the northeast boundary before branching out along two tracks, and two major roads that entered separately from the north and east before joining together and exiting in the southwest, the road to Potchefstroom and Kimberley. Contained within twenty-six square miles, the oldest of these neighbourhoods are generally located towards the top-right corner of the map, and as the transport routes are followed into 'deep' Soweto, the neighbourhoods are of more recent origin. But while each of the twenty-three neighbourhoods on the map differ in their design depending on the exact time they were built, they all share a set of distinctive geometric patterns that recall Georges-Eugène Haussmann's reshaping of Paris or the high modernist urban projects of the twentieth century.[3] This was a time

[1] Much of this planning was directed by the National Building and Research Institute, established in 1946 and affiliated to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. See Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.

[2] Soweto's place in these maps is discussed by Mark Gevisser in his memoir, *Dispatcher: Lost and Found in Johannesburg* (London: Granta, 2014), 7-21.

[3] See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1998).

of rapid urbanisation and huge population growth in Africa. North of the Limpopo, Africa's great cities were exploding in size.[4] Soweto's regimented streets are very different to the byzantine informal settlements that were beginning to envelop places like Nairobi, Lagos and Dar es Salaam. Built around central hexagonal rings with radial roads fanning out and narrower interconnecting roads placed methodically between, Soweto's streets showed the unmistakeable fingerprint of highly developed forms of modern state power; the desire to constrain, contain and tightly govern the tumult of Africa's passage into modernity that was elsewhere hungrily embraced.[5] The *Street Guide to the Witwatersrand* is a curious document with which to start thinking about the history of apartheid, a reminder of the massive powers the South African state wielded during the twentieth century, even as we find Soweto's very place on the map pointing to the limits of what those powers could achieve—a great black metropolis in the heart of white South Africa. It is the gap between apartheid's fictions and the complicated realities of what the National Party actually presided over that we shall return to time and time again.

During the twentieth century high modernism was made to serve many masters, and as in the plans of a place like Magnitogorsk in the Soviet Union, the hubristic desire to redesign society afresh assumed tremendous proportions.[6] In apartheid South Africa, the proportions of the plan were deliberately shrunk, although no less ambitious for that. Soweto's streets appear straight and ordered on the map, but to look at the scale is to appreciate how narrow and tightly packed these streets were. And to have travelled along those streets would have been to be immediately confronted with Soweto's defining feature. Laid out on forty-by-eighty-feet plots were rows upon rows of what the government called 'NE 51/6' and 'NE 51/9' model houses, but what everyone else simply called matchbox houses, three- and four-roomed houses sat facing each other, as if arrayed on one vast military camp. If Haussmann's vision for Paris saw ornate apartment buildings

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[4] Bill Freund, *The African City: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 142-169.

[5] For studies that understand apartheid as a project of modernity, see Heribert Adam, *Modernizing Racial Domination: South Africa's Political Dynamics* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1971); Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1997); Deborah Posel, 'The Apartheid Project 1948-1970' in Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Vol. II, *1885-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 319-368; Keith Breckenridge, *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Bill Freund, *Twentieth-Century South Africa: A Developmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[6] See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1995).

rising portentously from the streets as a projection of power, in apartheid South Africa power made these unadorned one-storied red-brick houses sit flat on the low hills of the highveld, the line of the horizon only broken by the twin cooling towers of the Orlando Power Station. Built to provide electricity for the white homes of Johannesburg, but not the homes that sat under their shadow, Sowetans lit their homes with candles and paraffin lamps, and cooked on coal stoves. A film of acrid smoke hung low over the asbestos roofs with the dust from the unsealed roads, roads which quickly turned to quagmires in the rain.[7]

This was a desperately impoverished space, and without adequate storm-water drainage and sewerage systems, outbreaks of disease like tuberculosis and smallpox were all too common.[8] Tragic then to trace Soweto's origins to a public health intervention. In 1904, two years after the Treaty of Vereeniging brought an end to the British Empire's war against the Boer republics, cases of bubonic plague struck Johannesburg. Officials in the city sought to move quickly. In typically racialised terms they looked at the residents of Johannesburg's inner-city slums as vectors of disease, not the rats that followed people along the paths being scoured across the country in South Africa's headlong industrialisation.[9] An opportunity was not wasted. The day after plague was confirmed, the City Council ordered soldiers to evict all the 1,420 African, 1,612 Indian, and 146 Coloured residents from their homes in the so-called Coolie Location. The slum was burnt to the ground.[10]

Deciding where these people should be moved next, the authorities settled on a stretch of land 12 miles from Johannesburg's city centre, an area distinguished only by its proximity to an

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[7] The NE51 series of houses were first outlined in a 1951 report, 'Minimum Standards of Accommodation for Non-Europeans', commissioned by a joint committee of the Department of Native Affairs, the National Housing and Planning Commission, and the National Building Research Institute. For more on the NE51 series see Derek Japha, 'The Social Programme of the South African Modern Movement', in Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavíc (eds.), *blank_architecture, apartheid and after* (Rotterdam: NAi, 1998); and Errol J. Haarhoff, 'Appropriating Modernism: Apartheid and the South African Township', *Journal of the Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul, Turkey*, 8 (2011), 184-195. For an interesting study on the legacies that these spatial forms have had in post-apartheid politics, see Jason Hickel, *Democracy as Death: The Moral Order of Anti-Liberal Politics in South Africa* (Berkeley, C.A.: California University Press, 2015).

[8] It was only in the late 1970s that most Sowetans were able to stop using 'night buckets'.

[9] William H. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1976), 138.

[10] See Howard Phillips, 'Locating the Location of a South African Location: The Paradoxical Pre-History of Soweto', *Urban History*, 41 (2014), 311-332. On the deeply entwined history of racial segregation and public health in South Africa, see Maynard W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1900', *The Journal of African History*, 18 (1977), 387-410; Susan Parnell, 'Race, Power and Urban Control: Johannesburg's Inner-City Slumyards, 1910-1923', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29 (2003), 615-663; and Marc Epprecht, 'The Native Village Debate in Pietermaritzburg, 1848-1925: Revisiting the 'Sanitation Syndrome', *Journal of African History*, 58 (2017).

existing train line and a sewage works, as well as its distance from any existing white settlement. As the threat of plague subsided, the Indians were allowed to make their way back to Johannesburg. But the black Africans were forced to remain in place. The hastily constructed buildings, built out of the same corrugated-iron panels Lord Kitchener's army used to build concentration camps during the South African War,[11] was replaced by a set of more permanent buildings, taking its name from the title of the land, Klipsruit.[12] The establishment of Kliptown, renamed Pimville in 1934 after Howard Pim, one of the leading proponents of segregationism in the interwar years,[13] was followed in 1930 by the Johannesburg City Council's decision to buy a further 1,300 morgen from the Klipsruit farm. Here a set of more careful designs were drawn up for Orlando, its name taken from another prominent white politician of the time, Orlando Leake, chairman of the City Councils' Native Affairs Committee. Envisioned as a 'model native township' capable of housing 80,000 people,[14] the massive demand for housing as the clouds of war gathered in Europe quickly outgrew the original requirements of the City Council. Building was soon expanded on the western side of the railway lines as the City Council battled to keep on top of a growing squatter movement.[15] The railway to Johannesburg now separated Orlando East from Orlando West, two places in which so much of South Africa's future history would come to be decided.

By the standards set in Johannesburg's inner-city slums, the quality of the housing in the new townships was relatively high, and some of Orlando's earliest residents moved there by choice, determined to make good on the promises of life in a 'garden city'. In the 1940s Walter and

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11 Keith Beavon, *Johannesburg: The Making and Shaping of the City* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2004), 77. Around 30,000 Afrikaners died in these camps from starvation and disease. See Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (London: Bodley Head, 2022), 86-87.

12 In 1954 much of Klipsruit was rebuilt to meet the new standards established in township planning.

13 Howard Pim (b.1874-d.1934) born in Ireland before moving to South Africa in 1890 to work for the British South Africa Company. A Quaker, he was an active reformer in Johannesburg's politics, and a founding member of the South African Institute of Race Relations. On the politics of the segregation era see Saul Dubow *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

14 Noor Nieftagodien and Sally Gaule, *Orlando West, Soweto: An Illustrated History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), 6.

15 The great figure in the squatters' movement was James 'Sofasonke' Mpanza, who moved to Orlando East in 1934 and who led a movement of shack builders in protest at overcrowding in 1944. The movement was short-lived but has lived long in popular memory. The last squatter camps were cleared in 1947. On Mpanza and the squatter movement see Kevin John French, 'James Mpanza and the Sofasonke Party in the Development of Local Politics in Soweto', (M.A. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1983); A. W. Stadler, 'Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-47', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6 (1979), 93-123; and Philip Bonner, 'The Politics of Black Squatter Movements on the Rand, 1944-1952', *Radical History Review*, 46 (1990), 89-115.

Albertina Sisulu made their home at No. 7372 Orlando West. Walter was a canny estate agent who helped new arrivals find their feet in the city, and who was fast making a name for himself in the ranks of the African National Congress as the party started to build its foundations as a mass movement in the cities.[16] Albertina was a nurse, deeply invested in the health and wellbeing of her local community, her own storied career in politics ahead of her.[17] Great friends of the Sisulus, Nelson and his second wife Winnie made their home at No. 8115 Orlando West. In this tiny three-roomed house Nelson established himself as one of a handful of black lawyers in South Africa, alongside Walter a rising political figure.[18] While her husband worked long hours and attended political meetings, Winnie Mandela trained as a social worker, a highly esteemed profession among people in the townships at the time.[19] The writer Ezekiel Mphahlele, author of *Down Second Avenue* (1959), lived close to the Mandelas at No. 8280.[20] But these were a tiny minority who deigned to hold this world beneath their feet. Most who moved to the townships felt the decision forced upon them, as successive governments pursued slum clearance programmes, backed by legislation like the Slums Act (No. 53 of 1934). In 1933 the entire Johannesburg metropolitan area was proclaimed a white-only area under the terms of the Native (Urban Areas) Act (No. 21 of 1923),

[16] Walter Sisulu (b.18 May 1912-d.5 May 2003) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at an Anglican missionary before leaving school at fifteen, moving to Johannesburg where he quickly became immersed in trade union politics. A founding member of the African National Congress Youth League and a member of the South African Communist Party, Sisulu was sentenced to life imprisonment at the Rivonia Trial in 1964, which he served alongside Nelson Mandela on Robben Island. He was released in October 1989 and appointed deputy president of the ANC in 1991.

[17] Albertina Sisulu née Nontsikelelo Thethiwe (b.21 October 1918-d.2 June 2011) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at the Roman Catholic Mariazell College. She trained as a nurse at Johannesburg General Hospital. Albertina met Walter Sisulu in 1941 and joined the ANC in 1948. After a long politically active life she was elected to parliament in 1994.

[18] Nelson Mandela (b.18 July 1918-d.5 December 2013) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at Clarkebury and Healdtown, Wesleyan missionary schools. He enrolled at University College of Fort Hare but did not finish his degree and left for Johannesburg where he trained as a lawyer. Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 and released on 11 February 1990. In 1994 Mandela was elected president.

[19] Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (b.26 September 1936-d.2 April 2018) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at Shawsbury, a Methodist missionary school. She trained as a social worker at the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg. She married Nelson Mandela in 1958. She was elected to parliament in 1994.

[20] Ezekiel 'Es'kia' Mphahlele (b.17 December 1919-d.27 October 2008) was born near Pretoria and educated at St. Peter's in Rosettenville, an Anglican missionary school. He trained as a teacher at Adams College in Natal before working as a teacher at Orlando High. A prominent writer, Mphahlele published *Down Second Avenue* in 1959. In 1957 he left South Africa for Nigeria, returning in 1977 and resumed his position as a leading figure in Soweto's education system. For more on Mphahlele's education see Catherine Woeber, 'Educating the Educator: Es'kia Mphahlele's Schooling at St Peter's', *English Academy Review: A Journal of English Studies* 21 (2004), 78-92.

with exemptions afforded to only a few inner-city neighbourhoods such as Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare.[21]

With every year the net was being drawn ever closer. But the pressure to move to the new townships reached new levels following the National Party's victory in the 1948 election, a slim five-seat majority secured in large by white South Africans' fear of uncontrolled black urbanisation.[22] In 1950, D. F. Malan's[23] government passed the Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950), a foundational legislative piece in the new apartheid order that governed South Africa for forty-six years, and legislation that gave the state the authority to commit one of apartheid's most grievous crimes against humanity. During the 1950s hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly ejected from their homes and sent to resettlement camps in the so-called homelands, or to new model townships, all according to a person's place in the mandatory racial classification as established in the Population Registration Act (No. 30 of 1950).[24]

In Johannesburg this early chapter in apartheid's history saw the destruction of the great cultural centre Sophiatown, famous for its jazz and the home of the so-called Drum generation of writers.[25] Newclare, Martindale and other parts of the Western Areas were also 'cleared'. Built as these places were being destroyed, Soweto's newest townships, Meadowlands and Diepkloof, owed their foundations to these removals. Soweto's latest arrivals were often forced to leave their old homes under the barrel of a gun, driven away on the back of a government lorry with only what they could carry. Few places managed to escape the trauma of the removals ('I knew that I

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[21] For a detailed study of urbanisation at this time see Phillip Bonner, 'African Urbanisation on the Rand Between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21 (1995), 115-129.

[22] The National Party won the 1948 election in alliance with the much smaller Afrikaner Party. Together they won 79 seats out of the House of Assembly's total of 153 seats (the AP won 9 seats). Jan Smuts' United Party secured 65 seats. The Labour Party won 6 seats. Together the UP and LP actually won the popular vote.

[23] Daniël François Malan (b.22 May 1874-d.7 February 1959) grew up in the Cape Colony and studied theology at Victoria College (later renamed University of Stellenbosch). He received his doctorate from the University of Utrecht. Founder of *Die Burger* and a leading politician in the interwar years, Malan opposed South Africa's participation in the Second World War. He retired in 1954 and was succeeded by J. G. Strijdom.

[24] On the forced removals see Cosmas Desmond, *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement in South Africa* (London: Penguin, 1971); Laurine Platzky, and Cheryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985); and Laura Evans, *Survival in the 'Dumping Grounds': A Social History of Apartheid Relocation* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[25] The Drum generation was named after *Drum* magazine, launched in 1951, and which acted as a foundation for a talented range of writers, including Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane, and Can Themba. On the Drum generation see Paul Gready, 'The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of their World', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (1990), 139-164. On Sophiatown's place in the history of jazz, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

would never say to my children: this is the house where I was born').[26] Alexandra, a densely packed residential area not far north of Johannesburg, kept hold of its status as a free-hold area for Africans throughout the apartheid era, while a few inner-city neighbourhoods like Doornfontein and Fordsburg kept their racially mixed mostly South Asian populations. But by the time the *Street Guide to the Witwatersrand* was being sold, the racial reordering of Johannesburg was essentially complete. Once a city where in one historian's words people had poured in 'from all over the world, giving the Rand a cultural diversity and social texture that bubbled with excitement and vitality',[27] Johannesburg now reflected apartheid's austere vision of a racially separated society. Neatly sequestered, the official 1970 census reported that 597,390 Africans lived in Soweto, although even state officials quietly admitted that the population was likely to be far higher, widely estimated to be around one million people, people adept at evading the eyes of the state.[28] In the mid-1970s the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce estimated that each forty-by-eighty-feet plot was home to as many as 14 people, many living in tiny one-room backyard brick shacks.[29]

Remarkably it was only in 1963 that Soweto was acknowledged with an official name. Until then the townships that had grown out of Pimville had been referred to by officials as the 'south-western native areas'. Soweto, a play on that semi-official designation (SO-uth-WE-stern-TOwnships), was the pick of a public competition run by the City Council.[30] That Soweto's very name should point elsewhere was entirely in keeping with the role Soweto fit in official imaginations. To the northeast sat Johannesburg, and to officials, Soweto only existed a vast labour

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[26] Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, (London: Penguin, 1999), 10.

[27] Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (Jonathan Ball, 2001), 1.

[28] The Johannesburg City Council's estimate in 1972 was that there were around 250,000 non-registered people living in the township. See 'Soweto schools can only admit 'pink' children', *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 January 1974. For two sophisticated studies which have looked at how blind the South African state could be in its attempts to see society see Deborah Posel, 'State, Power and Gender: Conflict over the Registration of African Customary Marriage in South Africa, c. 1910-1970', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 8 (1995), 223-256; and Keith Breckenridge, 'Verwoerd's Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), 83-108.

[29] Alan Morris (ed.), *Change and Continuity: A Survey of Soweto in the Late 1990s* (Johannesburg: Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999), 2.

[30] G. H. Pirie, 'Letters, Words, Worlds, the Naming of Soweto', *African Studies*, 43, 1 (1984), 49. Other suggested names included Goldella, Sothuni, Dumuzweni, Kwantu and Oppenheimerville. See Nechama Brodie, *The Joburg Book: A Guide to the City's History, People & Places* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan South Africa, 2014), 271.

camp to serve the tremendous riches being dug out of the city's deep underground wealth.[31] Between the rush hours of 4 a.m. and 8 a.m., and from 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. this intimate connection took dramatic form in a massive daily migration as hundreds of municipal Putco buses took to the roads and trains clattered back and forth between Soweto's stations and Johannesburg's Park Station, each train pulling carriages crammed with people, each person dictated by the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act (No. 67 of 1952) to carry a 96 page passbook, outlining the strict conditions on which the holders' right to continue residing in a white designated urban area depended. By the 1970s it was estimated that around 650,000 people made the commute to the city of gold each day, men to places of backbreaking heavy labour, women to the private homes of white South Africans, tending to their children and household chores.[32]

Soweto's status as an enormous open-air ghetto had produced an environment nakedly in service of racial subjugation and exploitation. And if the decision to officially recognise Soweto with a name in 1963 signalled at least some acceptance that Soweto's buildings were there to stay, the passbooks or *dompas*, were a daily reminder that the people themselves had no permanent rights to life in urban areas. Soweto's residents were seen as sojourners, and as such simply not afforded the right to have access to even the most basic features of urban life such as public parks, playgrounds, libraries, cinemas, or shopping centres. Indeed, it was not even possible for Sowetans to call their homes their own. All land was held under public ownership, each matchbox house rented on a strict time-limited lease.[33] Without security of tenure or title deed, this meant that it was nearly impossible for people to borrow against their property, a fact which might have allowed individuals to achieve some degree of financial autonomy. Alongside additional legislation that prohibited Africans from trading in any goods other than daily conveniences, this meant that Soweto provided for only the most basic commodities. To access nearly all basic goods and services, people had to join the long commute into Johannesburg, where it was estimated that

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[31] The mineral wealth dug out of Johannesburg's mines was spectacular. Gold from Johannesburg accounted for around 40 per cent of the total world's gold output in 1913.

[32] Pauline Morris, *Soweto: A Review of Existing Conditions and Some Guidelines for Change* (Johannesburg: The Urban Foundation, 1980), 28. On women's domestic labour, see Ena Jansen, *Like Family: Domestic Workers in South African History and Literature* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).

[33] The length of the leases changed throughout the apartheid period. From 1949 the norm in Soweto was for 30-year leases, but in 1968 a directive from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development stated that houses could only be rented. In 1975 the 30-year lease structure was re-introduced. Following the 1976 uprising a significant reform was introduced in 1979 that brought in a 99-year leasehold scheme. See Morris, *Soweto*, 16

Sowetans spent around seventy per cent of their wages.[34] Little was left behind. For many the demands proved too much. The writer Mtutelezi Matshoba remembered growing up in Orlando during the 1960s how it was not uncommon to find a corpse on the side of the streets, 'covered by wind-blown papers'.[35]

There were however two types of building which interrupted the anonymising monotony produced by the endless series of matchbox houses. In the late 1960s, Soweto had 116 government schools and around 900 churches, scant concession by the National Party that life could not be defined by race and labour alone.[36] The churches were an eclectic mix. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches were all represented, alongside churches with more recent beginnings. Founded in Philadelphia in 1816, the African Methodist Episcopal Church had grown rapidly in South Africa during the nineteenth century, and had a strong following in Soweto. Alongside the AME, a panoply of Zionist churches with names like the Full Witness Apostolic Church in Zion and the South African Christian Church in Zion bore witness to the latest religious current from across the Atlantic.[37] On Sundays this rich religious life spilled out resplendently onto the streets. Those who walked to the Zionist churches dressed in flowing green and yellow garments, the Methodists wore red and black, while the apostolic churches wore blue and white.[38] In their pews Sowetans listened to impassioned lessons in racial uplift, self-healing and racial pride.[39] The schools were different. Aside from a handful of Catholic schools such as St Matthews in Moroka, all schools in Soweto were under government control. During apartheid it was illegal for any school to be opened without government sanction.[40] Run by the Department of Bantu

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[34] *Ibid*., 108-109.

[35] Mtutuzeli Matshoba, *Call Me Not A Man: The Stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979), viii. The sight of bodies on the streets is also recalled by Joyce Sikakane in her memoir, *A Window on Soweto* (London: International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1977), 6.

[36] Martin West, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City: African Independent Churches in Soweto, Johannesburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975).

[37] On the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa see James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York, N.Y.; Oxford University Press, 1995). On the Zionist church movement in southern Africa see Joel Cabrita, *The People's Zion: Southern Africa, the United States, and a Transatlantic Faith-Healing Movement* (Cambridge, M.A.; The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

[38] Redi Tlhabi, *Endings & Beginnings: A Story of Healing* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 15.

[39] For a rich anthropological study of the social life of Zion in South Africa see Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[40] Section 9 (1) of the Bantu Education Act (No. 46 of 1953) Act: 'no person shall establish, conduct, or maintain a Bantu or native school, other than a Government Bantu school, unless it is registered as prescribed.'

Education, there were 73 lower-primary schools, 26 higher-primary schools and 11 combined lower- and higher- primary schools in 1968.[41] To meet the needs of a place with one million people, there were just six secondary schools, Morris Isaacson, Musi, Naledi, Orlando High, Orlando West and Sekano-Ntoane.[42]

Alongside Soweto's few other non-residential buildings, the police stations, the massive concrete dormitories built for single male labourers, the offices of the Urban Bantu Council, and the municipal beer halls on whose revenues the Urban Bantu Council depended, these schools might easily be seen as satellites in Soweto's architecture of surveillance and social control, especially by those familiar with some of the classic accounts of education by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, Talcott Parsons, Eugen Weber, Paul Willis, Michel Foucault, amongst others.[43] Indeed, the basic idea that education systems powerfully underpinned the makeup of modern society was what so attracted the National Party to incorporating schools as a key plank in the apartheid project. Schools offered the apartheid planners the beguiling promise of an institution that would make people to police themselves, rather than having to be coerced under force of arms. Speaking in the senate chamber in Cape Town on 7 June 1954, the man credited as the architect of apartheid, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs, spoke during the second reading of the Bantu Education Bill.[44] In words that have echoed down through history, Verwoerd gave one of the most unapologetic statements of apartheid that were ever delivered:

> The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within

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[41] Lower primary schools, Sub-A to Standard II, provided four years of schooling, intended for children aged seven to ten. Higher primary schools, Standard III to Standard VI, provided a further four years of schooling, intended for children aged eleven to fourteen. Standard VI was abolished in 1975 to create a twelve-year school programme. Secondary schools, Forms I to III, provided a further three years, leading to the Higher Primary Examination on which the Junior Certificate was awarded. The high schools provided a final two years (Forms IV and V), leading to the Joint Matriculation Board examinations.

[42] 'Teachers work double shifts', *The Star*, 17 January 1968.

[43] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 2000 [1970]); Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1976); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1981); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1995 [1975]).

[44] Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd (b.8 September 1901-d.6 September 1966), born in the Netherlands before moving to South Africa with his family in 1903. He was educated at Milton High School in Bulawayo, Rhodesia, and the University of Stellenbosch. Verwoerd completed his doctorate in psychology and sociology in Germany. In 1950 he was appointed Minister of Native Affairs. Between 1958 and 1966 Verwoerd was prime minister. He was killed on the floor of the senate on 6 September 1966.

> his own community, however, all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze. This attitude is not only uneconomic because money is spent for an education which has no specific aim but it is also dishonest to continue it. It is abundantly clear that unplanned education creates many problems, disrupting the community life of the Bantu and endangering the community life of the European.[45]

Verwoerd was clear. Schools were where people would learn their proper place.

That fifteen years after Verwoerd's speech there were around nineteen times more many primary schools than secondary schools in Soweto was the fruit of his promise. Bantu Education was deliberately structured like a steeply sided pyramid, designed to provide mass numeracy and basic literacy, but intended to thwart the ambitions of those who sought anything more. In 1969, government statistics reported that for every 251 African pupils to start school, only 1 reached matriculation.[46] In 1972, the South African Institute of Race Relations, a liberal think-tank, reported that of every 600 pupils enrolled in the Bantu Education system in 1972, only 1 was enrolled in matriculation classes.[47] Even for students who reached these rarefied heights, hopes of reaching one of the five newly created 'bush colleges' remained a distant proposition.[48] In 1969, just 20 students in Soweto achieved a university pass in their matriculation examinations.[49]

And yet the remarkable fact is that notwithstanding these degradations, perhaps even because of them, these schools were embraced with a passion which betrayed the government's obvious intent. Each January tens of thousands of children would gather outside the schools on

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[45] Hendrik Verwoerd, 'Speech Delivered to the Senate, June 7, 1954', in Brian Rose and Raymond Tunmer (eds.), *Documents in South African Education* (Johannesburg: A. D. Donker, 1975), 266.

[46] 'One in 251 is able to get to Matric class', *Pretoria News*, 30 April 1969.

[47] ''Education figures misleading'–Kambule', *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 January 1975.

[48] The five universities established under the Extension of the University Education Act (No. 45 of 1959) were the University College of Western Cape (designated Coloured), the University College of Durban-Westville (designated Indian), the University College of Zululand, the University College of the North and the University College of Fort Hare (all designated African). The history of these universities is increasingly a topic of historical interest. Daniel Massey, *Under Protest: The Rise of Student Resistance at the University of Fort Hare* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010); Anne Heffernan, 'The University of the North and Building the Bantustans, 1959-1977', *South African Historical Journal*, 69 (2017), 195-214; Anne Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy: Student Politics & Democracy in South Africa* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019).

[49] 'Only 20 qualify', *The Star*, 19 January 1968. If 1968 was a bad year, in 1974 results had not greatly improved. Then 98 students achieved university entrance passes. See 'Not Many in Soweto get matric passes', *The Star*, 17 January 1974.

the first day of the new academic year, a desperate scramble to win a place at school. Dressed expectantly in tunics and grey flannels for a school they could not be sure they would attend, children formed lines from as early as 6 a.m., often standing outside all day under the summer sun. Inside the schools, teachers flagrantly bent the Department of Bantu Education's rules to ensure as many students were accommodated as possible. Class sizes in Soweto regularly exceeded seventy students. Morris Isaacson was originally built to accommodate 400 students. By 1970 there were 1,400 students.[50] Orlando High had also been built to accommodate 400 students. In 1969, the school had 1,300 students.[51] But no matter the determination and perseverance (in 1970 around one hundred students at Orlando High launched a picket of the school for three months until they were finally let in),[52] there inevitably came the point when no more space could be found, and it would be left to someone to turn hundreds of children away.[53] Newspaper reports state that when the unwelcome news was delivered children often started crying, forced to contemplate a year without schooling or the prospect of trying another school where the odds were longer still.[54] This was a strength of emotion that Verwoerd and his talk of grazing animals had not anticipated. Nor are scenes of students being turned away crying from the doors of Bantu Education what have been commonly remembered today. Verwoerd's words have cast a very long shadow indeed.

No doubt Bantu Education was an institution that threatened social isolation and fragmentation. And yet the National Party's decision in the mid-1950s to build a mass education system ran curiously against the grain of its own instincts to close down public space, creating thousands of new schools across the country that brought young minds together. The result might have been predictable in nothing else but its capacity to defy expectations. Young Sowetans did see the schools as outposts of the state, recognising the National Party's ambition to reproduce apartheid's racial divisions in perpetuity. But that was not all people saw. People saw alternative possibilities in schools, places where an individual could not only reimagine their place in society—the aspiration to be a doctor, a lawyer, social worker, or a nurse, no matter how slim the chances—but where the rules that governed apartheid could themselves be overhauled and rethought.

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50 'No schools, no classes, no hope…', *The Star*, 27 January 1970.

51 'Compulsory education plea by Soweto headmaster', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 November 1969.

52 'School too full for comfort', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 March 1970; 'Still no desks', *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 April 1970.

53 'Hopes dashed at Soweto schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 January 1968.

54 'Tears as schools turn away hundreds', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 January 1970.

Schools, to put a complicated history simply, were places of paradox. They were institutions whose foundations were built on ideas of racial domination but then filled with people who dreamt of racial emancipation, a place where social isolation was threatened, but one of the rare spaces where a degree of socialisation was allowed, where life plans were designed to be set according to cast-iron racial laws, but where people sought to push back their future horizons, places seen as responsibility of the state but the property of the community and, when it served, vice-versa, where crude propaganda was taught but where real knowledge was seized, joyless places, but nevertheless places where people came together to play, sing and learn.

How are we to write the history of an institution that contained all this at once? How do we find the space in our histories to accommodate both sides of the paradox, the truth the map helps illustrate, a history made up of strictly bounded spaces and circumscribed lives, defined by apartheid's essential inhumanity, and the truths which the scenes of students crying on the first day of school helps to reveal, a history of people's humble aspirations, a hunger always for more, and the full riches of a people's humanity which spilled out the frames that were imposed upon it? As a slim literature attests, it is a very difficult history to write about.

The first scholars who wrote about education during apartheid did so by approaching this history through the logics of the map, top-down studies of crushing state power. At a time when much of the South African academy had embraced Marxism, and Althusserian structuralism especially,[55] Elmon Nqabeni Mathonsi published *Black Matriculation Results: A Mechanism of Social Control* (1988). Mathonsi argued that matriculation results in the Bantu Education system were being manipulated by the government in order to meet the demands of the national economy, flooding the labour market with cheap labour at times, contracting at others.[56] The correlation did not keep as tightly as Mathonsi's argument demanded, but other studies were more sophisticated, if not more empirically ungrounded, presenting the development of state education as the contested product of the competing interests of monopoly capitalism and the Afrikaner establishment.[57] In whatever form it was presented though, the basic argument never deviated very

[55] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014 [1970]).
[56] Elmon Nqabeni Mathonsi, *Black Matriculation Results: A Mechanism of Social Control* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988).
[57] See also Pam Christie and Colin Collins, 'Bantu Education: Apartheid Ideology or Labour Reproduction?', *Comparative Education*, 18 (1982), 59-75; and Jonathan Hyslop, 'State Education Policy and the Reproduction

far. As one article from 1982 clearly put it: 'Bantu Education is geared towards the reproduction of labour as required by the needs of capitalist accumulation in general'.[58] In truth, these early studies achieved little more analytically than rewriting Verwoerd's senate speech: apartheid's true realities and its mask fitted onto each other perfectly. To think that a young student might have felt great pride on receiving their end-of-year exam results only added terrible pathos to the idea that black South Africans had had their futures decided for them.

But in more recent years, as historians have started to enjoy more critical distance from the past, a few tentative openings have been made at writing the other side of Bantu Education, a history it has to be said that those who grew up in the townships had never forgotten. In 2009 the historian Jacob Dlamini published, *Native Nostalgia*, the provocative title a gateway into Dlamini's reflections of his youth growing up in Katlehong, a township east of Soweto and south of Johannesburg, his reminiscences unveiling 'a complexity of life among black South Africans, that not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy'.[59] Dlamini recalled the finely graded social distinctions and generational tensions of life in the townships, a complex social order held in balance between two poles, a respectability politics in which people's attempts to build themselves up above their poverty was matched only by others' pleasure in rule-breaking and ribaldry.[60] Nowhere did the politics of respectability and a brazen disreputableness compete more than in the schools. Young students tempted by the quick rewards of life on street corners and the lure of the gangs were dragged back to their classrooms and beaten by teachers. All the while students like Dlamini determinedly focused on their studies, the future historian encouraged by his mother, who recognised his success at the end of the year with the prize of a new pair of new football boots or a fresh shirt. Growing up in this education-minded household, Dlamini recalls how for his mother, 'education was liberation'.[61]

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of the Urban African Working Class: The Case of the Southern Transvaal 1955-76', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14 (1988), 446-476. These arguments echoed wider debates about the capitalist workings of the apartheid system. See Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1 (1972), 425-456; Martin Legassick, 'South Africa: Capital Accumulation and Violence', *Economy and Society*, 3 (1974), 253-291; and Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe, 'The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 3 (1976), 87-107.

[58] Christie and Collins, 'Bantu Education', 73.

[59] Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009), 19.

[60] On respectability politics see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[61] Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 92.

That there could be nothing more important than education is an idea pregnant with possibilities about how the history of apartheid might be written very differently, unmoored from historians' traditional preoccupation with the history of South Africa's famous struggle for liberation and its familiar cast of characters, the Mandelas, Mbekis, and Sisulus. But Dlamini's appeal for historians to embrace a more complicated history in which people's values pulled them in many different directions was also deeply controversial. Where might such a project of historical revisionism end? What stops revisionism turning into white apologia?[62] In *The Sowetan* one reviewer called *Native Nostalgia*'s basic premise 'so sickening that I decided to never read it'.[63] And while there are indeed signs a new 'post-anti-apartheid' historiography,[64] the challenge of writing the history of education in shades of grey has only been tentatively explored. Just three books stand out. In 2014, Meghan Healy-Clancy published *A World of Their Own*, an institutional history of the Inanda Seminary in Natal, a Congregationalist boarding school for young women founded in 1869 by the American Zulu Mission, one of a tiny number of mission schools the National Party allowed to carry on running during apartheid era.[65] In 2015, Goolam Vahed and Thembisa Waetjen published *Schooling Muslims in Natal*, a similarly constructed institutional history, this time of the Orient Islamic Educational Institute in Durban, first opened in 1960.[66] Then in 2016, Daniel Magaziner published *The Art of Life in South Africa*, a history of Ndaleni, a training institute for art teachers run in the hills of the Natal Midlands run by the Department of Bantu Education.[67] Magaziner never allows his readers to forget the politics behind the establishment of Ndaleni, but that is not its focus. *The Art of Life* is a book which dares readers to appreciate the beauty amidst

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62 In 2012 the conservative white historian Hermann Giliomee courted controversy in South Africa, by claiming the merits of Bantu Education. See Giliomee, 'Education in SA: Is Verwoerd to Blame?', *Politicsweb*, 3 September 2012. https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/education-in-sa-is-verwoerd-to-blame (11 September 2021). For an impassioned rejoinder, see Martin Prew, 'Sorry, But Verwoerd and His Ilk are to Blame!', *Politicsweb*, 10 September 2012. https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/sorry-but-verwoerd-and-his-ilk-are-to-blame (11 September 2021).

63 On *Native Nostalgia*'s reception, see Hedley Twidle, *Experiments with Truth: Narrative Non-Fiction and the Coming of Democracy in South Africa* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 75.

64 On the term 'post-anti-apartheid' historiography, see Catherine Burns, 'A Useable Past: The Search for 'History in Chords'', in Hans Erik Stolten (ed.), *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007), 351-362.

65 Meghan Healy-Clancy, *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

66 Goolam Vahed and Thembisa Waetjen, *Schooling Muslims in Natal: Identity, State and the Orient Islamic Educational Institute* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2015).

67 Daniel Magaziner, *The Art of Life in South Africa* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2016).

apartheid's ugliness as Magaziner marvels at people's imaginations to break free from their surroundings, his efforts to inhabit the interior worlds of Ndaleni's students as they walked between workshops at dusk or as they looked upon the ocean for the first time.[68] Not one of these institutions was properly a part of the Bantu Education system, but all three books help glimpse the enormous enthusiasm for education across South Africa that not even Bantu Education could hope to destroy.

Two very different approaches to the history of apartheid and education with two radically different lessons. Yet as we consider before us the challenge of writing the history of education in Soweto in all its complexity we would do well to remember that the freedom a historian possesses to choose what stories to tell about the past was not the freedom that those in the townships had to decide the meaning of these schools in their lives. Schools were never just a type prison in society, forcing people to live apartheid's iniquitous present. Nor were schools just a window through which people could hope to escape into a wider world. Schools always pulled in both directions. And it was because of this strange double-function that schools presented everyone who were pulled into their orbit with a terrible dilemma. Should one join for the sake of an education and risk being a part of a political project aimed at your subservience? Or turn one's back on a place of learning and friendship and risk social isolation and a form of self-annihilation? Writing in 1962, Albert Luthuli, the president-general of the ANC,[69] put the impossible question Bantu Education forced upon people this way:

> The choice before parents is an almost impossible one—they do not want Bantu Education and they do not want their children on the streets. They have to choose between two great evils, and no rule of thumb indicates which is the greater.[70]

What stories did people tell themselves to make sense of the paradoxical offerings of an institution that took with one hand what it gave with the other? The great challenge of answering that question

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[68] Daniel Magaziner, ''A Song of Seeing': Art and Friendship under Apartheid', in Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (eds.), *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), 210. See also Daniel Magaziner, 'Two Stories about Art, Education and Beauty in Twentieth Century South Africa', *The American Historical Review*, 118 (2013), 1403-1429.

[69] Albert Luthuli (b.1898-d.21 July 1967) was born near Bulawayo and educated at Ohlange Institute in Natal, a school founded by John Dube, a founding member of the ANC and modelled on Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Luthuli served as president-general of the ANC from 1952 until his death in 1967.

[70] Albert Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962), 147.

is the history this dissertation sets out to follow as Sowetans grappled with it from the opening of Bantu Education system in 1955 to the end of apartheid in 1994.

Among the different ways of answering that question there was at least one that is familiar today. On the morning of 16 June 1976, police opened fire on a massive crowd of students who had gathered outside Phefeni Junior in Orlando West, angry at the government's decision to impose Afrikaans as a language of instruction in the schools. The shootings marked the start of the Soweto uprising, a great outpouring rage that rocked South Africa for months. Soweto was now firmly placed on the map, its name synonymous around the world with a new uncompromising spirit of protest. By the year's end as many as one million people had joined the unrest in some form and hundreds of people had been killed.[71] At its heart, the Soweto uprising was driven by something electrifyingly simple: a bold new answer to the paradox of Bantu Education. The schools did not offer people anything in the present. Rather they were institutions irredeemably corrupted by the politics of apartheid, a fundamental part of a system that had to be fought against with everything for a future in which all injustices would be swept away. As a new slogan that fresh generations of youth took the barricades after 1976 had it, 'Liberation Now, Education Later!'.

There will be space to say much more about these events and their meaning in Chapter Two, but for now it is sufficient to say the Soweto uprising changed the course of South African history, not least in shaping how the history of apartheid has come to be written about ever since. The story Soweto's students told of their parents shackled in the chains of their oppression, only broken by their generation's newfound heroism, was embraced by historians, the dominant Marxism which once underpinned structural analyses of apartheid's powers giving way to a new intellectual lodestar, E. P. Thompson, a new bottom-up approach to writing history built in recognition of the powers of ordinary people.[72] Almost as soon as it started the Soweto uprising

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[71] John D. Brewer, *After Soweto: An Unfinished Journey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 67.

[72] On the turn to social history after the Soweto uprising, see Philip Bonner, 'New Nation, New History: The History Workshop in South Africa, 1977-1994', *The Journal of American History*, 81 (1994), 977-985; Jonathan Hyslop, 'E. P. Thompson in South Africa: The Practice and Politics of Social History in an Era of Revolt and Transition, 1976-2012', *International Review of Social History*, 61 (2016), 95-116; Clive Glaser, 'Thompson on the Highveld? Social History and Humanist Socialism in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s', *Social History*, 45 (2020), 427-439; and Bernard Dubbeld, 'Translating E. P. Thompson's Marxian Critique: Contesting 'Context' in South African Studies', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 46 (2020), 67-85. Amongst the most important works written in that tradition see Charles van Onselen, *The Small Matter of a Horse* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984); William Beinart, and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (London: James Currey, 1987); Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural*

quickly became seen as the great pivot on which South Africa's history of oppression turned into a history of liberation. And if the question of what life was like inside the classroom has barely been touched upon by historians, the history of how South Africa's youth took up responsibility for that fight stands at the opposite end of the spectrum.[73] There has only been one attempt at writing a comprehensive history of education during apartheid and its argument has been written in this vein.[74] Published in 1999, Jonathan Hyslop's *The Classroom Struggle* set forth an epic history in which the National Party's built an education system which came close to achieving its goal of hegemony before the growing power of the people swept it away.[75] The book is judicious and scholarly, but in its frame of reference it is also a book that sits at one with the worldview of those students who fought the police with rocks and petrol bombs. In the pages of South African history,

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South Africa (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1987); Belinda Bozzoli, with the assistance of Nmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (London: Currey, 1991); Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996).

[73] For example see John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978); Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt that Shook Apartheid* (London: Zed Books, 2016 [1979]); Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa, June-December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980); Colin Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1987), 303-330; Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984); Shaun Johnson, ''The Soldiers of Luthuli': Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa', in Shaun Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 1989), 94-152; Gill Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992); Belinda Bozzoli, 'Why were the 1980s 'Millenarian'? Style, Repertoire, Space and Authority in South Africa's Black Cities', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 13 (2000), 78-110; Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001); Sello Mathabatha, 'Missionary Schools, Student Uprisings in Lebowa and the Sekhukhuneland Students' Revolts, 1983-1986', *African Studies*, 64 (2005), 263-284; Thula Simpson, ''Umkhonto we Sizwe, We are Waiting for You': The ANC and the Township Uprising, September 1984 – September 1985', *South African Historical Journal*, 61 (2009), 158-177; Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2010); Timothy Gibbs, 'Chris Hani's 'Country Bumpkins': Regional Networks in the African National Congress Underground, 1974-1994', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (2011), 677-69; Noor Nieftagodien, *The Soweto Uprising* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2014); Franziska Rueedi, '*Siyayinyova!*': Patterns of Violence in the African Townships of the Vaal Triangle, South Africa, 1980-86', *Africa*, 85 (2015), 395-416; Julian Brown, *The Road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2016); Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 'The Anatomy of the Crowd', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. VII, *Soweto Uprisings: New Perspectives, Commemorations and Memorialisation* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2017), 41-77; Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth & South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2021).

[74] Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999). The book was an expanded version of his PhD dissertation. See Hyslop, 'Social Conflicts over African Education in South Africa from the 1940s to 1976', (Ph.D. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).

[75] That our understandings of the past can be so beholden to the very categories produced as to blind us to the riches of the past is an argument that has been famously advanced by Roger Chartier in relation to the French Revolution. See Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004 [1990]).

one sees how the struggle for liberation and the struggle for education have been folded neatly into one.

But it takes nothing away to see that the story Soweto's students told in 1976 was only one way in which people made sense of the paradox of education during the history of apartheid. In this dissertation's other chapters, we will explore what other stories people told themselves, revealing a rich history in which people did not just fight for their future liberation, but perhaps more than anything fought to keep control over their lives during increasingly tumultuous times. And what quickly becomes clear in piecing these other stories together is not only the extent to which the revolutionary story of 1976 was just one small chapter in a much bigger history, but how poorly a revolutionary narrative guides us to understanding the rest of this history.

In Chapter One we will see how the years before the Soweto uprising are badly understood as a time when National Party reached the zenith of its power and a subordinated people cowed into submission. These were years when the National Party was profoundly by the people's demand that education was a basic entitlement in the modern world, twisting and contorting the logics on which Bantu Education was built, forcing the schools into a shape that bore little resemblance to government's original plan. And for all the attention the history of youth-led insurrections has attracted in the years after 1976, Chapters Three and Four reveal how unusual and short-lived these scenes actually were. To be blunt, it was simply never the case, as one scholar wrote, that 'among the youth it was the majority who participated in the eruptions. The youngster who did not participate in these popular uprisings was the exception rather than the rule'.[76] In Chapter Three we will see how Sowetans started to piece their lives together amongst the ruins of 1976 by building new grassroots organisations to take back control of their communities, giving students the space to go back to school. Dreams of revolution were viewed sceptically in Soweto after 1976, a time when most people saw the business of politics and the business of going to school as occupying two different spheres. But no matter how much people in Soweto might have wanted to put the uprising behind them, the idea that a people was on the march to revolution gripped many people's imaginations, not least in the ranks of the National Party. In Chapter Four we shall see how the attempt to build an alternative nonviolent form of politics was threatened in

[76] Straker, *Faces in the Revolution*, 19.

July 1985, after president P. W. Botha[77] ordered the start of a state of emergency, threatening to cast Soweto in ruin again. In a desperate attempt to hold off the government's command of violence a new idea emerged in Soweto, with repercussions that spread far and wide. It was called People's Power, its revolutionary idea that going to school under conditions like these could itself be a revolutionary act. People's Power was an attempt to defeat the National Party, not by force of arms but by force of will, as dazzling as anything Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi dreamed possible.

And it is as we start to piece these different stories together that the outlines of a very different history of apartheid will start to take shape. Ever since 1976, the history of apartheid has been typically written as a kind of romance, how an oppressed people came together to overthrow apartheid.[78] Following the struggle for education suggests how we might better understand this history as a tragedy. For all the National Party's ambitions, Bantu Education was never able to hold back people's demands for a better life. But as the National Party faced the limits of what it could ever hope to achieve, the party turned increasingly to violence, and with terrifying and long-lasting consequences that have been poorly served by accounts of historical triumphalism. Chapter Five begins in June 1986 with Botha's decision to launch a second state of emergency in two years, spelling the destruction of People's Power and marking the start of a troublingly mercurial world in which neighbours started to turn on each other. During apartheid's final years Soweto's schoolchildren became trapped in a nightmarish world hollowed of political ideals, fighting each other to try and stay alive. It is sometimes said that South Africa enjoyed a peaceful transition to democracy, even a type of miracle.[79] Hard to find anyone who lived in the townships during these years who would describe things like that. When the time finally came for people to cast their first

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[77] Pieter Willem Botha (b.12 January 1916-d.31 October 2006) was born in the Orange Free State and educated at Bethlehem Voortrekker High School and Grey University College. He did not complete his degree. In 1948 Botha was elected to the parliament, representing George in Cape Province. In 1966 Botha was appointed Minister of Defence by Hendrik Verwoerd, a post he held for fourteen years. Botha became prime minister in 1978 and, after major constitutional reforms, state president in 1983.

[78] On history's relationship to literary form see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). As Saul Dubow has observed, the rise and fall framing has been explicitly taken up in the titles of a number of important overview histories. See Eric Louw, *The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of Apartheid* (Westport, C.T.: Praeger, 2004); Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004); Adrian Guelke, *Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid: South Africa and World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009).

[79] Patti Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (London: Viking, 1997).

ever votes in 1994 it was in the hope that a hideously violent world might finally be put behind them. Soweto's schools have been used to tell a very particular history of apartheid. They offer a remarkable vantage point from which to tell a very different history.

- I -

'These Schools Are Our Own'
1955-1976

> This was a school that prided itself on its sanity, its determination to succeed against the odds and its valued clear thinking. It was a school of students who saw themselves as people who would one day play a key role in uplifting Black people…. We stood tall in deep Soweto, irrespective of the fact that we came from the poorest families and communities. You needed that to have lived in deep Soweto in order to understand the nature of our pride and sense of dignity.
>
> Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses* [1]

In the classic accounts of the rise-and-fall of apartheid there is an argument concerning the place of the Black Consciousness movement that is so commonly accepted that it has almost never been called into serious question. The argument has been told in many different ways, but in its essence depends upon a characterisation of the 'High Apartheid' period; a dark time stretching from the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960 to the early 1970s, and a time when it is commonly agreed that the National Party reached the zenith of its power, when political opposition was eviscerated, and the masses beaten into an acceptance of the new apartheid order.[2] But where there was hopelessness the argument carries on, new currents began to emerge in the late 1960s that would have seismic repercussions. On factory floors, a new trade unionism began to develop in Natal, erupting in massive strikes in Durban in 1973.[3] And on South Africa's racially segregated university campuses far away in the countryside, small groups of students started to come together to formulate a new political consciousness. In late night conversations and in small ecumenical gatherings young intellectuals on the cusp of adulthood started to proudly assert a new Black

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[1] Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Press, 2001), 44-45.

[2] Sharpeville was part of an industrialised belt roughly forty miles south of Johannesburg. The massacre happened on the first day of the Pan-African Congress's anti-pass campaign, when police fired on a crowd outside the local police station. Sixty-nine people were killed, most shot in the back. See Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[3] Strikes started at the Coronation Brick and Tile Works on 9 January 1973 and quickly grew to include a quarter of the local African labour force in the Durban area. See Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

identity, one which united all Africans, Indians and Coloured people together in the face of their shared oppression, and which witheringly critiqued the role of white liberals in the struggle against racial oppression.[4] Dramatically announcing themselves in July 1970 when the newly formed South African Students' Organisation withdrew its recognition of the multi-racial but largely white-dominated National Union of South African Students, Black Consciousness found its organisational home and most electrifying expression under the charismatic leadership of Steve Biko, a young trainee doctor at the University of Natal Wentworth medical school.[5] Biko told his followers, 'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed', imploring them to free themselves from subservient thoughts and take pride in themselves and their history.[6] Black Consciousness, so the argument goes, was the spirit which reignited resistance in South Africa, helping to set fire to the Soweto uprising in 1976 and the township revolts of the 1980s that brought apartheid to its knees.

Over the years, this basic argument has been developed in a rich and complex literature. Historians have explored topics as varied as the Black Consciousness movement's Christian content,[7] its place within the Africanist tradition of politics,[8] the debts it owed to the Black Power

[4] A description of these scenes is provided by Mamphela Ramphele in her autobiography, *Mamphela Ramphele: A Life* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 58-59.

[5] Steve Biko (b.18 December 1946-d.12 September 1977) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at St. Francis College, a Catholic boarding school. Biko studied medicine at the University of Natal Medical School and was the first president of SASO. In 1973 Biko was given a banning order and consigned to King William's Town. In August 1977 Biko was arrested for breaking the conditions of his banning order. He died in the hands of the police following a seven-hundred mile drive to Pretoria in which he was shackled without clothes in the back of a Land Rover.

[6] Steve Biko, 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity', in Aeldred Stubbs (ed.), *I Write What I Like: Steve Biko, A Selection of His Writings* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004 [1978]), 101-2.

[7] Daniel Magaziner, 'Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa', *Radical History Review*, 99 (2007), 80-106; Ian Macqueen, 'Students, Apartheid and the Ecumenical Movement in South Africa, 1960-1975', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39 (2013), 447-463; Philippe Denis, 'Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness in South Africa in the 1970s', *South African Historical Journal*, 62 (2010), 162-182.

[8] Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press, 1978); Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986); C. R. D. Halisi, *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press,1999); Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

movement in the United States,[9] the role of community programmes in its designs,[10] and the presence (and absence) of women.[11] This literature has opened up new and often profound insights. But even the most important revisionist work published in recent years is notable for accepting Black Consciousness's fundamental place in South Africa's liberation struggle.[12] In statements typical of the literature, Saleem Badat has argued that Black Consciousness 'ended the silence and despair of the 1960s, rebuilt black oppositional politics, and inspired a new era of black political activism and resistance.'[13] For Thomas Karis and Gail Gerhart, Black Consciousness meant 'sloughing off the passivity that most whites had mistaken for contentment', inspiring the township youth 'with an aggressive spirit that helped sweep South Africa toward the cataclysm of 1976-77.'[14] While in Anthony Marx's *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990*, we read 'the days of bowing and scraping were long gone, with the positive self-identity consistent with BC as expressed as an angry desire to tear down rather than build up.'[15]

Yet for all this orthodoxy there remains a very different history to be told of the years before 1976, a history which turns the established narrative on its head. Rather than seeing the Soweto uprising as the moment when a new uncompromising spirit inspired by Black Consciousness finally came to the boil, this chapter argues that what changed in 1976 was nothing new amongst Soweto's students at all. What changed in 1976 was that the National Party's patience in having its designs for the classroom challenged by a demanding and unaccommodating people finally came to an end. Although little remembered by people today, and remarkably understudied,

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[9] George M. Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York, N.Y.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Ofole Mgbako, ''My Blackness is the Beauty of this Land': Racial Redefinition, African American Culture, and the Creation of the Black World in South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 10 (2009), 305-334.

[10] Leslie Hadfield, *Liberation and Development: Black Consciousness Community Programs in South Africa* (East Lansing, M.I.: Michigan State University Press, 2016).

[11] Daniel Magaziner, 'Pieces of a (Wo)man: Feminism, Gender and Adulthood in Black Consciousness, 1968-1977', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (2011), 45-61.

[12] Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2010).

[13] Saleem Badat, 'SASO and Black Consciousness, and the Shift to Congress Politics', in Anne Heffernan and Noor Nieftagodien (eds.), *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 99.

[14] Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. V*, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1997), 89.

[15] Anthony Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 1992), 61.

this chapter charts a history of struggle inside Soweto's schools as old as the Bantu Education system itself—a struggle which pitted Sowetans' basic demands that the state provide a decent quality education to all against the National Party's demand that schools be made to serve the basic principles of apartheid.

First introduced in 1955, we will see how the original designs for Bantu Education were whittled away at over the course of twenty years, leaving only a rump of Verwoerd's vision by the start of 1976. Secondary schooling, meant to be restricted by the terms of the Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953) to rural areas in order to stem African urbanisation, had started to explode in Soweto by the early 1970s. The financing of schools, meant to be almost exclusively raised from African taxation and tightly guarded by the Bantu Education Account, had been opened up to the general taxation base and private capital, fuelling an expansion beyond the state's control. The classrooms, intended to be segregated into the various language groups through which the National Party divided people not only by their race, but by their ethnicity, remained polyglot spaces, reflecting Soweto's ease with its own cosmopolitanism. And the school boards, intended as instruments to co-opt African communities into serving the system frequently became sites of resistance, choosing to serve the people instead. Each of these changes might not have amounted to much, but together they added up to something quietly momentous. A school system designed to divide Africans amongst themselves, binding them to the new Bantustans, was threatening to do the opposite, establishing novel connections across the great apartheid divides that separated black from white, Africans from each other, and the Bantustans from the cities. For those tasked with implementing apartheid's legislative order their failure halting these outcomes was humbling. Verwoerd may have owed his reputation to being seen as the architect of apartheid. These were years when officials came to realise how difficult it was to build a state according to his exacting designs.

High apartheid was a time of towering ambitions built upon teetering foundations. But as long as the state's weaknesses remained largely hidden from view, an illusion of granite-like power was able to be maintained. These were the years when white South Africans' confidence in the apartheid project reached their heights. During the 1960s the South African economy grew at an average of 6 per cent per annum, bettered only by Japan.[16] Looked out from their newly prosperous

16 Saul Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), 71.

suburbs flush with material goods, white South Africans felt safe assuming that the government's authority was assured following the political crackdown that followed the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960. But an authority upheld by violence is of a very different kind to an authority achieved through consent, even if the results can appear similar.[17] Looked at more closely, the limits to the state's authority in society were there to be clearly witnessed.

One place to look was the thorny question of what language schoolchildren should be taught in at secondary schools. In 1955, the Department of Bantu Education set out a longstanding requirement that all African secondary teaching in urban white-designated areas be carried out half in English and half in Afrikaans.[18] The government never had any success implementing this policy. Schools taught in their preferred language, nearly always English, and repeated efforts to introduce Afrikaans made little impact. In December 1959, a departmental circular was sent to all schools in the Bantu Education system stating: 'From 1960 exemption from the use of Afrikaans as a medium will not be granted so readily; it will be expected that everything possible will be done to bring Afrikaans to its rightful position as a medium of instruction.'[19] Directives like these made little difference. In 1964 a government commission reported that 95 per cent of all African secondary school classes were being taught in English.[20] If the National Party had any power over what language was taught in its schools, it was only that lip-service be paid to the idea that non-enforcement was a concession and not an unavoidable fact of life.

And so when W. C. Ackermann, the Regional Director of Education for the Southern Transvaal region, issued Regional Circular No. 2 on 29 August 1974, reaffirming the requirement to Soweto's school principals to teach half in English and half in Afrikaans, it came as much as a

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17 See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1997). That the period after the Sharpeville massacre should have been followed by the state's difficulty in imposing its authority will be less surprising to those less familiar with South African historiography's established conclusions. The danger of conflating power with violence is made clear by Hannah Arendt: 'Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.' See Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando, F.L.; Harcourt, Inc., 1970), 56.

18 Piet Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977,* Vol. I (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1980), 66.

19 Departmental Circular No. 31 of 1959, as quoted in Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I, 43. See also 'Bantu Education language rule', *Evening Post*, 30 November 1968; 'Teachers upset by medium rule', *Evening Post*, 7 December 1968.

20 'Afrikaans switch annoys Africans', *Natal Witness*, 17 February 1964.

sign of the state's weakness as it did a show of strength and resolve.[21] Confident the new directive could be rebuffed in the manner that previous directives from the Department of Bantu Education had been, people in Soweto met the directive by voicing their opposition, first at the level of the school boards and national teacher organisations, and then including the students themselves. So far this was entirely in keeping with the history of education in the years before the Soweto uprising. What proved different on this occasion was the role of a newly appointed and deeply ideological Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education, Dr Andries Treurnicht, under whose remit responsibility for Africans' primary and secondary schooling now fell from January 1976.[22]

A member of the reactionary *verkrampte* wing of the National Party, Treurnicht was one of those uncompromising apartheid ideologues who feared that the National Party had strayed perilously from the path Verwoerd had laid out for the *volk*, and who urged a quick return to the straight and narrow lest disaster follow. As the editor of the Pretoria-based newspaper *Hoofstad* in the 1960s before entering parliament in 1971,[23] Treurnicht had watched with alarm as a new status quo emerged under the National Party in which white taxpayer's money went towards funding the English language lessons of the next generation of urban Africans, anathema to Verwoerd's plan. Now in power he was given the chance to act. Where his predecessor, the more pragmatic Punt Janson may well have conceded,[24] Treurnicht stubbornly insisted that the language policy be followed, placing the state and the people on a fateful collision course from which no side could back down. The status of Afrikaans, so formative in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, became the issue on which Treurnicht sought to maintain some vestige of Bantu Education's place upholding the grand apartheid project.

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[21] Regional Circular No. 2 of 1974 (Southern Transvaal), as quoted in Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I, 52.

[22] Andries Pertus Treurnicht (b.19 February 1921-d.22 April 1993) was raised in Piquetberg in the Western Cape and educated at Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation on Abraham Kuyper. An ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church and editor of the Church's *Die Kerkbode*, Treurnicht was first elected to parliament in 1971. In 1982 Treurnicht led a breakaway party, the Conservative Party.

[23] On Treurnicht's place within Afrikaner politics at this time, see F. A. Mouton, ''Survival in Justice': Apartheid and the Schalk Pienaar-Dr A.P. Treurnicht *broedertwis*, 1968-1978', *South African Historical Journal*, 69 (2017), 452-467.

[24] For a study of Janson's place within the wider *verligte* tendency in the NP prior to 1976, see Matthew Chaskalson, 'Apartheid with a Human Face: Punt Janson and the Origins of Reform in Township Administration, 1972-1976', *African Studies*, 48 (1989), 101-129.

This is how we arrive at the start of the Soweto uprising along a very different road than the one historians gave usually followed. The year 1976 was unusual, but not for the fact of protest, a feature of Soweto's classroom politics ever since the first students walked through the doors of the Bantu Education system in 1955. What made 1976 unusual was that when faced with that protest, the National Party now refused to back down, displaying an obstinate denial of its true place in society that ended in atrocity on the morning of 16 June when the protests were allowed to continue no further, and the police opened fire. John Kane-Berman titled his account of these events, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction*.[25] Here the sequence of events is reversed; white reaction, black revolt.

It is important to be clear about what is and is not being claimed here. After the Sharpeville massacre and the government's state of emergency on 31 March 1960, black South Africans' formal political opposition against apartheid *was* destroyed. The General Law Amendment Act (No. 37 of 1963) suspended *habeas corpus*, allowing police to detain people for 90 days without charge, a terrible weapon that helped drive leadership of the ANC and the newly formed Pan Africanist Congress either into exile or prison. During the 1960s a formidable police state was built that made organised political opposition near impossible to sustain.[26] But it is a mistake to fixate attentions only on formal politics.[27] Following the struggle for control of Soweto's schools helps reveal a bigger more untameable political world than the police was able to destroy after Sharpeville.[28] Indeed, it was precisely the informal nature of politics that made this history so slippery for the National Party and historians to grasp alike.

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[25] John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978).

[26] Jacob Dlamini, *The Terrorist Album: Apartheid's Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2020), 42. For more, see John D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 223-267.

[27] Revisionist works which sets out to challenge the idea of a nadir often repeats this mistake, exaggerating what tiny pockets of organised political activity survived rather than focusing on informal politics. See, for example, Raymond Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976: A Social and Historical Study* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008); and Julian Brown, *The Road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2016).

[28] Scholars of African American history have been much more attuned to informal politics than South African historians. Their example has been influential in the thinking behind this chapter. See for example, Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South', *Journal of American History*, 80 (1993), 75-112; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Mary G. Robinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

And if that is one reason this history has remained hidden from view, another is a type of prejudice which has made looking at this history difficult even when its leading participants are brought into view. Between 1955 and 1976, the struggle for control of Soweto's classrooms was principally led by the township's incipient bourgeoisie, the lawyers, doctors, local businessmen, clerks and churchmen, as well as by the teachers and children themselves.[29] It was these people's fate to have their role in society dramatically rewritten after 1976. In a new revolutionary era, these people came to be seen at best as being too accommodating to the new apartheid order. At worst, as in the case of those who served on the Urban Bantu Council, they have been charged as collaborators, complicit in apartheid's crimes. But what this Carl Schmitt-like preoccupation with placing people as either friends or enemies of the state loses sight of is how these people saw a far richer set of possibilities in the world than this Manichean view of the world allows.[30] Rather than positioning themselves against the state, they chose to reposition the state in their lives, centring the schools at the heart of their children's and community's aspirations. It was a positioning that not only set the terms of their struggle with the state, but also placed them curiously at odds with the established forms of politics that claimed to represent them.

In December 1954, the ANC's National Executive Committee met for its annual conference in Durban, where it was decided that the party would call for a 'total rejection' of the new schools from 1 April 1955, the date on which the new Bantu Education system was to officially start in South Africa.[31] Despite the doubts of senior leaders in the ANC such as Albert Luthuli, and Z. K. Matthews,[32] the call for a boycott enjoyed considerable support among sections

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[29] For a classic study see Leo Kuper, *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class, and Politics in South Africa* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1965). See also Kim Wale, 'Historical Introduction to Class in Soweto', in Peter Alexander, Claire Ceruti, Keke Motseke, Mosa Phadi and Kim Wale (eds.), *Class in Soweto* (Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 35-54.

[30] Amongst those to warn of the narrow limits that occur when defining politics on Carl Schmitt's famous distinction was Theodor Adorno, who wrote: 'Freedom would be not to choose between black and white but to abjure such prescribed choices.' See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005 [1951]), 132. On the friend/enemy distinction see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1932]).

[31] National Executive Committee report to ANC annual conference, Durban, December 16-19, 1954 (abridged), in Thomas G. Karis and Gail Gerhart (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. III*, Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 257-271. Note that the first day of proper schooling actually fell on 12 April, after the Easter vacation, and the date of the boycott was adjusted accordingly.

[32] Zachariah Keodirelang Matthews (b.20 October 1901-d.12 May 1968) was born in Kimberley and educated at Lovedale and Fort Hare, after which he spent time at Yale and the London School of Economics where he was taught by Bronislaw Malinowski. He returned to South Africa in 1935 and became a professor at Fort Hare and a leading figure in the ANC.

of the party's grassroots, especially within the Youth League.[33] Without the participation of the people, the hope was that the Bantu Education system would simply collapse, allowing the ANC to provide their own classrooms, or what the party euphemistically called 'Cultural Clubs', an attempt to circumvent the legislation which banned any unauthorised alternative education. The call for a boycott wildly misread the mood in the townships, while the idea that the ANC might be able to establish their own school system vastly overestimated the party's capacities.[34] Outside a limited adherence to the boycott in parts of the Eastern Cape and East Rand (where around 7,000 students stayed away), huge numbers of students, around 900,000 in total, chose to enrol at the government's new schools in April 1955.[35] This was especially true of young girls, whose access to education had been greatly limited in the old segregationist era, but who now entered classrooms in equal numbers with boys.[36]

The popular response to the ANC's school boycott showed the party to have made a profound misjudgement, while those local community figures who now came forward and dedicated themselves to building up these schools showed themselves to be far closer in line with most people's aspirations and priorities. But even this divide between the world of formal politics and the masses begins to break down on closer inspection, revealing a far more consistent approach among people in the years before the uprising. Founded in 1968 in Soweto, the African Students' Movement (renamed the South African Students' Movement in 1972) is often cited by

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33 See Edward Feit, *African Opposition in South Africa: The Failure of Passive Resistance* (Stanford, C.A.: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1967), 143-189; Tom Lodge, 'The Parents' School Boycott: Eastern Cape and East Rand Townships, 1955', in Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Education and Apartheid: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), 265-295; Jonathan Hyslop, ''Let Us Cry for Our Children': Lessons of the 1955-6 School Boycotts', *Transformation*, 4 (1987), 3-26.

34 A few Cultural Clubs were established, but very few people attended, and the struggle in maintaining them was immense. In his memoir of his time as a priest in Sophiatown, Trevor Huddleston provides a desperate description of one Cultural Club in Benoni: 'I entered the building. It was very dark. What light there was filtered through two holes high up in the walls, where bricks had been removed just for that purpose. At first it was impossible to see: my eyes had to grow accustomed to the gloom. Then, gradually, the light fell upon a mass of heads; upon a crowd of children of all sizes, of all ages, gathered round a table. Seated at the table was a young African woman, trying to demonstrate some game: trying to keep fifty, a hundred children interested: or at least quiet. There were two or three other groups playing around the hall, or sitting on the dusty floor arranging letters into an alphabet, or just sitting.' See Trevor Huddleston, *Naught for Your Comfort* (Glasgow: Collins, 1956), 131.

35 Lodge and Philip Bonner argue that adherence in these areas likely reflected the strong presence of the ANC. See Lodge, 'The Parents' School Boycott'. See also Philip Bonner, 'The Politics of Location and Relocation: Germiston 1942-1960', *African Studies* 59 (2000), 192.

36 Elaine Unterhalter, 'The Impact of Apartheid on Women's Education in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 48 (1990): 66-75; F. A. J. van Rensburg, *Trends in Bantu Education in the Republic of South Africa* (Pretoria: Institute for Statistical Research, 1975), 12.

historians as one of the organisations responsible for radicalising the students ahead of the uprising,[37] one of the ways in which the radicalising ideas of Black Consciousness are purported to have travelled from the college campuses to the townships.[38] Yet when it came to offering their thoughts at the end of the 1971 academic year, the student organisation showed little of the revolutionary fervour that the historiography has led us to expect. Anticipating a period of increased spending ahead of the Christmas holidays, the student organisation reminded parents that they faced a choice; they could either spend their money on education, or on extravagant clothes.[39] The clear answer that the value of education should be prized over any material possessions was entirely in keeping with the central place the schools occupied in peoples' lives. It was all a very long way from the great revolutionary cry which would only emerge after the uprising, 'Liberation Now, Education Later!'.

People's passions might have been more clearly evident after 1976. But the strength of feeling and the seriousness with which people approached the question of education was remarkable. And what people claimed during this era was staggeringly presumptuous. Long before Biko began articulating with such electrifying clarity the principles of Black autonomy and self-reliance that underpin his most enduringly brilliant essays,[40] Soweto's mild-mannered middle-classes had come to adopt a position against the state which boldly proclaimed the classrooms to be their own. These were the last people who needed reminding of the Bantu Education system's

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[37] On the history of SASM see Nozipho Diseko, 'The Origins and Development of the South African Students' Movement (SASM): 1968-1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 40-62; and Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 'A Brief History of the African Students' Association', in Anne Heffernan and Noor Nieftagodien (eds.), *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 6-15

[38] For example Clive Glaser, ''We Must Infiltrate the *Tsotsis*': School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (1998), 301-323; Tshepo Moloi, 'Bodibeng High School: Black Consciousness Philosophy and Students Demonstration, 1940s-1976', *South African Historical Journal*, 63 (2011), 102-126; Noor Nieftagodien, *The Soweto Uprising*, (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2014), 40-45; Arianna Lissoni, 'Student Organisation in Lehurutshe and the Impact of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro', in Anne Heffernan and Noor Nieftagodien (eds.), *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 34-43; Anne Heffernan, 'Student/Teachers from Turfloop: The Propagation of Black Consciousness in South African Schools, 1972-76', *Africa*, 89 (2019), 189-209; Arianna Lissoni, 'Student Organisation in Lehurutshe and the Impact of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro', in Anne Heffernan and Noor Nieftagodien (eds.), *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 34-43.

[39] 'Students' plea on education', *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 December 1971. Another example is ASM's campaign against intermural choral competitions on the grounds that they distracted students from their studies. See Gail Gerhart, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising', paper delivered at Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 2 May 1994, 4.

[40] Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, Aelred Stubbs (ed.), (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004 [1978]).

immense failings. As we shall see, the poverty of the classrooms troubled them greatly, and considerable effort was spent in overcoming it—including the formation of a new political organisation almost completely overlooked by historians, the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People.[41] But for people who saw access to education as a basic entitlement of life in the modern world, the poverty of the classrooms was never sufficient for people to turn their back on the schools. That accessing this right meant filing through the doors of the Bantu Education system was not seen as the concession or the contradiction that it has later appeared to be. Between the years 1955 to 1976, the paradox of Bantu Education was resolved by rejecting one half of the paradox. The schools were not seen as the repressive institutions of the state because they were not seen as belonging to the state at all. Speaking in his position as a UBC councillor in 1974, Lennox Mlonzi,[42] best expressed the underlying sentiment that this chapter seeks to capture: 'the Black people [now] have full control of their education but at the same time the government sees it fit to interfere by appointing the majority of school board members.'[43] Mlonzi, a founding member of the PAC who became a UBC councillor, captures the strangeness of these times best. This was a time when the schools were accepted *and* Bantu Education rejected.

Looking back these imaginings and the world to which they belonged to seem alien to us now. But the rules and norms which helped govern society during this time are recoverable, and constitute what might be usefully thought of in E. P. Thompson's term as an alternative 'moral economy'.[44] When on the morning of 16 June 1976, police met a crowd of students protesting the government's insistent attempt to impose Afrikaans with gunfire, this moral world collapsed in an instant. The violence of that only made clear in tragically certain terms that the schools belonged to the state, but the shooting evidenced the bloody depths the state was prepared to travel to keep

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41 Baruch Hirson includes a brief description on ASSECA in his history of the Soweto uprising. See Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt that Shook Apartheid* (London: Zed Books, 2016 [1979]), 77.

42 Lennox Mlonzi (b.19 April 1928-d.12 October 2012) was born in the Transkei. An active member in the ANC Youth League, Mlonzi was a founding member of the Pan Africanist Congress. In 1977 he was deported to the Transkei, returning to Johannesburg in 1987.

43 As quoted in '200 call for BED inquiry', *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 February 1974.

44 E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136. On the moral economy's place in twentieth century progressive thought, see Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

that ownership. All those who had answered the paradox of Bantu Education by denying that any paradox existed now seemed hopelessly naïve. For a new generation born on 16 June, the schools were now seen as being indistinguishable from what was called 'the system', and for the system to be overhauled, a revolution was now demanded. In Albert O. Hirschman's famous terms, Exit replaced Voice as the central organising strategy around which the struggle for control of the classroom, indeed the country, was now waged.[45] But before we get to that more familiar state of affairs we must first turn back, reacquainting ourselves with just what Bantu Education meant to people in a place like Soweto. After all it is only once we have understood the terms on which Bantu Education was offered to people, that we can understand how it was rejected.

I

In January 1949 the newly elected National Party appointed Dr Werner Eiselen to chair a Commission on Native Education in the Union.[46] They were provided with a set of clear parameters. Eiselen and his team of seven commissioners were to consider the question of how best to create a system of 'education for Natives as an independent race in which their past and present, their inherent racial qualities, their distinctive characteristics and aptitude, and their needs under ever-changing social conditions was taken into consideration.'[47] Eiselen was a perfect appointee. An anthropologist trained in the *volkekunde* school committed to the immutable differences between groups, Eiselen had been the Chief Inspector of Native Education for the Transvaal in the 1940s, bringing a deep first-hand knowledge to the job.[48] Tabled in 1951 the

[45] Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[46] Werner Willi Max Eiselen (1899-1976) was born near Bloemfontein and educated at the University of South Africa, the University of Stellenbosch, and the University of Hamburg. In October 1949 Eiselen was appointed Secretary of Native Affairs. He died in July 1976, one month after the start of the Soweto uprising.

[47] Union of South Africa, *Report of the Commission on Native Education 1949-1951* (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1951), 1. The seven commissioners were Prof J. de Wet Keyter (University of the Orange Free State), Prof A. H, Murray (University of Cape Town), Dr P. A. W. Cook (National Bureau of Educational and Social Research), Prof G. B. A. Gerdener (University of Stellenbosch), Dr M. D. C. De Wet Nel (National Party member of parliament), Mr W. A. Hofmeyr (retired school inspector), and Mr J. Macleoed (retired school inspector). On the Eiselen Report and its principal author, see Cynthia Kros, *The Seeds of Separate Development: Origins of Bantu Education* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010).

[48] On anthropology's place within the apartheid project which pays specific attention to the role of Eiselen, see Robert Gordon, 'Apartheid's Anthropologists: The Genealogy of Afrikaner Anthropology', *American Ethnologist*, 15 (1988), 535-553. See also John Sharp, 'The Roots and Development of "Volkekunde" in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 8 (1981), 16-36.

Eiselen Report proffered a series of self-avowedly 'radical measures' for an education system in which children would be 'trained and conditioned in Bantu culture, endowed with a knowledge of a Bantu language and imbued with values, interests and behaviour patterns learned at the knee of a Bantu mother.'[49] Quickly embraced by the government, the report's lengthy 'Proposed Scheme for the Re-Organisation of Bantu Education' formed the basis of the Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953), promulgated by parliament on 1 January 1954.

Alongside the Population Registration Act (No. 30 of 1950), the Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950), the Bantu Authorities Act (No. 68 of 1951), the Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act (No. 67 of 1952), and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (No. 46 of 1959),[50] the Bantu Education Act represented the most far-reaching ambitions a core group of powerful figures within the National Party had to give meaning to a word *apartheid* whose shape was still being debated.[51] Far outstripping the vindictive legislative agenda of so-called petty apartheid in its ambitions for what a government could hope to achieve in power,[52] these acts saw the National Party embrace the special powers of modern bureaucracies, staging a series of massive interventions which have shaped the South African state to this day. Through the establishment of the Office for Race Classification, the byzantine labour bureaux, the issuance of a personal identity card to every person officially classified as African, the administration of the huge forced relocation programmes, the building of new townships, and the provision of mass

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49 Union of South Africa, *Report of the Native Education Commission*, 131-132.

50 The Population Registration Act (Np. 30 of 1950) required all people in South Africa to be classified into three racial groups, 'White', 'Bantu', and 'Coloured'. The Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950) divided urban areas into exclusively racially segregated zones based upon those classifications. The Bantu Authorities Act (No. 68 of 1951) provided for a new structure of 'native administration' within the traditional homelands. The Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination Act (No. 67 of 1952) brought cohesion to a previously fragmented system, requiring all designated Africans to carry a passbook which restricted the holder's movement on certain conditions. The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (No. 46 of 1959) provided the legislation to turn the traditional tribal lands into quasi-independent states, or Bantustans.

51 There is an old historiographical debate about how to best characterise the National Party's early agenda in government, to what exactly it was driven by ideology or pragmatism. In his history of apartheid, Saul Dubow helpfully reminds us that 'apartheid' was a nebulous electoral term in 1948, a word which meant different things to different people, which in part accounted for its power. See Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9-16. The differences in what the word could mean was meticulously explored by Deborah Posel in her seminal study, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). Both these works contrast with earlier scholarship, which was often quick to lend apartheid a coherence it did not have. See, for example, Dan O'Meara's *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital, and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

52 Petty apartheid was the segregation of basic amenities, such as water fountains and buses, as legislated for in the Separate Amenities Act (No. 49 of 1953).

schooling, bureaucracies became an inescapable and defining feature of life.[53] Under the National Party new bureaucracies set out to define who people were, where they belonged, where they could live, what jobs they could do, and who they could love. If petty apartheid was essentially conservative in its ambition to preserve white peoples' already vast privileges in society, these acts represented something different: the wildly reactionary plan to turn the clock back on South Africa's modern history.[54]

This mission saw the size and functions of the state grow rapidly.[55] Responsibility for African education had previously been devolved to the four provinces, Cape Province, Natal Province, Orange Free State Province and Transvaal Province. The Bantu Education Act removed these powers and placed them in the central government's Department of Native Affairs.[56] What little education infrastructure had been built by the provinces since 1910 was automatically transferred to the Department of Native Affairs, and the old departments were disbanded.[57] The Department of Native Affairs was also undergoing its own transformation under the National Party, led by Verwoerd as minister between 1950 and 1958. Once considered a backwater department staffed by the least ambitious bureaucrats on the state's payroll, Verwoerd set about

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[53] For a powerful account of what this transformation of the state looked like from those on the receiving end, see Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1996).

[54] Others in the National Party had far less grand expectations of what could be achieved. Eben Dönges, the Minister of the Interior between 1948 and 1961, predicted that apartheid would only last two generations before the demands for shared power would have to be granted. Nonetheless it was Verwoerd's ambition which won. See Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 38-51.

[55] The growth in the size of the state can be measured in the numbers of people employed in the civil service. Deborah Posel cites data from the Public Services Commission showing a 144 per cent increase in the number of public service employees between 1939 and 1958. See Posel, 'Whiteness and Power in the South African Civil Service: Paradoxes of the Apartheid State', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25 (1999), 104.

[56] There had been steps towards the centralised control of African education before but they had always been unsuccessful. In 1935, Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, Minister of Education, established the Interdepartmental Committee of Enquiry into Native Education (the Welsh Commission), which, in 1936, proposed 'the abolition of all Provincial control of Native Education' with control over education instead given to the Union Education Department. The proposal was blocked by the Natal Provincial Administration. In 1939 the proposal to centralise education was made again, but again it was blocked by the Natal Provincial Council. See Historical Memorandum for Executive Committee Concerning Proposals for Union Control of Native Education, TES/165/Vol.1/B.

[57] On the very limited history of provincial education prior to the 1953 Bantu Education Act, see R. Hunt Davis Jr., 'The Administration and Financing of African Education in South Africa, 1910-1953' in Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), 127-138; Michael Cross, 'The Foundations of a Segregated School System in the Transvaal, 1900-1924', *History of Education*, 16 (1987), 259-274; Sue Krige, 'Segregation, Science and Commissions of Enquiry: The Contestation over Native Education Policy in South Africa,1930-36', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23 (1997), 491-506; Sue Krige, ''Trustees and Agents of the State'? Missions and the Formation of Policy towards African Education, 1910-1920', *South African Historical Journal*, 40 (1999), 74-94.

revolutionising the department, turning it into the engine room that drove the National Party's agenda forward. Having arrogated the right to govern the lives of seventy per cent of South Africa's population for them,[58] the DNA was fairly described at the time as a 'state within a state'.[59] Following the passage of the Bantu Education Act, the Department established the post of Director of Bantu Education to oversee the Division of Bantu Education. In October 1958, the Division became the Department of Bantu Education.

With the powers of the central state behind it, the makings of a mass education system were in place. In January 1955 it was estimated there were 869,000 African children attending schools in the country, whether in provincial-run schools or community schools, or mostly in mission schools.[60] Two years later nearly all these children had been incorporated in the new Bantu Education system and the total number of students had risen to 970,000. It was the start of a precipitous rise. By 1967 there were 2,240,000 African children in apartheid's classrooms. By 1973, the Bantu Education system had 3,312,000 students.[61]

The speed of this transformation is staggering. In Germany, the transition from elite education to mass education system had a centuries old history, dating back to Prussia's compulsory attendance laws in 1763. In France, universal provision was legislated for in 1833, while in Britain incremental reforms in the nineteenth century were only properly consolidated by the 1944 Education Act.[62] Reforms incrementally built on existing reforms until only by the mid-twentieth century had anything resembling a mass education system been realised. The National

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[58] On South Africa's demographic history, see Charles Simkins, 'The Evolution of the South African Population in the Twentieth Century', in Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, *1885-1994*, Vol. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 627.

[59] On the history of the Department of Native Affairs see Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1997).

[60] 'Community schools' were schools run by Africans themselves, and in this poor land, were few and far between. On the immense struggles that faced people building community schools, see Robert Edgar, 'African Educational Protest in South Africa: The American School Movement in the Transkei in the 1920s' in Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), 184-191. The most famous community-run school was the Ohlange Institute in Natal, founded in 1901 by John L. Dube, and modelled on Booker. T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. On the history of Ohlange, see Heather Hughes, *First President: A Life of John Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011).

[61] See Ken Hartshorne, 'Bantu Education', *South African Medical Journal*, 48 (1974), 2517. Note that the author was the Deputy Director of Planning for the Department of Bantu Education.

[62] See Peter Mandler, 'Educating the Nation I: Schools', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (2014) 7. See also Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 [1990]).

Party tabled one piece of legislation in the mid-1950s which oversaw the creation of a mass state-run education system within a decade.

None of this would have been possible without the centralised control of education. But the real intent behind the Bantu Education Act was not to wrest control of education from the provinces, but from the mission societies. When the National Party came to power, missions had been active promoting education for more than a hundred years. By 1948, their efforts dotted much of the countryside, their presence in the cities much more limited.[63] Of the 869,000 children in schools in 1948, more than 90 per cent were in schools run by missions.[64] And this included some illustrious institutions. The names of the Inanda Seminary, Lovedale, Adams and Healdtown are still recalled by many South Africans today, the Etons and Harrows of their time.[65] Situated on manicured lawns these schools provided an elite liberal education, the envy of many. Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe,[66] Chris Hani,[67] Govan Mbeki[68] and Victoria Mxenge,[69] were among the few who passed through their doors, their education shining through in later life in clever speeches

63 On the history of missionary education see Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2012); Ingie Hovvland, *Mission Station Christianity: Norwegian Missionaries in Colonial Natal and Zululand, Southern Africa 1850-1890* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

64 Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London: C. Hurst, 2003), 507.

65 Alongside these schools there were English-speaking private schools for white children, many of which continue to run today. On their history see Peter Randall, *Little England on the Veld: The English Private School System in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982).

66 Robert Sobukwe (b. 5 December 1924-d.27 February 1978) was born in Graaf-Reinet in the Eastern Cape and educated at Healdtown and Fort Hare. In 1948 Sobukwe joined the ANC Youth League. In 1959 he left the ANC, elected the first president of the PAC. On 4 May 1960 he was sentenced to three years in prison. On 3 May 1963 legislation was passed which allowed the government to extend Sobukwe's detention indefinitely. Sobukwe was released from prison in 1969 and restricted to Galeshwe in Kimberley.

67 Chris Hani (b.28 June 1942-d.10 April 1993) was born in the Transkei and educated at Lovedale and the University of Fort Hare. Hani joined the ANC Youth League when he was fifteen, and Umkhonto we Sizwe after graduating from Fort Hare. He went into exile in 1963. In 1991 Hani took over the leadership of the South African Communist Party from Joe Slovo. He was assassinated on 10 April 1993 in Boksburg by a white far-right gunman, Janusz Waluś.

68 Govan Mbeki (b. 9 July 1910-d. 30 August 2001) was born in Nqamakwe district in the Transkei and educated at Fort Hare. He joined the ANC in 1935 and the Communist Party of South Africa. Mbeki was arrested in 1963 and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964. He was released in November 1987.

69 Victoria Mxenge née Nonyamezelo (b.1 January 1942-d.1 August 1985) was born in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape and educated at Forbes Grant Secondary School and Healdtown before training to be a nurse at Victoria hospital. She married Mlungisi Griffith Mxenge and with him trained as a lawyer in his legal practice. Her husband was assassinated in November 1981. On 1 August 1985 she was assassinated by four gunmen in Umlazi.

filled with Biblical allusions and Shakespearean references.[70] But the formative role these schools played in some of South Africa's most important political figures has also made it easy to forget the more typical realities of mission schooling. The much more typical reality of a mission school was something like a converted outhouse or a tin shack, students provided with only the most basic literacy and numeracy, often by someone barely educated themselves.[71] Institutions like these have hardly left a mark in the historical record. True, the Methodists might have boasted two of the most distinguished schools in South Africa, Healdtown and Clarkebury, in whose classrooms Nelson Mandela was educated.[72] But in 1948 the Methodists were responsible for running 1,339 schools, only 26 of which were secondary schools.[73] Elite mission education was the preserve of a vanishingly small minority. In 1945 it was estimated that only three per cent of African children in education were enrolled in post-primary classes.[74] That Mandela counted among them marked him out for rare distinction well before his later fame.

But no matter their limited reach in society, the National Party was convinced that these generally dismal schools represented a threat to the social order, responsible for inculcating liberal aspirations amongst an otherwise contented population, as well as promoting a movement of people across the country that threatened 'detribalisation'.[75] As the Eiselen Report put it, mission schools were responsible for:

> …creating a modern and extremely undesirable phenomenon, viz. that group of people who break away too rapidly from the views and habits of their own people and sometimes act against their own community. Such a stray minority is readily formed where two cultures are in close contact… he is an outcast among his own people and can find no anchorage with the people of the other culture.[76]

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[70] Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Reading Debating/Debating Reading: The Case of the Lovedale Literary Society, or Why Mandela Quotes Shakespeare', in Karin Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 258-277.

[71] Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), 3.

[72] For Nelson Mandela's memory of Healdtown, see, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London: Abacus, 1995), 43-44.

[73] Margaret Rundle, 'Accommodation or Confrontation? Some Responses to the Eiselen Commission Report and the Bantu Education Act with Special Reference to the Methodist Church of South Africa' (M.A. diss., University of Cape Town, 1991), 69-70.

[74] Muriel Horrell, *Bantu Education to 1968* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1968), 1.

[75] See, for example, 'No Native schools like Bishops or Kingswood: Verwoerd Tells Churches They Will Not be Allowed', *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 April 1956.

[76] Union of South Africa, *Report of the Native Education Commission*, 128.

For the apartheid project, dependent upon the clear delineation of group identities, such a class of person represented an existential threat.

With powers established in the Bantu Education Act, the National Party's solution was to effectively force the closure of the mission schools by withdrawing the meagre state subsidies which many had come to depend upon since teacher subsidies were first introduced in 1925,[77] as well as making all schools' continued existence dependent on the approval of the Minister for Native Affairs. The minister was given extraordinary powers to deny registration on any grounds. Further provision in the Act made it illegal for any school to be set up without explicit sanction. Anyone found guilty of working in an un-registered 'Bantu or native school' faced a fine or imprisonment.[78]

Faced with this hostile environment nearly every mission in South Africa declared their intention to cease operating before the government's 1954 end-of-year deadline.[79] Of the major churches, only the Roman Catholic church chose to try and maintain their system of 650 schools, launching a Catholic Mission Schools Appeal Fund that asked hard-pressed families to compensate for the loss of financial support, while making deep cuts to teacher salaries.[80] By the mid-1970s Roman Catholic schools were effectively the only non-state schools left operating in South Africa, accommodating 93 per cent of all privately educated pupils.[81] The rest either shut their operations

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[77] The precise arrangements of the cuts to the subsidy depended on the type of school, but the essentials were this: the Government was prepared to make a 75 per cent subsidy but only on the condition that the salaries did not exceed those hired directly by the Department of Bantu Education, that the schools follow the Bantu Education curriculum, and that the schools establish. The subsidy was set to decline year by year, until the beginning of 1958 when it was phased out completely. See Horrell, *A Decade of Bantu Education*, 22

[78] Bantu Education Act (No. 47 of 1953).

[79] 'Transfer of mission schools: First steps being taken', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 August 1954.

[80] 'Biggest education reshuffle in Union's history', *Natal Mercury*, 29 May 1955. Despite these sacrifices, some Catholic schools were still closed down, the Government forcing the closure of others which they saw as special threats to group cohesion. See Horrell, *A Decade of Bantu Education*, 26.

[81] Van Rensburg, *Trends in Bantu Education*, 8. On the history of Roman Catholic schooling during the apartheid period, see Colin B. Collins and Roslyn R. Gillespie, 'Catholic Education in South Africa: A History of Compromise and Coincidence', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 7, (1994), 21-47; Sello Mathabatha, 'Missionary Schools, Student Uprisings in Lebowa and the Sekhukhuneland Students' Revolts, 1983-1986', *African Studies*, 64 (2005), 263-284; and R. Bentley Anderson, ''To Save a Soul': Catholic Mission Schools, Apartheid, and the 1953 Bantu Education Act', *Journal of Religious History*, 44 (2020), 149-167. A landmark moment in the history of Roman Catholic education occurred in 1976 when the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference agreed to racially integrate their schools. See Pam Christie, *Open Schools: Racially Mixed Catholic Schools in South Africa, 1976-1986* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990).

down completely, or leased their schools, ceding full control to the government.[82] At the beginning of 1955, 5,000 mission schools were handed over to the Native Affairs Department.[83] A proud tradition of missionary education in South Africa was destroyed.

It was not enough though for the government to replace mission schools with their own. The National Party needed its own answer to the question of whether education took Africans away from their communities. After all, what was there to stop the state's classrooms providing the same deracinating functions?

For some prominent white politicians such as J. G. Strijdom, prime minister from 1954 to 1958,[84] the difficulty in answering this fundamental question was enough to urge caution when considering any proposals for the state to assume further responsibility for Africans' education.[85] How differently things might have been had Strijdom won that argument. But for the likes of Eiselen and Verwoerd, giving full expression to their characteristically twentieth-century faith in the ability of governments to mould society, there was an answer. With careful design, these men believed the state could intimately change the way that Africans understood the meaning of education. And they made no secret that this was their ambition. It is how we can now understand the full implications of Verwoerd's infamous speech in the senate chamber in June 1954:

> The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. Within his own community, however, all doors are open. For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze.[86]

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82 On how mission schools responded to the new Bantu Education system, see Neil Overy, ''These Difficult Days': Mission Church Reactions to Bantu Education in South Africa, 1949-1956' (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2002); Linda Chisholm, *Between Worlds: German Missionaries and the Transition from Mission Education to Bantu Education in South Africa* (Wits University Press, 2018); Ellen Vea Rosnes, 'A Time of Destiny for Norwegian Mission Schools in Zululand and Natal under the Policy of Bantu Education (1948-1955)', *History of Education*, 49 (2020), 104-125.

83 'Biggest education reshuffle in Union's history', *Natal Mercury*, 29 May 1955.

84 J. G. Strijdom (b.14 July 1893-d.24 August 1958) was born in Cape Colony and educated at Victoria College (later Stellenbosch University) and the University of Pretoria. Strijdom was first elected to parliament in 1929 and was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation in D. F. Malan's first cabinet. Following Malan's resignation in 1954, Strijdom was appointed prime minister. He died in office of heart failure.

85 Hermann Giliomee, 'Bantu Education: Destructive Intervention or Part Reform?', *New Contree*, 65 (2012), 76.

86 Hendrik Verwoerd, 'Speech Delivered to the Senate, June 7, 1954', in Brian Rose and Raymond Tunmer (eds.), *Documents in South African Education* (Johannesburg: A. D. Donker, 1975), 266.

Schools were to be transformed from an institution which took people away from their community, to an institution which bound people to their community. In a speech before the United Transkeian General Council in 1954, Eiselen declared:

> The school which is merely within the community must become the school of the community. This is the objective which the Bantu Education Act sets out to achieve.[87]

This was the ultimate ambition of the Department of Bantu Education. And it was the means by which the National Party sought that goal which made the Bantu Education system so different from any other mass education system in the world. The centralised control was one part of the history of Bantu Education, and the part most in keeping with the history of mass education globally as nation-states sought to equip public with the skills for a shared public life, turning peasants into citizens.[88] But what the National Party sought to do with that control was different, using schools to perform a kind of reverse nation-building, pulling people apart and forcing them to live in separate realms. In this Bantu Education was *sui generis*.[89]

Presented by Eiselen as a 'new deal' in education,[90] there were five fundamental features of this system. First, Bantu Education did not seek to provide education in the places where Africans lived, but where the state wanted them to live, the old 'native reserves' out of which the Bantustans were built following the Bantu Authorities Act (No. 68 of 1951). This meant that in

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87 As quoted in 'The Standard of English and Afrikaans in our Bantu Schools – Extract from the opening address by the Hon. Dr W. W. M. Eiselen at a meeting of the *Bantu Education Advisory Board*, held at Pretoria on 23rd March, 1971', *Bantu Education Journal*, 17 (1971), 6.

88 For a classic account of this process see Eugen Weber's, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1976). See also John Boli, Francisco O. Ramirez and John W. Meyer, 'Explaining the Origins and Expansion of Mass Education', *Comparative Education Review*, 29 (1985), 145-170; and Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

89 Someone quick to understand what made Bantu Education such a peculiarly ambitious tool in the apartheid project was Isaac Bangani Tabata. A founding member of the Non-European Unity Movement in the 1940s, a Trotskyite organisation with its roots among Cape Town's intelligentsia. Tabata published a pamphlet on the new state education system in 1959. That this remarkable pamphlet is still remembered by people today is thanks to its title, *Education for Barbarism*, invoked by people in their indictments of an education system without reprieve. But the contents of Tabata's pamphlet is remarkable not as a description of Bantu Education, but as a prophecy. In its slim pages Tabata sought to make clear to his readers that it was not the chronic poverty of the Bantu Education system which threatened black South Africans' place in society, but rather the system's ambition to remake people's very subjectivities. It was a project that Tabata thought was destined to fail. See Isaac Bangani Tabata, *Education for Barbarism: Bantu Education in South Africa* (Durban: Prometheus, 1959).

90 ''New deal' for Bantu schools', *Natal Witness*, 10 September 1954.

designated urban white areas like the townships surrounding Johannesburg there would be no secondary schooling. Teacher training centres would only to be built in rural areas.[91]

Second, up until Standard VI teaching was to be conducted in the students' officially designated 'native tongue'. This was to establish an intimate bond which the apartheid planners considered fundamental to preserving group difference. As the Eiselen report put it, 'the question of 'mother-tongue' education is vital to the whole system'.[92] Language was 'a vehicle for the preservation of pride in national tradition."[93] This was Herder's eighteenth-century German romanticism transplanted in twentieth-century South Africa; the immutable belief that language contained the spirit of the nation.[94] And it is once we appreciate the faith in the powers of language that we can understand one of the most startling features of Bantu Education: the lack of proper attention paid to the contents of what people were taught. During the interwar years Charles T. Loram, Chief Inspector of Native Education in Natal,[95] made a name for himself advocating a form of industrial education for black South Africans, an appropriation of Booker T. Washington's famously gradualist approach to racial uplift.[96] The National Party had no truck with even Loram's

[91] There has been a surge in interest in the history of the Bantustans in recent years. A few studies have focused specifically on the history of education in the Bantustans. See Timothy Gibbs, 'Chris Hani's 'Country Bumpkins': Regional Networks in the African National Congress Underground, 1974-1994', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (2011), 677-691; Linda Chisholm, 'Bantustan Education History: The 'Progressivism' of Bophutatswana's Primary Education Upgrade Programme (PEUP), 1979-1988', *South African Historical Journal*, 65 (2013), 403-420; Laura Phillips, 'Principals, Chiefs and School Committees: The Localisation of Rural School Administration in Lebowa, 1972-1990', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 (2015), 299-314; Linda Chisholm, 'Late Apartheid Education Reforms and Bantustan Entanglements', *African Historical Review*, 50 (2018), 27-45; Sarah Meny-Gibert, ''State "Infrastructural Power" and the Bantustans: The Case of School Education in the Transkei and Ciskei', *African Historical Review*, 50 (2018), 46-77.

[92] Union of South Africa, *Report of the Native Education Commission*, 145.

[93] *Ibid*., 131.

[94] On Herder's place in the development of Afrikaner nationalism see Saul Dubow, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'', *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), 209-237. Dubow makes clear that Afrikaner nationalism was drawn from an eclectic array with Herder one inspiration among many.

[95] Charles T. Loram (b.1879-d.1940) was born in Pietermaritzburg and educated at the University of the Cape of Good Hope, the University of Cambridge and Columbia University, where he received a doctorate in education from the Teachers College. He published *The Education of the South African Native* in 1918.

[96] On Loram's influence see R. Hunt Davis Jr., 'Charles T. Loram and the American Model for African Education in South Africa' in Peter Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984), 108-126; Julia Tischler, '"The Only Industry That Can Make Us Hold Our Own": Black Agrarianism in South Africa from a Transatlantic Perspective, ca. 1910-1930', *The American Historical Review*, 126 (2021), 1371-1745. For a history of Booker T. Washington's influence in another part of Africa, see Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

modest commitment to progress.[97] Language was what would bind Africans together for time immemorial.

Third, outside an amount initially pegged at R13 million per annum funded from the Bantu Education Account and drawn from general revenue,[98] financial responsibility for education was to fall on Africans themselves, forming a new social contract and a sense of ownership. In 1958 the Native Taxation and Development Act (No. 41 of 1925)[99] was amended, raising the general tax on African men from R2 to R3.50, four-fifths of the increased revenue marked for education.[100] In white urban areas, lower primary schools were funded by a levy on local residents, while higher primary and post-primary schools were to be funded on a Rand-for-Rand basis between the people and the Department, registration that could be denied at any time.[101] Private funding was prohibited. It was this funding structure which underpinned the huge disparities in spending between white and black education during the first decades of apartheid. In 1970, the government spent R282 on each white student and R16.97[102]

Fourth, schools would not just be paid for by Africans, but governed by the communities themselves through the establishment of school committees and school boards. In white urban areas school committees were made up of nine positions; a chairman, vice-charman, and two representatives of 'religious or other interests', all nominated by the Secretary of the Department of Bantu Education, as well as four positions elected by the parents.[103] In rural areas the chief or head-man was given powers of appointment, but here the idea the same. The committees were designed, as Verwoerd said, to, 'make him ["the Bantu"] feel that he is co-responsible for his

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97 Daniel Magaziner, 'Two Stories about Art, Education and Beauty in Twentieth Century South Africa', *The American Historical Review*, 118 (2013), 1418.

98 See Nathan Hurwitz, *The Economics of Bantu Education in South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1964), 57

99 See Ken Hartshorne, *The Making of Education Policy in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22.

100 Hurwitz, *The Economics of Bantu Education*, 57.

101 Ken Hartshorne, *Crisis and Challenge: Black Education, 1910-1990* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1992), 123.

102 Muriel Horrell, *Laws Affecting Race Relations in South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1978), 312.

103 Three parents were nominated by the chief or tribal authority after consultation with the parents and the secretary for Bantu Education, two members were nominated by the tribal authority, two members nominated by the Secretary to represent religious or other interests, and a chairman and vice-chairman were nominated by the chief or tribal authority after the consultation with the Secretary. See Section 2 (1) of the Bantu Education Act (No. 46 of 1953).

education but that he is also assisted by the guardian in so far as he is incapable of assuming co-responsibility for it'.[104] The great liberal writer Alan Paton[105] had another way of describing this: the 'monstrous theory that if the African people are going to value education or social services they are going to have to pay for them themselves'.[106]

And fifth, those few children given the opportunity to advance beyond Standard VI were required to be taught equally in their examination subjects in English and Afrikaans. This as the Eiselen Report put it, so 'the Bantu child will be able to find his way in European communities; to follow oral or written instructions; and to carry on a simple conversation with Europeans about his work'.[107] English and Afrikaans was not a means of integrating a small elite into a white world. Having been taught for eight years in their 'mother-tongue', learning Afrikaans and English would be a mark of their foreignness, preparation for their servitude.

At least that was the plan. By the start of 1976 not one of these policies was working in the way they had been envisioned. Rather than balkanizing South Africa, Bantu Education was helping to pull people together. To understand how we now turn our attentions back to Soweto.

II

In the big history of South Africa the end of the missionary tradition and the start of Bantu Education is usually told elegiacally. In his 1977 memoir, *A South African Pilgrimage*, the retired liberal senator and ex-principal of Adams College, J. Edgar Brookes,[108] described how mission education was '[b]utchered to make an ideologist's holiday.'[109] Speaking in 1980, Percy Qoboza,

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[104] As quoted in Jonathan Hyslop, 'Aspects of the Failure of Bantu Education as a Hegemonic Strategy: School Boards, School Committees and Educational Politics 1955-1976', in Philip Bonner, Isabel Hofmeyr, Deborah James, and Tom Lodge (eds.), *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1989), 204.

[105] Alan Paton (b.11 January 1903-d.12 April 1988) was born in Pietermaritzburg, Natal and educated at Maritzburg College and the University of Natal. A founding member of the Liberal Association that later became the Liberal Party of South Africa, he published his most famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, in 1948.

[106] 'A monstrous theory on African schooling – Paton', *The Star*, 8 September 1971.

[107] Union of South Africa, *Report of the Native Education Commission*, 146.

[108] J. Edgar Brookes (b.4 February 1897-d. 22 April1979) was born in Staffordshire before moving to Natal at a young age. Brookes was educated at Maritzburg College, the University of South Africa and the London School of Economics. He was a leading advocate of segregationism before breaking with the segregationists in the late 1920s. Elected as senator in 1937, Brookes was principal of Adams College between 1933 and 1945.

[109] J. Edgar Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1977), 56. In the past Brookes had actually advocated that the state take control of education. In his 1930 book, Brookes argued for government

the editor of *The World* before he was forced to flee after the Soweto uprising,[110] told an audience in America that black South Africans wanted a return to mission schooling, which was 'segregated but considerably less unequal than the present one.'[111]

That there were many who felt nostalgia for the old system is clear, even if that nostalgia tended to forget the resentments many students felt in elite mission schools during the 1940s.[112] But in the new townships there was little room for nostalgia for the simple reason that there was so little to be nostalgic for. As a 1940 government memorandum put it, 'the problem of the education of the Native child in urban areas is scarcely being touched'.[113] In 1937 the Johannesburg Non-European Housing and Native Administration Department estimated there were just 14,200 Africans in schools in the city, although what might be counted as a school proved highly elastic.[114] In September 1935, Eiselen's predecessor as the Transvaal Director of Education, G. A. C. Kuschke, made an education tour of the city. He encountered a world of truly Dickensian poverty. At one school, Kuschke counted 348 children kept in one room. At another, 80 children shared a space measured nine-by-sixteen feet.[115]

After the demands of the Second World War sucked huge numbers of people into the city, the situation had only become more acute. On 7 May 1948, weeks before South Africa's national election on 26 May, L. I. Venables, chairman of the City Council's Non-European Affairs Department, B. Porter, Johannesburg's town clerk, and I. Q. Holmes, city treasurer, submitted a report to the council's Non-European Affairs Committee. 'With the recent influx of Natives into Johannesburg and the Reef generally, the need for schools has grown enormously, and provision

takeover because of the inefficiencies of churches, the growth of autonomist Ethiopianist churches, and what he ultimately saw as one of the state's basic responsibilities in the twentieth century. See J. Edgar Brookes, *Native Education in South Africa* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, Ltd., 1930), 111-114.

[110] Percy Qoboza (b.17 January 1938-d.17 January 1988) was born in Sophiatown before studying theology in Lesotho. In 1963 he started work at *The World* where he eventually became the editor in 1974. In 1975 Qoboza won a prestigious Nieman fellowship at Harvard University. Detained during the crackdown after the Soweto uprising, Qoboza left for the United States, returning in 1985 as the editor of *City Press*.

[111] As quoted in 'Qoboza slates SA education', *Post*, 8 October 1980.

[112] See, for example, Liz Stanley, 'Protest and the Lovedale Riot of 1946: 'Largely a Rebellion Against Authority'?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44 (2018), 1039-1055.

[113] Memorandum on the Finance of Native Education, 1939/1940, TES/165/Vol.1. What little education existed in the townships before the Second World War has been very poorly recorded. For a significant exception, see J. S. Mohlamme, *The Early Development of Education in Soweto as Seen in the Story of Pimville School* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1990).

[114] Ray E. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand* (Lovedale, South Africa: The Lovedale Press, 1938), 142.

[115] *Ibid*., 156.

for schools is lamentably lacking.' They recommended that the City Council be 'authorised to make representations to the Administrator for the treatment of the Rand as an emergency area in the matter of the building of schools.'[116] Talk of an emergency was far from alarmist, even if the alarm bells being set off was at the prospect of bands of children roaming the streets, swelling the ranks of the criminal gangs.[117] As the National Party stood on cusp of power, the townships to the southwest of Johannesburg had one secondary school, with work having only recently been started by the Transvaal Education Department on another two.[118]

That existing school was Orlando High, its origins owed to the New Church of Southern Africa, a new church established in 1911 after its founder, David William Mooki,[119] stumbled upon the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg, in a bookshop in Krugersdorp. Ignorant of the global New Church movement Swedenborg's writing had inspired,[120] Mooki's application to have his church officially registered by the Secretary for Native Affairs brought his activities to the attention of the New Church in Britain. Not long after, Mooki's new church began to slip under the control of the British New Church movement's Foreign and Colonial Missions Committee.[121] In the 1920s, a series of white superintendents travelled out to South Africa from Britain, including Rev P. H. Johnson, who arrived in Johannesburg in 1929 and set about establishing a church and theological college, the Mooki Memorial College.[122] Johnson applied for permission to build on stand No. 6504 Orlando, officially making the New Church the

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116 As quoted in 'Lack of Native Schools on Rand "lamentable"', *The Star*, 7 May 1948.

117 On the history of the gangs see Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000) and Gary Kynoch, *We Are Fighting the World: A History of the Marashea Gangs of South Africa* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2005). The counterpoint to the gangs was communal policing. See Jeremy Seekings, 'Social Ordering and Control in the African Townships of South Africa: An Historical Overview of Extra-State Initiatives from the 1940s to the 1990s', in Wilfried Schärf and Daniel Nina (eds.), *The Other Law: Non-State Ordering in South Africa* (Cape Town: JUTA Law, 2001), 71-97; and Clive Glaser, 'Whistles and Sjamboks: Crime and Policing in Soweto, 1960-1976', *South African Historical Journal*, 52 (2005), 119-139

118 'School for Moroka children', *The Star*, 19 February 1948; 'Donation towards Moroka school', *The Star*, 20 February 1948; 'Lack of Native Schools on Rand "lamentable"', *The Star*, 7 May 1948.

119 David William Mooki (b.1876-d.2 April 1927) was born in the Transvaal and grew up in the old location adjoining Krugersdorp. A member of the independent African Catholic Church founded in 1908, Mooki stumbled upon Swedenborg's *The True Christian Religion* in 1909, leading him to found his own church.

120 Among the most notable Swedenborgians in the nineteenth century was William and Henry James' father, Henry James, Snr., who turned after suffering a nervous breakdown in 1844.

121 James Buss, *The Romantic Story of the South African Mission* (London: Kensal Manor House Printing Works, 1924).

122 See Conference Council and Overseas Missions Committee, *An Appeal for Funds on Behalf of the Mooki Memorial Training College of South Africa* (Forest Gate: J. W. Sparks, 1929).

first to open its doors in Orlando. Primary lessons on the site began in 1934 and in January 1938 secondary classes started, an initial enrolment of seventeen students. In 1939, the students at Mooki Memorial College moved to the Orlando Communal Hall. It is at this point we can say the official history of Orlando High as an independent institution started.[123]

The foundation of Orlando High was a significant moment in the history of Soweto. Up until then, parents with ambitions for their children's post-primary education had been forced to consider mission-run boarding schools, such as Lemana, a Swiss Mission Institution in Northern Transvaal, 300 miles from Orlando. These schools were not only physically distant, but well beyond most people's financial reach. Orlando High brought these opportunities within people's reach for the first time. The school's modest physical presence—four brick classrooms and a principal's office—quickly assumed a totemic place in Orlando. Known affectionately as 'the Rock' after the scree the school was built on, Orlando High carried the educational hopes of the township's rapidly expanding population.[124] In 1950, Form I classes averaged 110 pupils as the school sought to provide as much access as possible.[125] And yet even with these numbers, discipline and a coherent sense of purpose was able to be maintained, even as the classes expanded into the Bantu Methodist Church and Orlando Communal Hall, a kilometre walk from the school's main site.[126] It was a major logistical exercise to oversee, but under the direction of the widely respected Godfrey Nakene,[127] the school built a reputation for academic excellence. Zephenia Mothopeng, a founding member of the African National Congress Youth League and the Pan-Africanist Congress joined the school in 1941.[128] Mothopeng shared his passion for choral singing

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123 The history of Orlando High is drawn from a wonderful master's dissertation written by Michael Morapeli, a student at the school between 1950 and 1952. See Michael Marake Morapeli, 'The Rock: The History of Orlando High School, 1939' (M.A. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1984).

124 There were only two other secondary schools operating in the Johannesburg region at the time, Western High School and Alexandra Secondary School.

125 Morapeli, 'The Rock', 25.

126 *Ibid*., 48.

127 Godfrey Nakene (b.24 June 1908-d.January 1983) was born in Ga-Ramokgopa and educated at Ramoroko school and Stofberg Gedenkskrool in the Orange Free State. Nakene trained to be a teacher at Mariannhill. He was the first African to receive a BA from the University of Witwatersrand. Nakene was headmaster of Orlando High for fifteen years before he became a Department of Bantu Education sub-inspector. After his death the University of the North (Turfloop) awarded him an honorary doctorate in education.

128 Zephania Lekoane Mothopeng (b.10 September 1913-d.23 October 1990) was born in Vrede in the Free State and educated at St Peter's in Rosettenville, Johannesburg before obtaining his teacher's diploma at Adams College. A teacher at Orlando High School, Mothopeng was also president of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association before leaving teaching following the Bantu Education Act. In 1960, Mothopeng was sentenced to two years in prison following the Sharpeville massacre. In August 1976, Mothopeng was arrested and put on

with students, while Ezekiel Mphahlele recalled staging Shakespeare productions and Dickens adaptations,[129] part of the Anglophilia that then reigned in the schools.[130] Right from the start we can see clearly the passion for education which would express itself so forcefully during the first 20 years of Bantu Education; the clamour, pride and endeavour to beat the odds. Or, as the school's motto had it, *Nihil Sine Labore Mortalibus Datur*. Nothing is given to mortals without labour.[131]

When the Eiselen commission started its work, the question of what to do with people's passion for education under the National Party divided people. Eiselen's plans both threatened to destroy what had been carefully built, as well as opening access to education to many more people. On one side of the debate stood Orlando's principal, Godfrey Nakene, whose commitment to the importance of education above all else was such that he said he was prepared to fly the South African flag over his school. On the other side stood three of Nakene's younger colleagues, Mothopeng, Mphahlele and Isaac Matlhare. In 1949 these three were elected to the Transvaal African Teachers' Association (TATA),[132] Mphahlele as general secretary, Mothopeng as president, and Matlhare as editor. From these positions they began writing a new pamphlet, *The Voice of Africa*, expounding their strident opposition to Eiselen's proposed new system. In July 1952, they were fired by the Transvaal Education Department. A Parents' Protest Committee was formed in August 1952, calling on the students to boycott Orlando High until the three teachers were reinstated. Of the 750 students at the school, 200 decided to follow the call, going to the Donaldson Community Centre, quickly dubbed 'The People's High School'. But the immense difficulties maintaining the breakaway initiative without a source of reliable income or a set of permanent premises soon became clear. Within a few months most returned to Orlando High

trial for terrorism, charged by the government as a mastermind behind the Soweto uprising. For a recently published biography, see Ali Khangela Hlongwane, *The Lion of Azania: A Biography of Zephania Mothopeng (1913-1990)* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 2021).

129 See Es'kia Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2013 [1959]), 175.

130 See also Kasonde T. Mukonde, ''If you belong to my generation and you never read James Hadley Chase, then you are not educated': Everyday Reading of High School Students in Soweto, 1968–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 49 (2023), 205-224.

132 The Transvaal African Teachers' Association was formed in 1919 following the merger of the Southern Transvaal Native Teachers' Association and the Northern Transvaal Native Teachers' Association. It changed its name to TATA in 1926.

where Nakene's tightly run ship braced itself for the challenges of providing a high-quality education under apartheid.[133]

What happened at Orlando High in 1952 was effectively a precursor to what happened nationally three years later, when the ANC's call for a national school boycott enjoyed some initial success in places before quickly collapsing. Indeed, Orlando High's history likely explains why Soweto had an almost 100 per cent school attendance record during the ANC's school boycott in 1955, even while around half of students in the Western Areas initially refused to attend the new government schools.[134] But whether people set out to run their own schools in 1952 or in 1955 the difficulties in running alternative education structures soon struck home—the pain of what was being lost leading people back to school. In July 1955, as the ANC's boycott started to falter, representatives from schools across the Johannesburg region met in Germiston, east of Soweto, where it was 'felt very strongly against the ill-considered action of the African National Congress in that it failed to assess the implications of its action towards the African child.'[135] As an early historian writing about these events put it in 1967: 'For a very large number of Africans, what the Government offered was not a worse substitute for the education already available but an education of some kind instead of no education at all.'[136]

The decision not to turn their backs on what had been created before the start of Bantu Education was fateful, guaranteeing the continued existence of Orlando High, as well as the five other secondary schools that had managed to establish themselves before the Department of Bantu Education forbid any further expansions.[137] And as these schools' doors stayed open, the number of students swelled. In 1969, Orlando High had 1,300 students.[138] Indeed, the opening of dozens of new primary schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s was never enough to match Sowetans' demand for education. Faced with a demand that always vastly exceeded places, the Department of Bantu Education approved an emergency measure in the 1950s called 'double

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133 Morapeli, 'The Rock', 62.

134 'Part boycott of state native schools', *The Star*, 12 April 1955; 'Many native pupils may be barred from school', *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 April 1955.

135 'Boycott of native schools: A.N.C. criticised', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 July 1955.

136 Feit, *African Opposition in South Africa*, 145.

137 Pimville and Musi High School were established in 1948. Mehloding Secondary School was built in 1959, later renamed Morris Isaacson. In 1963 the Johannesburg Bantu High School was relocated to Soweto, where it was renamed the Madibane High School.

138 'Compulsory education plea by Soweto headmaster', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 November 1969.

sessions'. From 7.30 a.m. to 1 p.m., one set of students and teachers with their own designated principal occupied the building, before vacating the premises for another.[139] The practice quickly became routine, and was still being followed well into the 1980s.

Conditions inside the schools were poor from the start. At Emisebeni Lower Primary School 200 students were forced to sit on the concrete floor during their lessons because no desks had been provided.[140] Desks and chairs were meant to be provided. But there were other basic parts of a functioning education system that the government simply refused to meet. Families were required to buy their children's textbooks, which meant travelling into downtown Johannesburg, as the books were not allowed to be sold within Soweto.[141] This was not only an indignity as white students were provided with textbooks for free, but a burdensome expense.[142] In 1969 the cost of providing a matriculation student with textbooks was estimated at R35.[143] This at a time when a typical Soweto household had a combined earning power of around R75 a month,[144] and when a family of five might expect to spend R32 a month on food.[145] And on top of that came the costs of school uniforms, a lucrative opportunity for enterprising businessmen as each school required its own uniforms, seeking to stand out amongst the crowds.[146]

Poverty was inescapable. Teachers were not motivated to enter the profession for their wages. But the salaries were low enough to soon create problems.[147] In the 1960s, industries in Johannesburg began poaching Soweto's science teachers, offering twice the salaries in the Bantu Education system. In Johannesburg's goldmines it was estimated that half of the clerks were qualified ex-teachers.[148] And as good teachers were tempted elsewhere, the apartheid state's strict

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139 Hartshorne, *Crisis and Challenge*, 38.

140 '200 attend lessons on floor – no desks', *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 January 1970.

141 'Queues to buy schoolbooks', *The Star*, 12 February 1969.

142 'Book chaos will go on', *The Star*, 10 February 1974.

143 'Queues to buy schoolbooks', *The Star*, 12 February 1969.

144 'Soweto feud on school levies', *The Star*, 29 January 1969.

145 'Rising cost of learning', *The Star*, 9 September 1969.

146 'Standard uniforms in Soweto schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 January 1972.

147 In 1968 the monthly salary for a fully qualified university educated male teacher was R75 and R60 for a woman. See South African Institute of Race Relations, *The Report of the 1969 Conference on Bantu Education, convened by the South African Institute of Race Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, 16 to 19 January, 1969* (Johannesburg: S.A. Institute of Race Relations, 1969), 15.

148 Kambule, stated that in 1968 that over the previous five years he lost ten of his teachers to better employment. See 'African teachers quit for industry', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 January 1968. See also 'School crisis worsens: Classes of up to 50 pupils are common', *The World*, 7 July 1965.

influx controls and the prohibition of teacher training colleges greatly hindered teachers. By 1972 the chairman of Soweto's Zulu School Board, Mr J. Khumalo, estimated that his school board was short of 110 teachers.[149] This was what the great gulf in the government's per capita spending on white and black education looked like in practice.

These were all reasons people might have turned their backs on the schools. And yet, having refused to relinquish their claim on these schools in 1955, this was a time when the most common call was to make education compulsory. In 1971, the Secretary for the Bantu Education Department addressed a crowd of 500 students at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Thinking that he might be able to predict the answer to his own question, Dr van Zyl asked, 'Do you realise that if compulsory education is introduced there will be legislation to enforce it?'. The reply was a 'thunderous "yes"'.[150] The call for compulsory education was heard time and again. Following the 1957 merger of TATA with the Transvaal African Teachers' Union (TATU), a breakaway union that had been formed following Mothopeng, Mphahlele and Matlhare's takeover of TATA, the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association (TUATU) consistently advocated for compulsory education for students aged between six and sixteen.[151] Godfrey Nakene's successor at Orlando High, Thamsanqa Kambule (principal between 1959-1977), used his public position to campaign on the issue.[152] In an address before the University of Witwatersrand's Council of Education in 1969, Kambule told his audience how 'Compulsory education should be the order of the day.'[153] The call for compulsory education was heard time and again, an expression of the deep anxiety, felt most acutely each January, that no one should be left out. In 1973 the UBC estimated that there were around 110,000 children in Soweto's classrooms, but 42,000 who

149 'Govt. considers Soweto plea for college', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1972. See also 'Teachers: Some not qualified', *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 August 1969.

150 'Black parents 'could suffer' over truancy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 July 1971.

151 'Teachers call for compulsory education', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 March 1973. For a short survey of teacher unions in South Africa during this time, see Jonathan Hyslop, 'Teachers and Trade Unions', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11 (1986), 90-97.

152 Thamsanqa Kambule (b.15 January 1921-d.7 August 2009) was born in Aliwal North and educated at St Peter's. Kambule received his teachers diploma from Adams College in 1949 and his bachelor's degree at the University of South Africa in 1954. Appointed principal of Orlando High in 1959, Kambule resigned his post in 1977 after the Soweto uprising. He remained a prominent figure in Soweto education throughout the 1980s. In 2002 Kambule was presented with the Order of the Baobab by President Thabo Mbeki.

153 'Compulsory education plea by Soweto headmaster', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 November 1969.

were not, children left prey to recruitment in Soweto's infamously violent gangs, menacing the lucky children in their uniforms on their walks to school.[154]

Much of the Department of Bantu Education's time and resources was spent trying to hold back this tide. In the 1960s the Department introduced strict formulas to try and limit the expansion of schools in Soweto. Eight-teacher higher primary schools were capped at 400 students, while schools with 14 teachers were allotted 700 students. Principals found breaching the caps were threatened with dismissal. By design these were already grossly imbalanced teacher-student ratios, up to 55 students per class. But principals like Kambule regularly breached the caps in order to accommodate as many students as possible, a practice the Department found impossible to stop. In 1968, a Soweto school board reported that student enrolment at 8-teacher schools in its area averaged 600 students, while 14-teacher schools had 1,000 students.[155] Class sizes in Soweto regularly breached 80 students.[156] The overcrowding was greatest in the more recent extensions to Soweto, where the government had had more success limiting the number of schools.[157] Built in 1957 after a R6 million loan to the Johannesburg City Council from Sir Ernest Oppenheimer,[158] Naledi has as many as 1,400 students in it higher primary schools, twice their official capacity.[159]

The Department's failure to keep these numbers down threatened government policy that education opportunities should be directed towards the homelands. And the overcrowding threatened government policy that education should be segregated by ethnicity and mother-tongue too. Soweto was nominally divided into different language groups. IsiZulu and isiXhosa speakers were supposed to live in the so-called Nguni reserves, Dlamini, Dube, Senaoane, Zola, Zondi, Jabulani, Emdeni and White City. XiTsonga and tshiVendea speakers were designated Chiawelo, while seSotho and seTswana speakers were meant to live in the 'Sotho reserves', Naledi, Mapetla,

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154 '42 000 not in school, UBC told', *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 June 1973.

155 'Teachers work double shifts', *The Star*, 17 January 1968.

156 'No schools, no classes, no hope…', *The Star*, 27 January 1970.

157 The older townships tended to have more schools. In 1968 Orlando had thirteen of Soweto's total of twenty-eight schools.

158 Sir Ernest Oppenheimer (b.22 May 1880-d.25 November 1957) was born in Hesse, Germany. He moved to London as a young man and worked for a diamond brokerage company before being posted to Kimberley. In 1917 Oppenheimer founded the Anglo American Corporation with backing from J. P. Morgan, quickly becoming one of South Africa's wealthiest men.

159 'Teachers work double shifts', *The Star*, 17 January 1968.

Tladi, Moletsane.[160] The Department of Bantu Education made some effort mapping education provision onto what was in reality an already blurred set of dividing lines. Meadowlands, for example, was officially Tswana-designated. Of its seven higher primary schools in 1968, five were Tswana designated.[161] This gave Tswana families in the area a small head-start in the January scramble for school places. But across Soweto students and principals regularly showed themselves willing to put aside narrow ethnic politics for the sake of ensuring Sowetans' collective access to education. As a former chairman of a school committee in Orlando West expressed people's tolerance, 'because of the Tswana-speaking teachers shortage our children have over the years been taught in the South Sotho medium, a practice we did not mind.'[162] The government did mind of course, but was powerless to stop the cosmopolitanism bubbling up in the schools. In October 1970, 200 students and 9 teachers classified as North Sotho were told to remove themselves from Qhobosheane Community School in Diepkloof, now officially a Tswana and South Sotho school. The students refused to move.[163]

The task of overcoming the Department of Bantu Education did not end inside the schools, where a tireless effort was underway to work hard and beat the odds. In 1964, Orlando West Secondary boasted a 90.4 per cent pass rate in the Junior Certificate examinations, an astonishing achievement given the circumstances.[164] And even as the costs of textbooks and uniforms burdened families, parents set out to raise more money, to pay for what the government refused to. It is notable that during this period there were never protests against the Rand-for-Rand funding formula. Indeed, the struggle was amongst people who wanted to pay more for their education, not less. In 1967 Tswelelang Higher Primary in Meadowlands did something audacious, introducing a private R2 tax on local residents, as well as asking students to collect bottle caps, providing the school with a R30-a-week revenue as it sought to raise R15,000 in order to build ten extra classrooms. Eiselen's plans to make Africans to pay for their own education had not foreseen

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160 Officially, isiZulu and isiXhosa speakers were meant to live in the 'Nguni reserves', in Dlamini, Dube, Seaoane, Zola, Zondi, Jabulani, Emdeni and White City. XiTsonga and tshiVendea speakers were meant to live in Chiawelo, while seSotho and seTswana speakers were meant to live in the 'Sotho reserves', in Naledi, Mapetla, Tladi, Moletsane and Phiri. See Necham Brodie, *The Joburg Book: A Guide to the City's History, People & Places* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan South Africa, 2014), 271.

161 'No schools for many Soweto children', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 January 1968.

162 'Tribal schools threaten to split Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1973.

163 'School pupils are victims of tribalism', *The Star*, 27 October 1970.

164 *TUATU: Official Organ of the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association*, May 1965, 19. HPW/AD2533.

a scenario in which an established school would seek to raise more money. The Department refused to match Tswelelang's fundraising.[165] But through the cracks money was able to get to Soweto's schools. In the 1960s Kambule directed the Rand Bursary Fund, asking for donations in *The Star* and *Rand Daily Mail.* The Fund supported around 900 students with R20 bursaries.[166] Other donations came from more surprising sources. In 1965, Sir Robert Birley, ex-headmaster of Eton, visited Orlando High.[167] Surprised the school had no library, Birley set about raising the money to have one built. The library opened in 1968, a proud addition to 'the Rock'.[168]

But people's idealism, determination and the trickle of donations could only take people so far, a fact made dramatically clear when the results of the 1967 matriculation examinations were released in early 1968. Of the 275 students who sat the examinations in Soweto, only 16 passed. Just one, Solomon Makgamathe, achieved a distinction.[169] The results were met with panic in this education-minded community. Teachers from Orlando High, Orlando West and Morris Isaacson met immediately and pledged to provide free extra lessons at Morris Isaacson for those who wanted to resit.[170] On the evening of 1 February a group of community leaders came together to discuss the reasons for the poor results. A litany of well-known complaints were aired. C. L. Mageza blamed the teachers' low salaries. Dr D. P. Marolen, a local businessman who had once been employed in the Department of Bantu Education,[171] blamed the ethnic segregation policy. But the meeting was most remarkable for what it proposed to do next. Llewyn Mehlomakulu, a local bank director and ex-chairman on one of Soweto's school boards, called for the creation of a 'national education fund controlled by Africans to provide finance for schools'.[172] The extraordinary suggestion, that Africans should take over financial responsibility for their own

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165 'Strange tale of a Soweto school', *The Star*, 14 February 1969.

166 'Obstacles overcome by Africans in matric', *The Star*, 29 July 1971.

167 Sir Robert Birley (b.14 July 1903-d.22 July 1982) educated at Rugby and Balliol College, Oxford. Birley taught at Eton before being appointed headmaster of Charterhouse in 1935, and then returning to Eton as headmaster in 1949. Birley was known for his liberal politics, nicknamed 'Red Robert', and in the 1960s became involved in anti-apartheid politics.

168 Morapeli, 'The Rock', 106.

169 'Only 16 of 225 pass matric in Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 January 1968. To place these result in some context, the pass rate across the whole Bantu Education system that year was 23.8 per cent. See Hartshorne, *Crisis and Challenge*, 72.

170 'Soweto matric failures to go back to school', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 February 1968.

171 Marolen's employment is mentioned in Iris Berger, 'An African American 'Mother of the Nation': Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940-1963', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (2001), 562.

172 'Soweto meeting urges better African teaching', *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February 1968.

schools, was the genesis of a new organisation, the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People (ASSECA), officially founded weeks later. Mehlomakulu became first secretary. P. Q. Vundla,[173] an old ANC activist and a member of the Moral Re-Armament movement, was appointed the first chairman. Up until ASSECA was banned on 19 October 1977, ASSECA was the dominant voice in Soweto's education politics.

The new organisation's most immediate goal was to help the students who had failed their exams in 1967, and by mid-February 1968, Vundla was able to announce that it was providing fifty students with extra-lessons ahead of the resits in early March.[174] When the results of the resist were announced in May, Vundla shared in the success of the students. 'We have proved that we are not a beggar race and are capable of doing things ourselves.'[175] But ASSECA had its sights set on a far bigger target and work on this front started quickly. On 10 February 1968, the organisation announced that it had received its first donation, R100, from a wealthy local textile merchant, Richard Maponya, whose small business empire had been helped in overcoming apartheid's commercial restrictions in court by Nelson Mandela.[176] In March, the nascent organisation announced that it had begun a fundraising drive to meet 'one of its most ambitious schemes – building enough schools for African children throughout the country.'[177] In early April ASSECA hosted a fundraising barbeque, attended by what was described in the press as 300 'prominent Africans from the Reef and Pretoria'. The evening was described by the chairman of ASSECA's

[173] Philip Qipu Vundla (b.1901-d.1969) was born in Healdtown. He did not receive a secondary education. Vundla moved first to East London before moving to Johannesburg where he found early work as a clerk at one of the mines. Vundla soon became involved in trade union politics and the ANC. For more on Vundla's life, Kathleen Vundla, *PQ: The Story of Philip Vundla of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Moral Re-Armament, 1973); Garth Mason, 'The Moral Rearmament Activist: P. Q. Vundla's Community Bridge-building during the Boycotts on the Witwatersrand in the mid-1950s', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 28, 2 (2015). See also David Goodhew, 'Half a Loaf or No Bread: A Political Life of P. Q. Vundla', paper presented to the University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1992.

[174] 'Association's aim is to aid matric students', *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 February 1968; 'Teachers will coach mail course students', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 March 1968.

[175] 'Students thank the 'rewrite' volunteers', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 May 1968.

[176] Richard Maponya (b.24 December 1920-d.6 January 2020) was born in Lenyene, around 300 miles north of Soweto. He moved to Alexandra during the Second World War and worked as a teacher before starting his business career in textiles. During the 1960s his attempts to grow his business interests were thwarted by apartheid regulations that limited black businesses in Soweto to trading in daily necessities. It was during this time that Nelson Mandela represented Maponya in court. In 2007 Maponya realised his lifelong dream when he opened the Maponya Mall in Soweto. Nelson Mandela cut the ribbon.

[177] 'Crash fund programme for schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 March 1968.

fund-raising committee as a 'tremendous success', capped by a performance of the Ebenezer Choral Society[178]

Very quickly ASSECA was able to establish its presence outside Soweto. In May, meetings were held in Vereeniging, Atteridgeville, and Springs.[179] In its first few years, ASSECA representatives travelled to New Brighton in the Eastern Cape[180] and across the Western Cape to discuss establishing new branches.[181] By the end of 1972, ASSECA had established nineteen branches across three provinces.[182] ASSECA's growing stature was testified to in 1970 when the organisation held its first national conference in Orlando West, opened by Dr Guerino Bozzoli, the vice chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand. Two years later Roy Wilkins, the great American civil rights activist and executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),[183] opened ASSECA's national conference in New Brighton.[184]

And it was with this growing profile that ASSECA started to assert itself on the national stage. When 21 students were expelled from Fort Hare in 1968 (among them Barney Pityana the soon-to-be co-founder of SASO),[185] ASSECA intervened, meeting with the Secretary of Bantu Education and the Rector of Fort Hare in Johannesburg, and bargaining the expelled students' re-admission at the University of South Africa.[186] And alongside these interventions, the organisation's fund raising soon made a mark too. In 1969, ASSECA made a financial donation to Orlando West High, helping the school install gas taps in the school's laboratories, as well as

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178 'Big crowd at braai to aid education', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 April 1968.

179 'Cultural body's activity spreads', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 April 1968.

180 'Educationists to meet P.E. African leaders', *Evening Post*, 16 October 1970.

181 'Asseca may form Cape unit', *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 October 1970.

182 M. T. Moerane, 'ASSECA – A mighty adventure', *Reality* Nov. 1972 HPW/A2675/III/248.

183 Roy Wilkins (b.30 August 1901-d.8 September 1981) was born in St Louis, Missouri, and educated at the University of Minnesota. Following W. E. B. Du Bois' departure from the NAACP, Wilkins replaced Du Bois as editor of *The Crisis*. Between 1964 and 1977 Wilkins was executive director of the NAACP.

184 The ability of the organisation to attract was remarkable. In 1972 the organisation hosted prominent civil rights activist and National Association, Roy Wilkins. See M. T. Moerane, 'ASSECA – A mighty adventure', *Reality* Nov. 1972 HPW/A2675/III/248. Note that it was Mehlomakulu who first met Roy Wilkins on a trip to the United States in 1971. See Allan C. Brownfield, *South Africa's Importance to the Free World* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: America's Future, Inc., 1984).

185 Barney Pityana (b.7 August 1945-) was born in Uitenhage. After being expelled from Fort Hare, Pityana completed his degree at the University of South Africa. Pityana went into exile in 1978 and became an Anglican priest and later directed the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism. In 2008 Pityana was a founding member of a breakaway party from the ANC, the Congress of the People.

186 'New spirit of self help', *The Star*, 14 March 1969.

supplementing the teachers' Department salaries.[187] In December 1970, ASSECA volunteers joined with the African Students' Movement to improve the grounds of Diepkloof High School. At Nonto Community School in Moroka, ASSECA helped build a security fence around the school.[188] In 1974 ASSECA employed eight teachers to provide extra revision lessons at Morris Isaacson.[189] In these small ways ASSECA made significant inroads meeting its goal in its constitution to 'advance the education and cultural welfare of the African people of South Africa'.[190] But the bigger goal, assuming full financial responsibility and control of the schools, would always prove beyond the organisation.

Following Vundla's death in 1969, in 1970 ASSECA's new chairman, M. T. Moerane [191] another founding member of the ANC Youth League, delivered the keynote address at ASSECA's first conference in Orlando West. Moerane outlined a bold vision for ASSECA. 'I see every child in school, neatly dressed and well fed. The class will be small enough for every child.' He was all too aware that to some this vision would seem small. 'Some people may not think much of that vision. To the Whites it is an every occurrence.'[192] But to Moerane this vision meant everything. And to realise it, he used his speech to commit ASSECA to a 'million rand pledge', calling on every black South African to donate 10c. In Moerane's words, this was nothing less than an attempt 'to take over Bantu Education.'[193]

What might be built with a million small donations proved a potent thought. Justice Moloto,[194] the president of the University Christian Movement, an organisation closely tied to

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187 *Ibid*.

188 Second Annual Executive Report of the Johannesburg Branch 1970-'71, March 1972, HPW/A2675/III/248.

189 'Asseca to aid matric triers', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 February 1974.

190 Constitution of the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa, HPW/A1729/E1.

191 Manasseh Tebatso Moerane (b.1913-d.1989) was born in the Transkei and educated at Adams College and Fort Hare. Moerane joined the ANC in 1935 and helped to establish the ANC Youth League in the 1940s. In 1948 Moerane was appointed principal of Ohlange College. Between 1962 and 1973 he was editor of *The World*.

192 As quoted in 'Africans to help students', *The Star*, 1 June 1970.

193 M. T. Moerane, 'ASSECA – A mighty adventure', *Reality* Nov. 1972 HPW/A2675/III/248.

194 Bakone Justice Moloto (b.26 July 1944-) was educated at the University College of the North, University College of Fort Hare and the University of South Africa. A key figure amongst the network of young student intellectuals out of which Black Consciousness emerged, Moloto was the first black president of the University Christiam Movement He was banned to Mafeking under the Suppression of Communist Act in 1973. After the end of apartheid, Moloto served as a judge on South Africa's Land Claims Court before being appointed judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

SASO gave his backing to the initiative.[195] So did Dr William F. Nkomo,[196] another founding member of the ANC Youth League still active in the township's politics, and, like Vundla, a member of the Moral Rearmament Movement, a shadowy presence in the biography of so many individuals during this time, and an organisation which seems to have acted as a magnet for old ANC activists after the ANC was banned.[197] As one delegate who listened to Moerane's speech said, 'You know, I think it is actually going to work.'[198]

The reality soon proved different. A million small donations allowed ASSECA to dream big, but it did not take many people to think otherwise for those imaginations to be scaled back. Just like those who had entertained the idea of Cultural Clubs in the mid-1950s, ASSECA was confronted with the incredible difficulties of running something as complex and costly as a school. The mundane reality was that fundraising was very difficult, and even modest fundraising drives failed to meet expectations. Attempts to sell Christmas cards and tickets for the premiere of Sol Rachilo's new play *Three in Number* were both disappointing.[199] The play was pulled, and the organisation was left with cards it could not sell.[200] But ASSECA's failure to meet its grandest ambition was not the end of the attempt to get more money to the schools. There was another route forward, one which dared to work within the system, and that had profound repercussions.

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195 'Education blueprint welcomed', *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 June 1970.

196 William Frederick Nkomo (b.1915-d.26 March 1972) was born in Makapanstad in the Transvaal and educated at St Peter's in Rosettenville, Johannesburg before enrolling at the University of Fort Hare and the University of South Africa. After working as a teacher, Nkomo won a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Witwatersrand where he was a contemporary of Nelson Mandela. Today there is a school named after Nkomo in Attereridgeville.

197 The Moral Re-armament Movement appears again and again in the biographies of people from this time. The MRA had its origins in 1930s Britain in a group called the Oxford group, led by an American, Frank Buchanan. During the 1940s the movement relocated to the United States and advocated for American neutrality during the Second World War. How and why the MRA took a hold in the townships is unclear, but the link during this time. Prominent South Africans who involved included Mewa Ramgobin, Jordan Ngubame, William Frederick Nkomo, Jacob Nhlapo, editor of *The Bantu World*, Charles Kwelemthini Sakwe, member of the Bunga. Frederick Chiluba, Zambia's second president was also a member.

198 'Asseca's aim: Every child at school', *The Star*, 13 June 1970.

199 Sol Rachilo (b.1929-d.-) was born in Pietermaritzburg and educated at the Madibane High School in the Western Native Township. He trained to be a social worker at the Jan Hofmeyr School. After meeting the playwright Athol Fugard in 1958, Rachilo dedicated himself to drama. He was attacked by police during the Soweto uprising and spent 28 days in Baragwanath Hospital. For his reminiscences of the Soweto uprising, see Sol Rachilo, *Nostalgic Waves from Soweto: Poetic Memories of the June 16th Uprising* (Johannesburg: African Perspectives, 2009).

200 Second Annual Executive Report of the Johannesburg Branch 1970-'71, March 1972, HPW/A2675/III/248.

In July 1968 David Thebehali was thirty years old, a long and controversial political career in Soweto ahead of him.[201] He was then the chairman of the Johannesburg branch of ASSECA, and a chairman of the local branch of the Progressive Party, at a time when only 300 Africans were members of the party.[202] He was also a UBC councillor, the chair of the Council's Education and Health Committee. And it was from this latter position that Thebehali began a campaign to raise the monthly levy from which new lower primary schools were built, from 18c to 38c.[203] It was estimated that the additional revenue would raise R248,000, a sum that would allow ten new schools to be constructed,[204] addressing what the UBC estimated to be a shortfall of 63 lower primary schools, 24 higher primary schools, and 10 secondary schools.[205]

Thebehali's proposal was not uncontroversial. The increase was substantial, and many asked why people should pay more.[206] But the proposal was nothing like as controversial as Thebehali's later career after the Soweto uprising, when the idea of working inside the system came to be seen by the vast majority as an act of collusion. At a community meeting in Naledi in August 1968, Thebehali received public backing for his proposal.[207] The general-secretary of TUATA, and Ellen Kuzwayo,[208] president of the Transvaal Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), both publicly backed the increase. Gauging the mood a reporter from *Rand Daily Mail* found that most people were 'prepared to accept the levy because "we want to see our children educated."'"[209] What held the measure back was not people's refusal to pay more, but the National Party. Flatly

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[201] Ngoako David Thebehali (b.3 June 1938-d.20 December 2020) was born in Orlando East and educated at St Peter's and the University of Lesotho and the University of the North. Nominated mayor of Soweto in 1978, Thebehali was committed to the improvement of Soweto after the uprising, especially in education. He played a key role in the establishment of the Soweto College of Education and the Vista University, now the University of Johannesburg.

[202] 'African Battles a 'White World': Apartheid Foe Pins Faith on a Multiracial Party', *New York Times*, 15 November 1964.

[203] The Education and Health Committee was one of four committees run by the Urban Bantu Council. The others were Amenities, General Purposes and Housing, and Trading and Transport.

[204] 'Soweto people against levy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 December 1968.

[205] 'Soweto needs 63 schools – official report', *The Star*, 13 May 1969.

[206] 'Soweto feud on school levies', *The Star*, 29 January 1969.

[207] 'Warning of clash on school funds plan', *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 July 1968; 'R400,000 may be raised from school levy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 August 1968.

[208] Ellen Kuzwayo (b.29 June 1914-d.19 April 2006) was born in the Thaba'Nchu district in the Orange Free State and educated at St. Francis' College in Mariannhill. She trained as a social worker at the Jan Hofmeyr School where she was a contemporary of Winnie Mandela. Kuzwayo was general-secretary of the Transvaal YWCA between 1964 and 1976.

[209] '38c school levy is welcomed', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 December 1970.

rejecting Thebehali's proposal, Van Zyl stated, 'We have a formula according to which schools are to be built in the urban areas. No local authority can go against this without our consent.'[210]

Things might have easily ended there. But Thebehali's next step was to try and circumvent the Department of Bantu Education completely by working with the Johannesburg City Council,[211] exploiting the City Council's traditional opposition to the National Party which, in 1958, led Verwoerd to station government inspectors in municipal offices, to ensure the government's apartheid agenda was being followed.[212] These two levels of government now clashed. The City Council sought to raise the levy to 35c, while the Department of Bantu Administration limited the increase at 20c, insisting that the formulas which limited class sizes be maintained.[213] A four-year standoff was only brought to an end by a wave of private donations, and the government's desperate attempt to reassert its authority.

It was from the late 1960s that Soweto's schools started to receive substantial amounts of money in private donations. In May 1968, Harry F. Oppenheimer's[214] Anglo-American Corporation made a R10,800 donation to the Dube-Mofolo-Zondi school board, funding the construction of six new classrooms and a new laboratory, part of Oppenheimer's desire to modernise the South African economy that he thought was being held back by apartheid.[215] Whether for business reasons or more philanthropic reasons, donations like these, big and small, quickly became regular. In 1969, the government sought to control this by ending the Rand-for-Rand funding for higher-primary and post-primary schools.[216] But the donations kept coming. In October 1970, *The Star* newspaper launched its Teach Every African Child campaign, or TEACH,

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210 As quoted in 'Warning of clash on school funds plan', *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 July 1968.

211 'New Soweto schools plan suggested', *The Star*, 26 November 1968.

212 See James Ball, ''A Munich Situation': Pragmatic Cooperation and the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department during the early stages of Apartheid' (M.A. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 2012).

213 'Africans must pay for own schools', *The Star*, 21 February 1969; 'Speed-up plan for African schools', *Cape Argus*, 6 March 1969. At one stage in this standoff, Koornhof, the Deputy Minister of that Sowetans were welcome to pay an extra 18c if the revenues went to funding school expansion in the Bantustans. See 'City plea for 38c Soweto levy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 December 1970.

214 Harry Oppenheimer (b.28 October 1908-d.19 August 2000) was educated at Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford. The son of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, Henry was elected to the South African parliament in 1948, where he represented the Liberals. In 1957 he was appointed head of Anglo American and De Beers. He retired from the chairmanship of Anglo American in 1982, and De Beers in 1984. For a recently published biography see Michael Cardo, *Harry Oppenheimer: Diamonds, Gold and Dynasty* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2023).

215 'Money for new school coming in', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 May 1968.

216 'Africans must pay for own schools', *The Star*, 21 February 1969.

donations pouring in from readers and local businesses.[217] In 1970, African school boards were estimated to have raised R1,7 million in private funding.[218] To try and stop this the Department of Bantu Education sent a circular banning schools from receiving donations without ministerial approval. A R3,000 donation by the Anglo-American Corporation to Naledi Secondary school was frozen.[219] Parents pleaded with the government to not stand in the way of the donations. Van Zyl told them to 'pack up and go to a rural school' if they wanted to receive their education on their own terms.[220] But the government's hard-line stance only created more support for the plight of the township's children. In February 1971, a group of Indian businessmen in Johannesburg donated R500 towards the construction of new school buildings in Soweto.[221] In the end these funds changed the government's calculation. In 1972 the National Party relented. The 38c levy was introduced in 1972, in typical face-saving fashion. Now donations would be allowed, but must be paid into the Bantu Services Levy.[222]

The result was a period of rapid school expansion in Soweto in the early-1970s. In November 1973, the Teach programme announced that it had turned 'the first shovelful of dry red earth' for its twenty-second school, a junior-secondary for 500 pupils in Jabavu, partly funded with a R25,000 donation from Frank and Hirsch Limited, Polaroid's South African distributor.[223] Sod-turnings became regular and celebrated affairs, dancing drum majorettes playing before local dignitaries at ribbon-cutting ceremonies.[224] At the start of 1975 the West Rand Administration Board (a new bureaucracy that replaced the Johannesburg City Council's Non-European Affairs Department),[225] reported that there were 221 schools in Soweto, with construction underway on

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217 Thoko Mbanjwa (ed.), *Black Review, 1974/5* (Durban: Black Community Programmes, 1975), 123. Students at Cambridge University in England even became involved raising money for TEACH. See 'Star's TEACH appeal gets to Britain', *The Star*, 17 January 1973.

218 'Big amount raised by Africans for own schools', *Eastern Province Herald*, 1 May 1971.

219 'African schools hit by aid ban', *The Star*, 19 February 1970; 'School donation rule', *The Star*, 23 February 1970.

220 As quoted in 'Hard line taken on school shortage', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 November 1970.

221 'Indians donate R500 to Soweto schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February 1971.

222 'Helping hand for Soweto schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 June 1972.

223 'Another TEACH school gets under way', *The Star*, 2 November 1973. For more on Polaroid, see Erik P. Eckholm, 'Polaroid's Experiment in South Africa: Enlightened Engagement and the Structure of Apartheid', *Africa Today*, 19 (1972), 44. See also Eric J. Morgan, 'The World is Watching: Polaroid and South Africa', *Enterprise & Society*, 7 (2006), 520-549.

224 For example, 'TEACH school opening delayed', *The Star*, 18 January 1972; 'TEACH school No 24', *The Star*, 8 May 1974.

225 The West Rand Administration Board was established the passing of the Bantu Affairs Administration Act (No. 45 of 1971), effectively replacing the municipal governance of the Non-European Affairs Department

5 more.[226] Since Thebehali first proposed more than doubling the levy, the number of schools in Soweto had doubled.[227] And to staff these new schools the Department of Bantu Education was forced into making another concession. To meet a desperate need for new teachers, in 1972 the Jabulani Technical School was given authorisation to start a teacher training course, 70 spaces opened for women applicants. Van Zyl made it clear at the times that the government considered this a temporary measure, liable to be 'terminated at any time'.[228] But the courses continued. Then in April 1976, two months before the start of the uprising, the Department announced that Anglo-American Corporation had been given permission to fund the construction of a new purpose-built teacher-training school on the Jabulani site, the first teacher-training school in Soweto's history.[229]

The construction of dozens of new schools in the 1970s was a minor victory in Sowetans' struggle for education. And the donations tilted the balance in other ways. Since they were established, the school boards had always refused to act as the instruments of the government, platforms on which people spoke back their demands for more and better funded education.[230] With more money their voice grew louder. In 1972 Edward Kubayi, a geography teacher at Sekano-Ntoane Secondary, and Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro, a history teacher at Morris Isaacson, were told that they had been sacked by the Department of Bantu Education.[231] The two young men had until recently been students at the University of the North (or Turfloop), its campus rocked by student protests in early 1972, culminating in a speech Tiro, a SASO member, gave at a graduation ceremony in April. With his father sat at the back of the hall, Tiro stood up and mocked the pretensions of Bantu Education, ridiculing the idea that black South Africans had been given control of their education while white people sat in the front rows.[232] It was what everyone knew

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attached to the Johannesburg City Council. WRAB was one of fourteen boards in the country that governed the lives of urban black South Africans.

226 'No Soweto backlog', *The Star*, 9 January 1975; '31 Black schools–thanks to TEACH', *The Star*, 14 January 1975.

227 'Teachers work double shifts', *The Star*, 17 January 1968.

228 'Govt. considers Soweto plea for college', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1972; 'Training in Soweto soon', *The Star*, 16 August 1972; 'Teacher training in Soweto soon', *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 September 1972.

229 'Training college for Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 April 1976.

230 See Hyslop, 'Aspects of the Failure of Bantu Education', 84-115.

231 Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro (b.1945-d.1 February 1974) was born in Dinokana near Zeerust on the South Africa-Botswana border. Tiro was briefly a student at Nadeli Secondary in Soweto until he was found to have violated the pass laws. He completed his secondary school studies at Barolong High in Mafeking before enrolling at the University of the North. Tiro was killed by a parcel bomb in Botswana in 1974.

232 For a transcript of Tiro's speech, see 'Graduation Speech by O. R. Tiro at the University of the North, Turfloop, April 29, 1972', in Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A*

but few dared to say so brazenly. Three days later Turfloop's students were summarily expelled, many returning to their homes in Soweto where they sought employment in the schools. When the Department of Bantu Education found out that they were now paying Tiro and Kubayi's salaries, they ordered that the school committees fire the teachers at once. In defiance the boards refused, choosing to pay the teachers' salaries themselves, the start of a standoff that lasted months, attracting much attention.[233] The standoff could only last so long. Tiro was ultimately forced from his post in February 1973, the principal of Morris Isaacson, Lekgau Mathabathe,[234] admitting that the committee had found it 'extremely difficult' to pay his salary.[235] It was nonetheless a dramatic show of defiance, and one only made possible by the board's improved financial position. The Department of Bantu Education had learnt to expect this type of intransigence at every turn.

The government's loss of control of the funding of education had a perverse outcome,. The construction of new schools allowed the Department of Bantu Education to return to an old policy: the segregation of education by ethnicity. Implementation of this policy had always been made more difficult by the government's greater determination to limit the number of schools. As Mr R. N. Gugushe,[236] a Sowetan circuit inspector stated in 1968, rezoning according to ethnicity was difficult 'because there were too few of them [schools] and rezoning would involve an exchange of huge numbers of pupils.'[237] But now scope for the policy returned. In September 1971, Dr J. B. de Vaal, the Regional Director of Bantu Education in the Transvaal, told a community meeting in Dube Village that the department was 'busy planning to establish

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Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, Vol. V*, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1997), 497-499. For more on events at Turfloop, see Julian Brown, 'SASO's Reluctant Embrace of Public Forms of Protest, 1968-1972', *South African Historical Journal*, 62 (2010), 716-734; Julian Brown, 'An Experiment in Confrontation: The Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38 (2012), 55-71; Anne Heffernan, 'Black Consciousness's Lost Leader: Abraham Tiro, the University of the North, and the Seeds of South Africa's Student Movement in the 1970s', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 (2015), 173-186.

233 'Expelled teacher to get job back', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 October 1972; 'Teachers to battle on…', *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 November 1972.

234 Lekgau Macauley Mathabathe (b.1925-d.2003) was detained on 18 August 1976. In the aftermath of the Soweto uprising, Mathabathe resigned from teaching and became a key figure in the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee and the Committee of Ten. After the end of apartheid he was awarded the Order of Luthuli in bronze.

235 As quoted in 'Tiro sacked by school', *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 February 1973.

236 Gugushe had an important career in Sowetan education. After being appointed circuit inspector, Gugushe was promoted to Secretary of the Bantu Education Advisory Council shortly before the start of the Soweto uprising. In the 1980s Gugushe became the director of Vista University in Soweto, which opened its doors in 1981.

237 As quoted in 'Reef schools will become 'one-language'', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 November 1968.

homogenous schools boards' in Soweto. As he told people, 'we have uni-lingual schools, we must have uni-lingual school boards to run them.'[238]

The public justification was that the Department was merely responding to a request from 'members of the North Sotho and Zulu units who wanted their own school boards.'[239] If there was any truth to this, then it was an expression of self-interest, for it was these groups that stood to gain the most in the reorganisation. Under the proposals 5 of the 9 existing school boards were to be dissolved, replaced with 14 boards, 5 Zulu, 3 Tswana, 2 South Sotho, and 1 North Sotho, Tsonga, Xhosa, and Venda. But the far more general response was to reject this latest attempt by the government to dictate terms. By October 1971, every school board except for Meadowlands had come out against the proposed reorganisation.[240]

The government tried to carry on. But when the schools opened 1972 it became clear ethnic segregation was beyond the government's power. Not only did the state lack the necessary authority, but even more fundamentally the Department did not even have the capacity to properly plan the reorganisation. At Sediba-Thuto Higher Primary in Mapetla a 'near riot' erupted as parents from two classified groups, North Sotho and Tswana, clashed for access to the previously mixed school, reclassified now, Tswana only. The principal told the Sotho-speaking parents to enrol their children at the nearby Phenyo Community School, but here the situation was equally confused, and the eight-classroom school with 600 existing pupils threatened to be overwhelmed by the new arrivals.[241] Chaotic scenes like this were repeated across Soweto, the planned reorganisation quickly collapsing in early 1973.[242] Still the government was not prepared to give up. At the beginning of 1974 a new, stricter policy was introduced. Before any students was admitted to school now they were required 'to be cleared by a local superintendent'. Once cleared each child was then to be issued with a pink 'Education Card', permitting the student to enlist at their designated school.[243]

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238 As quoted in, ''Tribal' school boards plan', *The Star*, 17 September 1971.

239 As quoted in 'Funds problem over schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 December 1971.

240 'Tribal line on school boards', *The Star*, 17 January 1972.

241 'Near riot in Soweto school', *The Star*, 18 January 1972.

242 For example, at Moetapele Lower Primary in Dube three schools occupied one eight-roomed classroom, with the staffroom converted into an extra classroom. See '660 must share 8 rooms', *The Star*, 10 November 1972.

243 'UBC probes pink card as schools open', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1974.

Introduced with no warning, the policy triggered a scramble for the suddenly coveted pink cards, inevitably dubbed the 'school pass-book'. With alarming reports in the press that thousands of children were being turned away from schools, 400 parents and schoolchildren gathered outside the superintendent's office in Senaoane, angry scenes repeated at the superintendent offices in Tladi and White City.[244] At the schools, the pink cards quickly created absurd scenes. Some schools found themselves massively oversubscribed, while others sat empty. At Phuti Lower Primary in Orlando West, an administrative error meant that two sets of students, a Zulu junior secondary and a Zulu higher primary, were told to enrol in the same building. And this was only the start of the error. It soon transpired that the higher primary had been allocated the school by mistake, meaning they were left with no school at all, while the junior school had been allocated the building, but had not been allocated any teachers.[245] As the *Rand Daily Mail*'s editorial astutely observed of the chaos being created by the pink-cards, 'to apply logic in an illogical situation is in itself illogical'. It was a case of 'ideology gone mad.'[246] Speaking on behalf of the UBC, Mr S. Manthata, said 'The committee wants to stress that superintendents must keep their hands from the education of Africans.'[247] For some this was a breaking point. Curtis Nkondo,[248] an important figure in Soweto's history whom we will encounter later, resigned his post at Lamula High in Meadowlands.[249]

But disruptive as the pink cards were, they quickly proved a failure. Before long the new cards started to be ignored by principals. At the newly opened double-storeyed Orlando North Secondary, around 300 of the 400 Form One pupils were from groups other than South Sotho.[250] A report in *The Star* on 19 January stated that around half of the 111,000 children admitted to

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244 'Soweto schools can only admit 'pink' children', *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 January 1974; 'UBC probes pink card as schools open', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1974.

245 'Disruption at Soweto schools', *The Star*, 1 February 1974.

246 ''Pink card' madness', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 January 1974.

247 'UBC probes pink card as schools open', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1974.

248 Curtis Nkondo (b.1 February 1928-d.3 December 2009) was born in Louis Trichardt, Northern Transvaal and was educated at the Swiss Missionary Lemana College where he was friends with Eduardo Mondlane, future head of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO). He was arrested in October 1976 and detained at Modderbee Prison. In the aftermath of the Soweto uprising Nkondo was appointed chairman of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee. In 1979 Nkondo was appointed president of the Azapo People's Organisation before resigning a year later. He later joined the United Democratic Front but was frustrated by its perceived moderateness, joining the more uncompromising Release Mandela Committee. In 2000 Nkondo was appointed South African High Commissioner to Namibia.

249 'AZAPO chief is a bitter man', *Post*, 5 October 1979.

250 'Ethnic shock for 300 kids', *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 February 1974.

school did not have the new paperwork.[251] As angry Sowetans started to demand explanations, the West Rand Administration Board pointed the finger of blame at the Department of Bantu Education, who pointed the finger back at WRAB.[252] Neither showed any enthusiasm to push the policy forward. One year later, principals felt confident openly stating their refusal. Mrs Cafwell, the principal of Orlando West Primary School, said 'I am not going to enforce anything that will make it difficult for children to get an education.' At Orlando High, Kambule said 'a child must qualify for school by academic standards, not by a piece of paper.'[253]

But of all Bantu Education's policies that failed before 1976, it is the language policy which occupies a special place in the history of apartheid. In September 1972, the secretary for Bantu Education announced that in three years' time, the Bantu Education's thirteen-year school system would be turned into a twelve-year system, by getting rid of Standard VI and turning Standard V into the first year of secondary school.[254] The reform was intended to bring the Bantu Education system in line with the white education system. But a consequence of the policy was to create a bulge of 240,000 students entering Form I, 116,000 more than usual.[255] And the bulge, within a context of rapidly rising secondary student numbers in the early 1970s, 122,489 in 1970 to 318,568 in 1975,[256] increasingly brought to the fore an old question: what language should the ever rising number of black students being educated in designated white urban areas?[257]

To begin with it was not clear the government knew what they intended to do. To canvas opinion a circular was sent to regional directors and circuit inspectors in January 1973 outlining the three possible options; teaching in English, in Afrikaans, or both.[258] The circular made clear the Department's own preference at this point: that where a school was located in a white area with one dominant language that teaching should follow in line, the circular suggesting a formula

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251 ''Illegal' pupils: no threat', *The Star*, 19 January 1974.

252 'Pink cards: Board, BED deny blame', *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 January 1974.

253 As quoted in 'Heads ignore Soweto 'pink card' system', *Sunday Express*, 19 January 1975.

254 'Earlier language switch', *The Star*, 9 September 1972; 'African mother tongue schools change', *The Star*, 28 October 1972; 'African education to be streamlined', *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 December 1972. In Soweto, the restructuring meant the fifty-fifty policy was expanded to include 160 schools, 121 more than had faced the policy before. See Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry,* Vol. I., 47.

255 'It's primary school still for 240,000 children', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 November 1975.

256 Tom Lodge, 'Resistance and Reform, 1973-1994' in Robert Ross, Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Vol. II, *1885-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 419.

257 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry,* Vol. I., 51.

258 'African schools – which tongue?', *The Star*, 2 March 1973.

for deciding in areas where white people spoke both English and Afrikaans.[259] At some later stage though, the government changed track, insisting on rigid dual language policy in all schools.[260] Why this change has never been made exactly clear. But in their 1979 book, *The Super Afrikaners*, Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom suggest the impetus came from the secretive Broederbond, where Treurnicht and other leading *verkramptes* held considerable influence.[261] Whatever behind-the-scenes machinations, on 29 August 1974, W. C. Ackermann, the Regional Director of Bantu Education in Southern Transvaal issued Regional Circular No. 2. Under the heading, 'Uniform approach in schools', the circular stated that from 1975 it would become mandatory policy that general science and practical subjects such as woodwork be taught in English, while mathematics and social sciences taught in Afrikaans. There was notably no talk of any exemptions being allowed.[262]

Protest against Regional Circular No. 2 was widespread and instantaneous. On 21 December 1974, 91 people representing school boards from the townships around Johannesburg met at the Mpebatu Hotel in Atteridgeville, a township east of Pretoria. They discussed mounting a legal challenge to the directive in the Supreme Court. They also submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of Bantu Education, Mr G. J. Rousseau, setting out their demand that Afrikaans not be used as a medium of instruction in secondary schools.[263] And they resolved that should they not get their demand, more direct action would follow. As one of the delegates said, 'We have to be militant to be understood. We have been docile for too long. If the Department says no to our demands, our children must stay away from schools next year.'[264] Then in January 1975, the African Teachers' Association of South Africa[265] submitted an eight-point memorandum to the Secretary of Bantu Education, outlining the reasons they saw for why English should be retained, from the

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259 'Languages at African schools', *The Star*, 9 August 1973.

260 'Language decision 'despite advice', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 July 1975.

261 Wilkins and Strydom reference the minutes of an Executive Council meeting on 21 March 1968, which stated: 'Broeders in responsible circles (Cabinet) have confirmed that much has already been done to give Afrikaans its rightful place, but that there were many problems. It is recommended that the 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.' See Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom, *The Super Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball,1979), 218.

262 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry,* Vol. I., 52-55.

263 'Board threaten to take Bed to court on English, Afrikaans', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 December 1974.

264 As quoted in Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry,* Vol. I., 57.

265 On the history of ATASA see Randall Langa Peteni, *Towards Tomorrow: The Story of the African Teachers' Associations of South Africa* (Algonac, M.I.: Reference Publications, Inc., 1979).

costs of replacing existing English-language textbooks, to the idea that policy in the homelands and the townships should be aligned, and the fact that English was the language of business. Several school boards formed Federated School Boards to present a common front.[266] Leaders of the Bantustans even met with prime minister John Vorster[267] at two 'summit' meetings in January 1975, urging a change in policy.[268]

And as people reached for every means of having their voices heard, the most effective form of protest was taking place in the schools. Principals carried on applying for exemptions, all the while instructing their teachers to carry on in English.[269] Six months after Regional Circular No. 2 was sent to the schools, *The Star* reported, 'most African school boards [and] administrators of schools, have instructed principals to use only English as a medium of instruction'.[270] Frustrated, the Department of Bantu Education issued another circular on 7 February 1975. 'It appears that a few School Boards somehow got the impression that they had the right to decide what medium of instruction should be used in the schools. This is entirely wrong. It is a professional matter over which no school board has any jurisdiction.'[271] After the Tswana school board announced its refusal to follow, Ackermann met with its chairman and warned that noncompliance meant no 'new grants for teachers.'[272] Threats were being followed through. On 15 April 1975 Mr J. Mahlangu was dismissed from his post as chair of the Orlando-Diepkloof Zulu Board.[273] But it was a delusion to think the schools could be strong-armed into teaching Afrikaans, just as Afrikaner nationalists had fought fiercely to preserve their own language. The depths of the delusion would become clear in 1976, when Andries Treurnicht took responsibility himself,

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266 Pat Hopkins and Helen Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Soweto Uprising* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2001), 79.

267 Balthazar Johannes 'B. J.' Vorster (b.13 December 1915-d.10 September 1983) was born in Jamestown in Cape Province to a sheep farming family and educated at Stellenbosch University. A member of the *Ossewabrandwag*, staunchly opposed to South Africa's participation in the Second World War, Vorster was detained in 1942. On his release in 1944 Vorster joined the National Party. Elected to the House of Assembly in 1953, Vorster was appointed Minister of Justice in 1961, overseeing the political crackdown on the ANC after the Sharpeville massacre. Vorster succeeded Verwoerd as prime minister in 1966 and resigned in 1978.

268 'Africans call for English in schools', *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 January 1975.

269 There were a few notable exceptions. At the Thomas Mofolo Secondary School in Naledi the principal, Tefo Mohapi, a well-known Basotho Unity Party supporter, called in the police 'after an incident over Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.' See 'Head in politics, language row', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 March 1976.

270 'Soweto schools crisis looms: Clash over language', *The Star*, 13 February 1975.

271 Departmental Circular No. 7 of 1975, as quoted in Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry,* Vol. I., 59.

272 As quoted in 'Soweto schools crisis looms: clash over language', *The Star*, 13 February 1975.

273 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I, 47 and 62.

determined to succeed where his predecessors had failed. It did not work. In July 1976 the government announced that it was finally abandoning the 50:50 language policy for good.[274] But by then it was too late. Verwoerd and Eiselen's vision for apartheid had come crashing down.

274 'Language is 'up to schools'–Botha', *The Star*, 6 July 1976.

- II -

The Soweto Uprising
1976

> Parents, you should rejoice for having given birth to this type of child. A child who prefers to fight it out with the oppressors rather than to be submerged in drunkenness, frustration and thuggery. A child who prefers to die from a bullet rather than to allow a poisonous education which relegates him and his parents to a position of perpetual subordination. Aren't you proud of the soldiers of liberation you have given birth to?
>
> - Soweto Students' Representative Council, September 1976 [1]

For twenty years the history of education in Soweto seemed set. These strangely paradoxical institutions, at once oppressive and yet offering some of the rare wherewithal of life, were met with the response that the schools did not belong to the state at all, but to the people. It was, in its time, a radical claim to make, taking the apartheid conceit of separate development and turning it into a substantive claim on power. And for twenty years that claim humbled the National Party's ambitions in the schools. The plan to ethically segregate the schools had failed, the funding regulations meant to limit spending in urban areas had been breached, school numbers had started to expand rapidly, and the school boards were regularly exercising their own authority, independent of the Department of Bantu Education. Rather than acting as the passive, atavistic subjects the apartheid project deemed them to be, Sowetans had acted with all the expectations and demands of citizens. High apartheid had foundered in the minds of the oppressed it thought could be so malleably moulded to its will.[2]

But just as the government had never realised its ambitions, it remained the case that Sowetans' demands for a good quality education available to all had never been met either. The poverty of Bantu Education was a bitter and inescapable reality. Overcrowding was chronic and

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[1] ''Azikhelwa on Monday'. Flyer by Soweto Students' Representative Council, September 1976', in Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. V*, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1997), 581.

[2] For a very different interpretation that much more readily accepts the apartheid state's powers to realise its designs see Mahmood Mamdani's seminal *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

teacher retention difficult, basic supplies like chalk often missing. In place of any great victory or defeat, what took place instead was the type of history that lends itself poorly to making the headlines, an unremitting and unglamorous struggle waged day-after-day between two sources authority, the state and the people. That this struggle was sustained for so long ultimately depended on two things: the National Party's willingness to deny the full reality of what it was presiding over in society for the sake of maintaining a semblance of control, and Sowetans' denial of the tenuousness of their claim that the schools belonged to them for the sake of an education. For both sides a half-knowing self-deception followed the pursuit of power, the struggle for education unfolding in the grey spaces created in the overlap between the two sides' positions. That was until January 1976, when Dr Andries Treurnicht entered the office of Deputy Minister of Bantu Education. In a fit of ideological pique Treurnicht denied that the National Party faced any weaknesses at all, only a lack of will.[3]

On the streets the 1976 academic year began with the usual long queues of students outside the schools, no let-up in the demand for education. But signs of Treurnicht's new hard-line approach fast became clear. On 20 January the Regional Director of Education for the Southern Transvaal met with the Tswana School Board. In 1975 W. C. Ackermann had ordered the Tswana board to comply with the 50:50 language directive, only to be told in reply that 'it is not in the interest of the community'.[4] Now Ackermann returned to insist. And this time when they refused, he dismissed two members of the board, including the chairman, Joseph Peele.[5] The remaining board members resigned in protest.[6] At a meeting at the Thutolore Secondary School on the weekend of 6 March, school parents in Meadowlands threatened to remove all their children, 14,000 students, should the board members not be reinstated.[7] The quickly escalating crisis was only brought to an end when Lucas Mangope, Chief Minister of Bophuthatswana,[8] travelled to

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3 Regional Circular No. 2 of 1974 (Southern Transvaal), as quoted in Piet Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977,* Vol. I (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1980), 52.

4 As quoted in 'Soweto schools crisis looms: Clash over language', *The Star*, 13 February 1975.

5 'Soweto schools back Tswanas', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 February 1976; ''School sackings will not lead to withdrawals', *The World*, 11 February 1976.

6 'Soweto school back Tswanas', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 February 1976.

7 'Soweto school row: 14,000 may be removed', *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 February 1976.

8 Lucas Mangope (b.27 December 1923-d.18 January 2018) was educated at St Peter's before receiving his Higher Primary Teacher's Diploma at Bethel College. After working as a teacher, Mangope became involved in

Cape Town to speak personally with John Vorster, returning to Soweto a few days later with a reassurance that people were still free to determine their language policy.[9] But Vorster's government was characterised by the leeway he gave his ministers to make decisions. It was not Vorster who was taking the decisions in Soweto, but Treurnicht. After Mangope gave his assurances, the tools of coercion continued to be put to use. Principals and teachers were being fired from their posts and the Department of Bantu Education was withholding grants from noncompliant schools.[10]

As the highveld's often bitter winter mornings began to set in, the struggle for control of Soweto's classrooms was being pushed into ever more uncharted territory. For the first time, students took the lead. On 17 May students at Phefeni Junior Secondary in Orlando West decided to stop studying in protest against the language policy, piling their Afrikaans-language textbooks outside the principal's door.[11] The novel form of protest spread quickly. Two days later, students at Belle Higher-Primary refused to carry on learning, joined the next day by students at Thulasizwe Higher-Primary and Emthonjeni Higher-Primary.[12] Urgent parent meetings were held with the Department as the adults sought to take back the initiative. The Department of Bantu Education was unmoved. By the start of June, 2,700 pupils in Soweto had put down their books, refusing to study until the language directive was withdrawn.[13]

As reports of increasingly unusual events in Soweto started to reach the outside world, questions were raised in parliament and the press. Treurnicht publicly downplayed the tensions stating that no final decision had been made.[14] The message given to people in Soweto was different. When the principal of Phefeni Junior Secondary travelled to Pretoria to meet with

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the politics of the Tswana Territorial Authority. In 1972 Mangope was appointed Chief Minister of Bophuthatswana.

9 'School language crisis – hopes on Mangope's talks', *The World*, 25 February 1976.

10 '1,000 boycott classes over sacked heads', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 April 1976; 'School sackings hit pupils', *Sunday Times*, 16 May 1976.

11 'School strike spreads', *The Star*, 19 May 1976. For an account of these events written by someone who was a student at Phefeni Junior at the time, see Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1998).

12 '1,600 pupils keep up strike', *The World*, 24 May 1976.

13 'Seventh school joins strike', *The World*, 1 June 1976; 'African wives join protests in schools', *The Star*, 2 June 1976.

14 Muriel Horrell, Tony Hodgson, Suzanne Blignaut and Sean Moroney, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1976* (Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness, 1977), 54-55. See also Nigel Mandy, *A City Divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1984), 199.

Ackermann to discuss the stand-off, he was flatly told by Ackermann that 'no country has its laws changed by students'.[15] Then, on Friday 11 June, Treurnicht stood in the House of Assembly and announced that exemptions from the language-policy from five Sowetan schools had all been rejected.[16] In words whose value would not last a week, he told the House, 'I have spoken to my officials and I believe the dispute will be settled amicably'.[17]

Two days later around 400 Sowetan students met at the Donaldson Community Centre in Orlando East to discuss Treurnicht's latest intervention. Having been pushed into the frontlines by a minister whose blind pursuit of power made him deaf to every appeal to reason so far, they decided to elect an Action Committee, and set about planning a protest march through the streets of Soweto to Orlando Stadium, the setting of a mass demonstration that would be impossible for even Treurnicht to deny. And so it was that on the morning of Wednesday 16 June around 15,000 students started to march. It was an unprecedented moment in Soweto's history. Not even at the famous signing of the Freedom Charter on a field in Kliptown in 1955 had so many people come together in Soweto to assert their basic rights.[18] It was also the last great expression of the claim that the schools belonged to the people.

In this chapter we follow what happened next that day and in the weeks and months that followed. How the claim that the schools belonged to the people was destroyed in an act of sense-destroying police violence during the course of that morning, and how to make sense of a terrifying new world, a new Manichean view of the world was born.[19] Dispossessed of so much already, and now robbed of the idea the schools belonged to them too, a new millenarian spirit swept Soweto's schools which made a new concession and set a new demand: the schools might belong to the

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15 As quoted in 'Soweto strikers due back in class', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 May 1976.

16 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I, 94. The schools were Belle, Emthonjeni, Khulo-Ngolwuzi, Pimville and Thesane.

17 As quoted in Franz Auerbach, *No Single Loyalty: Many Strands One Design: A South African Teacher's Life* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2002), 120.

18 An estimated three-thousand people met at the Assembly of the People in Kliptown to sign the Freedom Charter, representing the African National Congress, the Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation and the Congress of Democrats. The Freedom Charter committed the Congress movement to non-racialism, and became a focal point of political opposition in the years to come. For more on the Freedom Charter, see David Everatt, 'The Congress of the People', in *The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), 169-194.

19 The potential of violence to create new narratives through which people see and act within the world has been brilliantly explored by Anand Gopal and his history of the Taliban's reconstruction following the US invasion of Afghanistan. See Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Picador, 2015).

National Party, but the future belonged to the people—a future in which all that was wrong in the world would be washed away. It was not that the schools had suddenly come to mean any less to people. The passions and sacrifices at the heart of the Soweto uprising only start to make sense when we know just how much education meant to people in the years before the Soweto uprising. But now that education was ripped away from people in the present, people's great hopes for a better and changed life came to be stored in the dreams of a utopian future. Only in a post-revolutionary future could anything like the promise of a true education be realised. And for that, people were now prepared to give their lives.

Who in that beguilingly simple formulation were the people? Like so much else, answers to this question took on a new hard-edged clarity. The people were not just all those multitudes whose fates had led them to Soweto. The people were seen as those prepared to stand and fight on the right side of history. In this the dreams of a utopian future had its seeds in the present. To belong to the people was to be committed to the cause of freedom, to live without compromise or contradiction. And the converse of this was true, with ominous implications. To stray from the revolutionary cause was to stray from the people. New fault lines opened in Soweto during the uprising, pitting the virtuous against the corrupt, the self-sacrificing against the self-seeking, the young against old. Beerhalls, *shebeens* and nightclubs were all destroyed by the students.

And yet without the broad support of the people how was any of this to be achieved? Along with the belief that a new utopia lay over the horizon, a new romantic conceptualisation of the people, and a puritanism which bound the believers to this faith together, there was one last ingredient in this millenarian chapter in Soweto's history. Unlikely though it was, Soweto's students did not see themselves alone in their task. Fifteen years before the Soweto uprising, the ANC launched its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, a desperate attempt to take the fight back to the National Party after the political crackdown that followed the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The leaders of Umkhonto we Sizwe had hardly started to think about the future when the police raided the underground headquarters at Liliesleaf farm near Johannesburg in July 1963, swiftly rounding up many of its top-level leaders, driving what was left of the organisation into exile or prison. Umkhonto we Sizwe was forced to regroup faraway from South Africa in Tanzania and Zambia, a tiny guerrilla army made up of just a few hundred men, its most serious attempts to take the fight

back into South Africa through Rhodesia in 1967 ending in a bruising and demoralising defeat.[20] It was an unlikely source of salvation. And yet in 1976, during their desperate hour of need, Soweto's students turned to this distant, tiny army and blessed it with messianic qualities. No matter how improbable, Umkhonto we Sizwe was an army that might march on Pretoria.

All together it was a potent mix. By the year's end, the millenarian belief had fuelled the most extraordinary events. During the course of the uprising Soweto's students had called for a series of general strikes, each bigger than the last. The schools had been abandoned entirely and a new eschatology was being acted out in Soweto's cemeteries during mass funerals. Thousands of students had fled the townships to take up arms in Umkhonto we Sizwe.[21] The compromise, pragmatism and short-horizons of the old era had been replaced by a new politics, boldly uncompromising, youthful, and with ambitions of taking control of the state itself.

But to package things up like that is to risk dealing much too abstractly with the ideas that helped guide Soweto's students through months of turmoil, lending the Soweto uprising a coherence that it did not have, which is perhaps the biggest misimpression that has been allowed to form about 1976. Ever since the uprising started, what the students thought they were doing

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[20] On the history of the ANC-in-exile before the Soweto uprising see Thula Simpson, 'The Making (and Remaking) of a Revolutionary Plan: Strategic Dilemmas of the ANC's Armed Struggle, 1974-1978', *Social Dynamics*, 35 (2009), 312-329; Stephen Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012); Hugh Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963-1994* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013); Janet Cherry, *Umkhonto weSizwe: South Africa's Freedom Fighters, 1960s-1980s* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2012); Stephen R. Davis, *The ANC's War Against Apartheid: Umkhonto We Sizwe and the Liberation of South Africa* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 2018); Thula Simpson, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2016).

[21] There is of course an enormous literature on millenarianism. The classic and oft-recommended starting point is Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 1993 [1957]). Beyond Cohn's text, some of the texts that have guided the thinking behind this chapter include Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959); Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against European Colonial Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Karen Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Africa* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Chinese Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (London: Flamingo, 1997); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017). As these texts help make clear, the colonial frontier has been fertile grounds for millenarian movements to arise, and South Africa's own history is no exception. On the history of millenarianism in South Africa see Jeff Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1989); Robert R. Edgar, and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century Prophet* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999); Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2011); and Robert R. Edgar, *The Finger of God: Enoch Mgjima, the Israelites, and the Bulhoek Massacre in South Africa* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

has been subject to often fierce and partisan debate. For the National Party and its supporters, the rioting as they insisted on calling events was the product of sinister political agitators, *opstokers* ('those who stir up trouble'), who had tricked the youth into a wave of wanton criminality, their violent actions betraying any serious political grievance they might have had.[22] For the regime's opponents this cynical and self-absolving narrative was turned on its head. The students were not politically immature at all, the starting point of the search connecting the explosion of violence in Soweto to the cerebral, introspective Black Consciousness movement on South Africa's segregated university campuses. What the terms of this debate misses is how 16 June was a day in which a world of meaning was destroyed, leaving frightened, angry, leader-less Sowetans grappling for answers as they tried to make sense of a new world. For the historian William Sewell, days like 16 June 1976 are best understood as times when 'the usual articulations between different structures become profoundly dislocated', when people 'are beset with insecurity', when people might feel 'anxiety, fear, or exhilaration; incessant activity, paralysis, extreme caution, or reckless abandon.'[23] This chapter sets out to follow how a new way of seeing the world was put together. And in so doing it seeks to make the conclusions that people reached at the end of 1976 seem strange again. The Soweto uprising is so familiar that it can seem uncomplicated—the demand that apartheid be overthrown immediately, the unvarnished truth that apartheid was nothing more complicated and elaborate than white supremacy delivered by the barrel of a gun. But as outsiders we risk creating a false affinity with Soweto's class of 1976 when we stop there. Under barely imaginable pressures, Soweto's students embraced a politics that many could empathise with, but few could easily share. And that, as we shall come to see, is the all-important lesson to understand in the long history of apartheid, an example as inspirational as it was difficult to follow.

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[22] On the government's view of the uprising see John D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 270.

[23] Willian H. Sewell Jr., 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille', *Theory and Society* 25 (1996), 845. Sewell's work is part of a tradition in French history of reading moments of social upheaval as if we might read a text. See also Natalie Zemon Davis "The Rites of Violence Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France" *Past & Present* 59 (1973), 51-91; and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1984).

The students' plan was simple. The students were told to start gathering at three meeting spots early in the morning of 16 June, at Naledi Secondary in the western outskirts of Soweto, at Sekano-Ntoane in the south, and at Morris Isaacson in Jabavu. Then at 6.30 a.m. the students were to start marching to Phefeni Junior Secondary in Orlando West, a symbolic meeting spot, the school where students had first put down their books.[24] From here the plan was for the students to march over the nearby bridge crossing the railway lines to Johannesburg and into Orlando East, finally reaching Orlando Stadium. But word of the hastily organised plan had not reached everyone by Wednesday morning. Many young Sowetans woke up and went to school as usual. Hearing the noise of the passing crowds, some decided to put down their books, swelling the columns as they made their way east towards Phefeni. Others chose to stay at their desks, focussing on their studies on the last day of school before the winter vacation.[25]

We can get a sense of what the atmosphere was like on the streets from the photographs taken by the few journalists who had caught rumours of the students' plan, curious to see what might happen.[26] In the early morning winter sun we see the children starting on their march with smiles on their faces. In one famous photograph taken from the top of a boulder, a crowd have gathered under Mike Mzileni's[27] camera holding up cardboard signs. 'TO HELL WITH AFRIKAANS' 'TODAY IS THE BURIAL OF BOERE TALK' 'WE DO NOT WANT AFFRIKAANS'. Those who do not carry signs have their fists clenched above their heads in the Black Power salute, the peals of laughter on their faces giving away their impression of full-grown revolutionaries. There is defiance in these images to be sure, but as many of the students later recalled, there was a carnivalesque atmosphere too, a giddiness as the students considered the

[24] Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the 16 June 1976 Soweto Student Uprisings Routes: Past Recollections and Present Reconstruction(s)', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19 (2007), 8.

[25] As one pupil at Nghungunyane Junior Secondary recalled, 'I woke up, as usual, like all the other days. I ate soft porridge, because it was our usual breakfast, since bread was scarce at that time. After that, I took my books…. I went to collect my friend who stayed nearby. He was called Ronald Rikhotso. Then we went to school just like the other days.' As quoted in Elsabé Brink, Gandhi Malungane, Steve Lebelo, Dumisani Ntshangase and Sue Krige (eds.), *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2006), 23.

[26] See Peter Magubane, *Magubane's South Africa* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978); and Peter Magubane, *Soweto: The Fruit of Fear* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986).

[27] Mike Mzileni (b.16 January 1942-1 June 2022) was born in Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape before his family moved to Johannesburg. His work appeared in *Drum*, *Rand Daily Mail* and other publications. He was detained in February 1977 and fired from his job at *Drum*. In 1982 he joined *City Press*, retiring in 2000. For a collection of Mzileni's photographs of black South African women singers see Z. B. Molefe, *A Common Hunger to Sing: A Tribute to South Africa's Black Women of Song, 1950-1990* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1997).

possibilities of their actions. Dan Moyane was a senior student at Morris Isaacson with dreams of becoming a doctor.[28] He recalled: 'We were singing and it was jovial, the mood, exciting, and with the placards we started going, we started going.'[29] Vuyo Mntuyedwa, a nine-year-old student at Mzamo Primary, remembered how 'there was something electrical about that crowd, chanting and stomping.'[30] As the students marched, they sang *Senzeni na?* What have we done?[31]

The description of a carnival can help us get close to understanding what was happening in the crowds that morning. Carnivals take many different forms, though they are at their essence moments in time when people gather to turn the social order upside down.[32] The spectacle of thousands of young Sowetans marching through the streets in their school uniforms as their parents walked to the trains and buses that would take them to Johannesburg was this type of inversion. In a place devoid of public space the march was a dramatic claim on the public, led by children in a world dominated by adults. A distinctly carnivalesque humour can be read on some of the signs the students carried. 'IF WE MUST DO AFRIKAANS, VORSTER MUST DO ZULU'.[33] '50-50 AFRIKAANS AND 50-50 ZULU FOR VORSTER'.[34] Njabulo Nkonyane, a fourteen-year-old boy from Mncube Secondary, remembered how some boys chose to wear skirts that day, girls walking in their father's trousers.[35]

In a study of the sixteenth century French writer François Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin described moments like these as 'the people's second life', times when, even if only briefly, people

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[28] Tsakani Dan Moyane (b.3 August-d.) was born in Soweto and educated at Eislen Primary School. He fled Soweto in 1979 after police harassment and headed to Mozambique where he became involved with the African National Congress and worked at Rádio Moçambique. After returning to South Africa in the early 1990s Moyane has enjoyed a successful media career. For Moyane's autobiography see Dan Moyane, *I Don't Want to Die Unknown: We Need to Listen to Our Inner Voice* (Johannesburg: Tracey McDonald, 2021).

[29] As quoted in *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising*, 59.

[30] As quoted in Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprisings Routes', 18.

[31] Memories of these events now vary widely. Some students later recalled that the crowds were already singing struggle anthems like '*Oliver Tambo theta noBotha akhulule, uMandela, Oliver Tambo, akhulule uMandela*' [Oliver Tambo, speak to Botha, so that he must release Mandela]. More likely that these are reconstructed memories. As Solly Mpshe, a student from Morris Isaacson, remembered: 'Let me put it blatantly to you: during those years we didn't know much, even the songs that we knew those days would be like songs that we got by some chance from an LP, from the exile singers. You find that maybe out of 26 only five people knew the songs which were relevant.' As quoted in *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising*, 62.

[32] Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, 83.

[33] 'Police fired – then I saw four children fall', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

[34] 'First shots fired in White City', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 June 1976.

[35] As quoted in Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings*, 29.

'entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance.'[36] Bakhtin was effusive about the possibilities opened in such moments, the licence to breach taboos and question established hierarchies. But Bakhtin's study was also a coded critique of Stalin's totalitarian rule, and he was quick to observe the limits of this type of action in the modern world. Usually, Bakhtin thought, the creative energy of the people's second life was smothered by the powers of the modern state.[37] It was a lesson the police in Soweto might have done well to learn. For had the police recognised what was happening in front of them as having the essential form of a carnival, they might have responded differently. Choosing to watch over the students as they marched to Orlando Stadium before returning to their homes, 16 June 1976 might have been remembered as something like what Max Gluckman called a 'ritual of rebellion', a day that left the old order left intact.[38] That this was not how the police saw things ultimately betrayed their lack of faith in the apartheid order. The students' laughter was met with nervous, frightened white policemen.

The head of police was Brigadier Schalk W. Le Roux, who received the first reports that students were out on the streets from his security chief at 7.50 a.m.[39] Le Roux immediately radioed his station commanders, ordering out patrols. At Orlando Police Station, the station commander was Colonel Johannes Kleingeld. Out on the streets Kleingeld saw small groups of students milling around on street corners. These scenes alarmed Kleingeld who hurried back to Orlando police station and assembled a squad of 48 men, 8 white men armed with revolvers and automatic rifles and 40 black policemen carrying *kierries*, or clubs. At 9.30 a.m. Kleingeld led a convoy of nine vehicles out onto the streets of Orlando. As they crossed the bridge into Orlando West, the crowd gathering outside Phefeni Junior Secondary was estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000, new students arriving all the time.[40] Kleingeld would later describe what he saw before him as a *waansinnige horde*, an insane horde.[41]

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[36] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]), 9.

[37] See M. Keith Booker and Dubravka Juraga, *Bakhtin, Stalin, and Modern Russian Fiction: Carnival, Dialogism, and History* (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[38] Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954).

[39] Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I., 108.

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] As quoted in Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 'The Anatomy of the Crowd', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. VII, *Soweto Uprisings: New Perspectives, Commemorations and Memorialisation* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2017), 65.

Instead of searching for a nearby vantage point, Kleingeld ordered his men to disembark, forming a line across Vilakazi Street. Now the march would not be allowed to go any further. The atmosphere of the day quickly began to change. Those students stood closest to the police line taunted the men in their uniforms, those further back using their anonymity in the crowd to throw pebbles on the policemen's heads. The police held their line with dogs strained at the leash. Some remembered teargas being used, although either the cannisters failed to discharge properly or the wind quickly blew the gas away, for the crowd remained in place.[42] Establishing exactly what happened in these moments is now impossible. But then, at around 10.30 a.m., one of the white policemen fired his revolver, followed by a volley of gunfire.[43] Amongst those who fell to the ground, two died, Hastings Ndlovu, fifteen-years-old, and Hector Pieterson, twelve-years-old, a student at Itshepeng Higher Primary in Central Western Jabavu.[44]

Stood watching with a Pentax camera was Sam Nzima,[45] a forty-two-year-old journalist working at South Africa's most popular black newspaper, *The World*. As some students reached for the stones scattered under their feet on the unpaved streets while others fled for their lives, Nzima watched as a young man gathered Hector Pieterson in his arms, carrying him towards the journalists' Volkswagen Beetle. In a series of six remarkable photographs, we see Mbuyisa Makhubu foregrounded against the crowd with Pieterson, the boy's left shoe missing, his school jumper pulled up around his neck stained in blood.[46] In the most widely reproduced of these images Hector's sister Antoinette runs alongside Makhubu, her palms pointed to the sky, her face

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42 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I., 111. See also *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising*, 58-9.

43 Piet Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977,* Vol. II (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1980), 6.

44 Baragwanath Hospital was rushed with students with 'Urgent Direct' stickers stuck on the most badly wounded. See Malcolm Klein, 'Hastings and Hector: Completing the Record of "June 16th"', in Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Sifiso Ndlovu, Mothobi Mutloatse (eds.), *Soweto '76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles*, (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan, 2006), 71. On the history of Baragwanath Hospital see Simonne Horwitz, *Baragwanath Hospital, Soweto: A History of Medical Care, 1941-1990* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013).

45 Sam Nzima (b.8 August 1934-d.12 May 2018) was born in Lilydale in the Transvaal before running away to Johannesburg, where he finished his education by correspondence. He was employed fulltime by *The World* in 1968.Following the widespread publication of this image around the world, Nzima received death threats from the police. The persecution forced him and his wife were later forced to leave their homes and employment in Soweto and head into internal exile in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) where he gave up his career as a photographer. For Nzima's own account see Nzima, 'It Started on 15th June 1976', *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 26 (2006), 12.

46 Mbuyisa Makhubu (b.1957 or 1958-d.unkown) was a recent graduate of Orlando North High School who happened to be visiting his grandmother when the shootings started. Shortly after 16 June Makhubu fled into exile. It is not known what he did next.

consumed with grief. It is an incredibly powerful, steeped in Christian iconography.[47] Nzima knew the value of what he had witnessed immediately. He tucked the film into his sock and hurried back to *The World*'s offices, where the editors debated whether to print the photograph.[48] That evening Nzima's photograph was placed on the front of a special late edition of *The World*, changing the way South Africans understood their country.[49] Just as the truth revealed in Emmett Till's open casket in Chicago in 1955 breathed new life into the Civil Rights movement, and just as the violent attack on a civil rights march on Burntollet Bridge in Northern Ireland in 1969 set the stage for the Troubles,[50] the photograph of Hector Pieterson was one of those moments in a divided society which casts stark new light on their most fundamental truth: the violence which ultimately upholds them. That not even a school uniform or the innocent years of childhood could protect someone from the full violence of the apartheid state coursed through society with all the power of a revelation. As Nzima later reflected in his testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, 'after the picture was taken, yes, there was never peace in Soweto.'[51]

In Soweto, word of the shootings spread quickly. Students who stayed in their classrooms now started to pour out onto the streets, the news of what had happened turning carnivalesque crowds still marching towards Phefeni Junior into vengeful mobs. One of those still marching was Dan Montsitsi, a final-year student at Sekano-Ntoane Secondary,[52] and part of a small group of friends who used to gather in the evenings at Musi High to discuss politics, and who had been

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[47] As Paula Alexandra Horta has observed, Nzima's image recalls Michelangelo's *Pietà* in the Vatican, the statue of Christ being held by the Virgin Mary. See Horta, 'Portrait and Documentary Photography in Post-Apartheid South Africa: (Hi)stories of Past and Present', (Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2011), 82.

[48] Aryn Baker, 'This Photo Galvanised the World Against Apartheid: Here's the Story Behind It', *Time*, 15 June 2016. https://time.com/4365138/soweto-anniversary-photograph/ (10 November 2021).

[49] For a history of the image, see Ruth Kerkham Simbao, 'The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings: Reading the Shadow in Sam Nzima's Iconic Photograph of Hector Pieterson', *African Arts*, 40 (2007), 52-69. On the international reaction to the Soweto uprising, see Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 158-173.

[50] The way Till's murder reshaped the entire American political landscape has been captured in a remarkable passage of writing by Robert Caro in *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson,* Vol. III, (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 2003), 701-710. On Burntollet Bridge, see Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland* (London: William Collins, 2019).

[51] Sam Nzima, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996.

[52] Daniel Sechaba Montsitsi (b.1954-d.12 August 2021) was born in Alexandra and educated at Sekano-Ntoane. He was arrested on 10 June 1977 and tortured before being sent to Robben Island. On his release in mid-1983 Montsitsi became actively involved in politics. In 1994 he was elected to parliament representing the ANC.

particularly vocal at the Donaldson Community Centre meeting.[53] Years later, Montsitsi recalled the moment he learnt of the tragedy which had befallen their plan. Looking up the road Montsitsi saw students travelling in the direction of Phefeni, among them Murphy Morobe,[54] and Tsietsi Mashinini,[55] two friends from Morris Isaacson, selected as leaders of the Action Committee at the Sunday meeting. As they drew close Montsitsi saw how many of the students coming from Phefeni had blood on their bodies, how some were no longer wearing shoes. Dressed in a skull cap and bell-bottomed jeans, a visibly shaken Mashinini told them what happened.[56] On hearing the news, Montsitsi remembered how the mood in his group changed completely. Rather than seeking safety, they made the extraordinary decision to keep marching east. A West Rand Administrative Board delivery van drove by and the vehicle was immediately pelted with stones. A group of schoolgirls at the front of the crowd dragged the white man from the cab and set upon him. A boy then pushed his way forward and stabbed J. N. B. Esterhuizen to death.[57] The van was turned over and set on fire, the black smoke from the burning tyres starting to fill the sky all across Soweto as groups of students attacked bakery vans, milk delivery trucks and any other commercial vehicle they encountered. Sowetans driving private cars were only allowed to pass through the crowds if they their fist up in salute.[58] The parsing of the community had already begun.

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[53] Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', in *The Road to Democracy*, Vol. II, *1970-1980* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2007), 384.

[54] Murphy Morobe (b.2 October 1956-) grew up in Orlando East and was educated at Orlando High Secondary and Morris Isaacson. He was captured by police on New Year's Eve 1976 and sent to Robben Island. In prison Morobe continued his studies, finishing his matriculation exams, and starting an undergraduate degree. in May 1982 Morobe was released, becoming a leading political figure in the 1980s. In 1994 Morobe was appointed Chairperson and CEO of the Financial and Fiscal Commission in South Africa.

[55] Tsietsi Mashinini (b.27 January 1957-d.1990) was born in Central Western Jabavu and educated at Seoding Lower Primary, Itshepeng Higher Primary and Morris Isaacson. In August 1976 Mashinini fled into exile. In exile Mashinini founded the South African Youth Revolutionary Council that attracted a small number of exiles. He died in Conakry, Guinea. In 2011 Mashinini was awarded the Order of Luthuli in Bronze.

[56] Dan Moyane as quoted in *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising*, 23. So-called hippy culture was popular amongst youth in Soweto during this time. For a shocked report written by two Black Consciousness activists of a hippy social event at Mofolo Hall in 1973, see Nthanyane Maaga and Xola Nuse, 'Report on a Hippie Fact-Finding Mission', *SASM Newsletter* (April 1973), 5-8.

[57] Dan Montsitsi, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996. See also Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprising Routes', 25.

[58] Thomas Ntuli, then a student from Nghungunyane Junior Secondary School in Dlamini, as quoted in *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising*, 69.

Esterhuizen was one of two white people killed in Soweto on 16 June.[59] Meanwhile in Jabavu students hurled stones at the Youth Centre next to Morris Isaacson, where WRAB's chief welfare officer, Dr Melville Edelstein,[60] and his colleague, Mr R. Hobkirk, had locked themselves inside. Edelstein stepped outside, perhaps hoping his status as a well-known social worker would allow him to appeal to the students. He was pulled into the street and killed. The Youth Centre was set on fire and his body thrown inside. It was not lost on Montsitsi that those who killed Edelstein had just earlier that day walked by him peacefully on their way to Phefeni. Then 'he was an ordinary person to us, but when we came back he was an enemy.'[61]

Things that until now been lived alongside suddenly became targets of violent retribution. In one of the earliest accounts of the uprising Baruch Hirson wrote, 'There could be little doubt that the object of the attacks was to destroy all symbols of state control.'[62] What happened on Vilakazi Street had opened a great gulf between the oppressors and the oppressed. But the task of deciding where all the myriad parts of life should fall between those two groups was not always clear. Should the rent offices, police stations, and WRAB administration offices be targeted? That much seemed obvious, and the students set about attacking these places with unrestrained rage on 16 June. But what about the few libraries and health clinics in Soweto? And what about the schools themselves? These were much more complicated questions, and the students debated them as they ran through the streets. Late that night a journalist overheard a conversation outside Dube library. 'That's a place that can help our people become educated'. 'It's white man's property', said another. After deciding to move on another group came back and set the library alight.[63] It was just one of

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[59] Others, such as the four white women who happened to be making food deliveries at the time were lucky to escape. See Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I., 7.

[60] Dr Melville Leonard Edelstein (b.1919-d.16 June 1976) was born in King William's Town. At the time of his death he had worked in Soweto for eighteen years. Edelstein was the author of an attitudinal study of 200 Sowetan schoolchildren published in 1972. The study has sometimes been seen as evidence of the rising discontent amongst the students. In truth, its findings might have been predicted. For example, the study found that 'Most prefer 'African' to describe their people and object to 'Kaffir'' and 'They would rather live in South Africa under a multiracial government, and would prefer their child to be educated through the medium of English.' See Melville Leonard Edelstein, *What Do Young Africans Think? An Attitude Survey of Urban African Matric. Pupils in Soweto with Special Reference to Stereotyping and Social Distance* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1972), 116.

[61] Dan Montsitsi, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996.

[62] Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt that Shook Apartheid* (London: Zed Books, 2016 [1979]), 182.

[63] As quoted in Pat Hopkins and Helen Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Soweto Uprising* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2001), 97.

dozens of buildings that blazed that night, amongst the ruins, the offices of the African Teachers' Association of South Africa in Jabavu, their attempts to block the language policy having done nothing to stop the bloodshed.[64]

In this dramatic upturning of their old childhood worlds, one notable target was the big municipal beerhalls, built near the train stations for the workers coming off the trains. Alcohol had once played a role supporting children's education. In the 1930s the social reformer Ray E. Phillips[65] observed how on the eve of each term there would be a flurry of parties in the townships as parents sold alcohol to help pay for their children's upcoming education.[66] So often the illegal sale of alcohol was the source of a family's autonomy. The National Party had sought to tightly regulate the sale of alcohol, limiting the public consumption to the beerhalls and using the revenue to fund the township's governance. That the students should have attacked the beerhalls was perhaps obvious. But the students also attacked the smaller locally-owned bottle stores. And in a slogan graffitied on walls, they told of their motivations: 'LESS LIQUOR, MORE EDUCATION!'[67]

Two things are interesting to observe in this linkage. The first is to note the start of a strand of puritanism which would become pronounced in the coming months as the students bound themselves to a strict and abstemious moral code.[68] Drink came to be seen as a key link in the chains of oppression which had kept their parents' generation in subservience, and which they were now determined to break free from. The second is the continued concern with education.

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64 Randall Langa Peteni, *Towards Tomorrow: The Story of the African Teachers' Associations of South Africa* (Algonac, M.I.: Reference Publications, Inc., 1979), 144-145.

65 Ray E. Phillips (b.1889-d.9 March 1967) was born in Wisconsin and educated at Carleton College and Yale University School of Religion. He arrived in South Africa as a missionary in 1918 with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the Congregational Christian Church. In 1940 Phillips founded the Jan H. Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg where Winnie Mandela was trained.

66 'Because of the lack of free education, Native families who wish to educate their children are often forced into the making of illicit liquor or gambling to provide the necessary funds. It has been noted n the Witwatersrand that just before the opening of schools in August and in late January there is an epidemic of "parties" at the homes of parents of children. These parties feature food, drinks, and dancing. Guests pay admission and the proceeds go to pay school expenses.' See Ray E. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand* (Lovedale: The Lovedale Press, 1938), 161. See also Blake Modisane, *Blame Me on History*, (London: Penguin, 1999), 38.

67 Interview with Tebello Motapanyane, 'How June 16 Demo was Planned', *Sechaba* 11 (1977), 57. There were other variations of the slogan. 'WE WANT MORE SCHOOLS, NOT BEERHALLS'. See Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa, June-December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), 144-150.

68 Even if only observed in the breach.

The shootings on Vilakazi Street had transformed a peaceful protest against the government's incursion in the classrooms into something much bigger, a fight from which only one side could triumph.[69] But education still had a fundamental piece to play in that struggle, although exactly how and where the schools would be made to fit was very uncertain. Amidst all the devastation it is extraordinary that only three schools were attacked on 16 June.[70] But this was only the first day. So much of the history of the Soweto uprising as it took shape in people's minds in the coming weeks and months was how the schools would ultimately come to fall on the other side of that fundamental dividing line, left abandoned by the students, their protests taken into the cemeteries and exile, pursued by the police.

Defying desperate pleas from members of the UBC to withhold reinforcements to avoid the space for further deaths and confrontations,[71] Soweto's exit roads were sealed off and huge reinforcements sent into the township on 16 June. Arriving around 2 p.m. in armoured personnel carriers, known colloquially as Hippos ('like a tent blowing in the wind. When we realised it was it was an army vehicle, we fled'),[72] and with helicopters providing support from the sky, the police fired upon the students with submachine guns and FN rifles. At 3.30 p.m. the recently established Riot Unit arrived in Soweto under the command of Colonel Theunis Swanepoel, a thickset, notorious ex-member of the Special Branch, whose torture of high-profile political detainees in

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[69] The spread of the protests in South Africa can be briefly sketched here. On 17 June protests spread to Alexandra, Thembisa and Kagiso near Johannesburg. On 21 June there is unrest in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville, two townships near Pretoria and in Bophutatswana. On 19 July there are violent clashes between students and police at the University of Fort Hare. On 11 August there are violent clashes in Guguletu, Langa and Nyanga, the three major African townships in Cape Town. At least 16 people are killed in the first hours and 27 in the first two days. On 18 August there are clashes in New Brighton, Kwazakele, and Zwide townships by Port Elizabeth. At least 8 are killed. By the end of the uprising more than a hundred urban centres had been impacted. On 9 September there is major unrest in Paarl, northeast of Cape Town. The history of the uprising outside of Soweto has been very underexplored. For a first-hand account of the unrest on the University of the Western Cape's campus, see Cornelius C. Thomas, *Cocktails of Liberty: Contours of a South African Student Uprising in 1976* (Pretoria: South African History Online, 2008). For an account of the protests in Alexandra and Kathorus, see Noor Nieftagodien, 'The Soweto Uprising: Alexandra and Kathorus', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. II, *1970-1980* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2007), 351-359. For an account of events in Thembisa see Noor Nieftagodien and Tshepo Moloi, 'The Soweto Uprising: Thembisa', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. II, *1970-1980* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2007), 359-368.

[70] Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I., 127.

[71] Leonard Mosala, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 23 July 1996.

[72] Dumisane Nkabinde, a student at Pimville senior primary, as quoted in Mark Orkin, ''Democracy Knows No Colour': Rationales for Guerrilla Involvement among Black South Africans', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 659.

the 1960s made him a hugely feared figure in the ANC's senior ranks.[73] Swanepoel immediately directed the Riot Unit to open fire on a crowd of around 4,000 people which had commandeered the crossroads outside Uncle Tom's Hall, a key intersection near Vilakazi Street.[74] As the crowds scattered into ever smaller groups the police spent the rest of the day chasing the students in a deadly game of cat and mouse. Amelia Molapo was just one of the many victims. Eleven years old she was struck by a bullet from a policeman riding inside a Hippo, hitting the base of her spine. She lived with the debilitating injuries for the rest of her life.[75] Sowetans gave Swanepoel a new name for his role overseeing the bloodshed, the 'Beast of Soweto'.[76]

In their actions the police were given the full support of the government. On Friday 18 June, with the unrest in Soweto having spread to other townships around Johannesburg, Alexandra, Kagiso, Thembisa, Katlehong, Mohlakeng, as well as to the campuses of Turfloop, the University of Natal Medical School, and the University of Witwatersrand, John Balthazar Vorster addressed parliament, his words recorded and later broadcast to the nation:

> I cannot come to any other conclusion but that we are dealing here not with a spontaneous outburst but with a deliberate attempt to bring about polarization between whites and blacks. Certain organizations and persons, working together to achieve this, are doing this with a view to obtaining obvious objectives…. This Government will not be intimidated, and instructions have been given to maintain law and order at all costs.[77]

The costs were enormous. By the police's own admission, 96 people were killed during the first few days of the uprising, and more than 1,000 injured.[78] The real figures were likely far higher than

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[73] Theunis Swanepoel (b.1928-d.1998) joined the Oudshoorn police in 1947. During the 1960s Swanepoel was a key individual in the Security Police's notorious 'sabotage squad', responsible for the torture of political detainees. He retired from the police in 1982 before advertising his services as a water diviner and running for parliament in the 1987 election as a Conservative Party candidate. As the National Party entered negotiations, Swanepoel joined the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). After the end of apartheid, Swanepoel retired on his government pension. He did not apply for amnesty at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For an account of one person's torture under Swanepoel see John Schlapobersky's testimony in Hilda Bernstein (ed.), *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 81-87.

[74] Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. II., 10.

[75] Amelia Molapo, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto 16 June Hearings, 23 July 1996.

[76] Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1998), 93.

[77] 'Text of Vorster Statement', *New York Times*, 19 June 1976.

[78] Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 187.

the police were prepared to admit.[79] In Soweto people witnessed piles of bodies wrapped in plastic stacked up high on top of each other in the basement of Baragwanath Hospital and in the yards of the township's police stations.[80] Rumours soon started to swirl of government helicopters landing in the township's cemeteries at dusk, leaving freshly dug unmarked graves behind.[81] An informant told the researchers Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill how after one helicopter left he had seen 'the earth… packed down and sticking out of it was the end of a schoolgirl's girdle.'[82]

On one level, this iron-fisted response provided the government with what it wanted. The rioting in the streets lasted in earnest for just three days. By Saturday things had already become quieter, the police's firepower showing over the unarmed students. By the start of next week the streets were mostly deserted, the heavy police presence aside. But any sense that order had been restored was largely illusory, a fact admitted as much by the government in its decision to deny Sowetans the right to bury their dead. A day of mass funerals planned to lay 47 people to rest on 3 July was banned after the Minister of Justice Jimmy Kruger[83] invoked Section 2 (1) of the Riotous Assemblies Act (No. 17 of 1956), fearful of what they might turn into.[84] In brave defiance a few hundred people met to bury Hector Pieterson at Avalon Cemetery, intended to commemorate all those who had been killed so far.[85] As Pieterson's coffin was lowered the small crowd raised their fists and shouted *Amandla*, their attendance marking many of them out for arrest in the massive wave of detentions that followed in July, the onlooking security forces carefully recording their presence.[86] But if the National Party had achieved anything it was only forcing frightened people to stay in their homes, or to have locked them away. The real struggle for control of Soweto would only properly resume when the National Party asked people to step back out into their lives, and

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[79] Brooks and Brickhill estimate that between June and December 1976 the figure had already likely exceeded 1,000. See *Whirlwind before the Storm*, 256.

[80] Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 186.

[81] Elliot Ndlovu, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto 16 June Hearings, 23 July 1996.

[82] As quoted in Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 258.

[83] James Thomas Kruger (b.20 December 1917-d.9 May 1987) was born in Bethlehem in the Orange Free State. After leaving school in Ventersdorp Kruger worked in the mines before taking a law degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. Kruger was first elected to parliament in 1966 and was appointed Minister of Justice and the Police in 1974, having previously served as a junior minister in the department. In June 1979 Kruger was appointed 'President of the Senate'. He retired from politics the following year.

[84] Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. I., 514.

[85] Harry Mashabela, *A People on the Boil: Reflections on Soweto* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2006), 59.

[86] 'South African Blacks Mourn Their Dead with Slogans and Salutes', *New York Times*, 4 July 1976.

when they asked the students to return to their schools, kept shut since the afternoon of 16 June. It was not what dominated people's attentions, but talk about how and on what terms the schools would be reopened started immediately.

On 17 June, the chairman of WRAB, Mannie Mulder, convened an emergency community meeting at the WRAB offices in New Canada, a small extension just beyond the northern outskirts of Soweto. But the Sowetans dismissed Mulder for being much too junior to discuss the grave developments happening outside. They demanded to meet with M. C. Botha, the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Treurnicht's senior in government.[87] Botha at first refused, but after the Sowetans sought the intercessions of the Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Energy,[88] and Helen Suzman, a lone liberal light in parliament,[89] he agreed to fly from Cape Town for a meeting on Saturday 19 June in Pretoria in the Bantu Administration offices. That a senior minister should fly across the country at the demand of a group of Sowetans was an early sign of the Soweto uprising's tectonic shifts in South African politics; the end of the National Party's denialism during the high apartheid era, and the start of a much more honest reckoning with the state's position in society. Treurnicht meanwhile, whose obstinacy remained undimmed since the start of the shootings, was notably not invited. He told the press that such a meeting was unthinkable, even as the delegates made their way to Pretoria.[90] In this moment of crisis there was no space for the *verkramptes*' hard-line politics.

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87 Michiel Coenraad Botha (b.14 December 1912-d.10 July 1993) was raised in the Orange Free State and educated at the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Pretoria. Elected to parliament in 1953, representing Roodepoort. Botha was Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (1960-1966), Minister of Bantu Administration and Development (1966-1977). He retired from politics in 1978.

88 Piet Koornhof (b.2 August 1925-d.12 November 2007) was born in Leeudoringstad in the Western Transvaal and educated at Stellenbosch University and Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes scholar. Elected to parliament in 1964, Koornhof was a prominent *verligte* in his cabinet positions as Minister of Energy, Minister of Sport and Minister of Co-operation and Development. In 1984 he was appointed ambassador to the United States. After the end of apartheid Koornhof was one of only two government ministers who applied for amnesty. The other was Adriaan Vlok.

89 Helen Suzman (b. 7 November 1917-d.1 January 2009) was born in Germiston near Johannesburg. Educated at Parktown Convent, Suzman attended the University of the Witwatersrand where she became a lecturer in economic history. She was elected to parliament in 1953 as a member of the United Party representing Houghton. Suzman was the only United Party MP to retain their seat in the 1961 election, becoming a lone dissenting opponent of apartheid in parliament.

90 Leonard Mosala, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 23 July 1996.

The Sowetan delegation that travelled to Pretoria was led by the chairman of the UBC, Mr T. J. Makhaya.[91] After everyone in the room on the third floor of the Bantu Administration Building on Paul Kruger Street prayed together, the Sowetans told Botha that if there was to be any hope of peace, the language directive had to be withdrawn immediately. Botha prevaricated, defaulting to the ambiguity and procedural politics that had long helped cloak the government's weaknesses in the schools. The proper place for these discussions, he said, was 'between principals and School Boards with their Circuit Inspectors'.[92] But the cindered buildings and husks of charred cars made a mockery of the bluff of the old struggle for who had control of Soweto's schools. With scenes of unprecedented protest broadcast to the world, the government was soon forced to admit defeat. On 6 July Botha gave a televised address and announced that the National Party was finally abandoning the 50:50 language policy.[93] On hearing the news Makhaya said, 'I think it is what the African community is looking for. I think they will be happy with it.' Part of Makhaya's delegation, Lennox Mlonzi, said, 'A fight has been won.'[94] Indeed, a fight had been won and with profound repercussions that can easily be glossed. In the next chapter we will see how education during apartheid never looked the same again after 1976. Ten years after the start of the Soweto uprising, just eleven schools in a newly re-branded Department of Education and Training taught in Afrikaans, part of a massively expanded network of 12,393 schools, many hundreds of new secondary schools built in the townships.[95] For a new generation born on 16 June though, what it meant to win a fight against the government had taken on radical new meaning.

One of the first to realise that nothing would ever be the same again was Winnie Mandela, whose home sat almost directly opposite Phefeni Junior Secondary on Vilakazi Street. Ever since her husband's arrest in 1962, Winnie Mandela had been forced to suffer an isolated life, left to bring up her two daughters alone, persecuted by the police, a series of strict banning orders and

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91 The delegation was made up of six UBC councillors, T. J. Makhaya, R. J. Maponya, S. M. Motlha, L. Mosala, P. M. Lengene, and L. Mlonzi. Also present were H. H. Dlamlenze, secretary general of the African Teachers' Association, S. S. Selepe, a former teacher and radio announcer, Rev. Mahabane, M. T. Moerane, and a student, M. M. Sebetlelo.

92 Minutes of a Meeting between the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr M. C. Botha, officials of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, the Chairman and Officials of the West Rand Administration Board, and a Delegation from the Soweto Urban Bantu Council and other Soweto Leaders, held in the Bantu Administration Building, Pretoria, 19 June 1976, HPW/A2675/III/798.

93 'Language is 'up to schools'–Botha', *The Star*, 6 July 1976.

94 As quoted in 'Schools language rule is dropped', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1976.

95 '11 Afrikaans-medium black schools', *Eastern Province Herald*, 14 June 1986.

imprisonments keeping her out of public life. But on the eve of the uprising Winnie Mandela was given a glimpse of freedom. In September 1975, her most recent five-year banning order had recently been allowed to lapse, giving her a rare opportunity to involve herself in her community. She made use of that freedom to involve herself with the long struggle for education just as it entered its final hours.

Ten days before the shootings outside her door, Winnie Mandela gave a speech at a Soweto Parents' Association meeting in Naledi Hall. Founded two years earlier, the SPA was a classic example of the pre-1976 politics. Led by Dr Aaron Matlhare, a doctor trained at the University of Edinburgh, the organisation was middle-class, respectable, and deeply invested in education. Indeed, the SPA had only welcomed Winnie Mandela because they thought her legal connections might prove useful in the fight against the Department of Bantu Education's language policy in the courts. But that night Winnie Mandela cast all practical questions aside, delivering a fiery, impassioned speech. It was, 'an absolute disgrace that our children fight battles for us whilst we… [illegible] ….around looking for the actual tribal origin of these children before grave matters are attended to'. 'You will agree with me', she said, 'our young generation will spit on our graves, our generation of cowards.' Dressed in an African print-dress,[96] Winnie concluded her speech with a rousing peroration:

> Let us leave this meeting with the spirit of rebirth of purification from the humiliation of domination. If you are to free yourselves, you must break the chains of oppression yourselves. Only then can we express our dignity; only when we have liberated ourselves can we co-operate with other groups. Any acceptance of humiliation, indignity, any insults is acceptance of inferiority. We have to think of ourselves as men and women. As one quotation goes 'Once the mind is free, the body will soon be free'.[97]

The speech appears extraordinarily prescient today. But for the 300 people gathered in Naledi Hall, the experience of listening to this speech was bemusing, not least to be charged with cowardice by someone who had only so recently become interested what was happening in the classrooms. Matlhare would later recall before the Cillié Commission that the audience were 'quite surprised

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96 Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, 22.

97 'Speech by Winnie Mandela at launch of the Soweto Parents Association, early June 1976 (abridged)', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge,* Vol. V., 574-575.

and shaken by this.'[98] To be sure very few people in Soweto had reached the types of Manichean conclusions Winnie Mandela had arrived at before 16 June 1976. The government's attempts to pin Winnie as the mastermind of the uprising should not be taken seriously.[99]

But if there was no conspiracy, there was a strange type of connection that bound Winnie Mandela to the events of 1976. That Winnie had reached her conclusions of Manichean struggle on the eve of the Soweto uprising spoke of her own experience of violence at the hands of the state. In 1969 she was detained by police and held for 491 days under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act (No. 83 of 1967), kept in a windowless cell with a lightbulb never turned off. During this time she was tortured by the man who led the Riot Unit into Soweto in 1976. For five days Swanepoel refused to let her sleep, leaving no part of her life untouched in his questioning. It was the moment she felt she understood the fundamental truth of apartheid, the violence at its heart.[100] As she told a journalist in 1984, 'I realized then that the Afrikaner had closed the chapter of negotiation… [O]ur patience had been tested and had endured for too long. I knew then that somehow, there had to be a political crisis in this country, for us to reach the ultimate goal.'[101]

Now, with her experience of violence at the hands of the police now shared by thousands, Winnie Mandela threw herself into the crisis. As people scrambled for answers during those first chaotic days, she was at the heart of a series of clandestine community meetings, desperately seeking to make sense of what had happened. At a meeting on 21 June, the SPA was rechristened the Black Parents' Association, taking responsibility for coordinating transport in Soweto, providing medical care to the students, and planning the funerals. Winnie Mandela was appointed to the executive committee,[102] with Dr Manas Buthelezi as chairman.[103] But it was her leadership

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[98] Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Other Places in South Africa, Morning Session, 7 February 1977, Vol. 99, 728-9, Digital Innovation South Africa (https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/tra19770207026019a).

[99] On the government's attempt to portray Winnie Mandela as the mastermind see Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, 'Controlling Women: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2000), 585-614.

[100] For a careful discussion of Winnie Mandela's torture see Jonny Steinberg, *Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage* (New York, N.Y.: Knopf, 2023), 226-234.

[101] As quoted in Steinberg, *Winnie and Nelson*, 322.

[102] Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, 55.

[103] Dr Manas Buthelezi (b.February 1935-d.20 April 2016) was born in Mahlabathini, KwaCeza and educated at St Francis, Mariannhill, where he trained to be a teacher. Buthelezi later studied theology at Eshiyane and Umphomulo Theological College, before moving to the United States to complete a masters in theology at Yale University and a doctorate at Drew University. Returning to South Africa, Buthelezi was prominently involved in the Black Consciousness movement. In 1977 Buthelezi was appointed Bishop of the Elcsa-Central Diocese of the Lutheran Church.

that stood out. With astonishing bravery she led a march on Protea police station just days after the shootings, demanding the release of all students, throwing her shoe at the policeman in charge.[104] She was a prominent figure at Hector Pieterson's funeral on 3 July, photographed at the graveside in a black leather jacket with her fist held above her head.[105] Winnie Mandela might not have organised the uprising, but as much as anyone led the uprising during those first chaotic days, it was her.

When Winnie Mandela heard the news of the government's concession on 6 July she brusquely dismissed its significance. 'The principals will try to please their masters in Pretoria. As long as there is Bantu Education there will be unrest. Small concessions are not a solution.'[106] She had grasped the uprising's fundamental political realignments. And just as she predicted, the government's concession did nothing to end the unrest. Nine days after Botha made his announcement, Chiawelo Secondary was set on fire, sporadic clashes with police reported on the streets.[107] In response Jimmy Kruger announced that he was using the powers of the Internal Security Act (No. 44 of 1950) to postpone the reopening of schools until 'the blacks show a willingness to use the schools for the right purpose.'[108] But the government could not delay the reopening for long if it wanted to prove that it had control of Soweto. A date was soon set, Thursday 22 July.[109]

Ahead of the reopening, the students who planned the march at the Donaldson Community Centre put the word out that their classmates should go back to school where they could regroup and talk properly about what had happened to them for the first time since 16 June. But the massive police presence made many students afraid of leaving their homes. In 1976 Joan Hoffman was one of the very few white teachers employed in Soweto's schools. She later described her journey back to work at Jabulani High on 22 July:

> I drove… past buildings black and gutted, beerhalls with shattered windows, clinics that looked as though people had jumped on the roofs. The weird, creepy silence deepened as

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104 Winnie Mandela, *Part of My Soul*, Anne Benjamin (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1985), 116.

105 For the photograph, see Magubane, *Magubane's South Africa*, 101.

106 As quoted in 'Schools language rule is dropped', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1976.

107 Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, Vol. II., 80.

108 As quoted in Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 96. See also 'Schools are shut by South Africans', *New York Times*, 16 July 1976.

109 Hopkins and Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show*, 125-126.

> I went further into Soweto…. On the way out I saw a small boy bending or pretending to pick up a stone, but a woman shouted and he stopped. At school there were only a few students.[110]

It was estimated that just half of Soweto's secondary school students returned on 22 July.[111] For the principals, once towering figures of authority now denigrated as puppets, low student numbers created a problem. On Monday 26 July they held a closed-door meeting, issuing their own demand that the police 'be removed from the vicinity of schools'.[112] The government refused to withdraw the police from the vicinity of the schools, and attendance at the schools remained at little more than half capacity. But for the National Party, low student numbers presented a kind of problem too. Ever since 1955 the government had struggled to turn students away from Soweto's schools. Now, unable to coax the students back but desperate for some kind of order to be returned, Kruger announced a special exception to the ban on public meetings, sanctioning a public meeting in the hope that Sowetans would agree among themselves to return to school. It was a remarkable moment when two generations met face-to-face to discuss what to do next.

On Sunday 1 August, 3,000 people sat in the Jabulani amphitheatre. On the stage were representatives from the UBC, the school boards, and the school principals. Surrounding them in the amphitheatre's crescent seats the students and many of their parents. The man tasked with chairing the meeting was M. T. Moerane, one-time president of ASSECA. Few people had given more to Soweto's schools. Yet when Moerane started to speak, his words were met with heckles. It set the tone of the meeting. Moerane welcomed Lennox Mlonzi to the stage. Like Moerane, Mlonzi had played a major role in Soweto's education history before 1976. The leader of the Soweto Progressive Party, and a member of ASSECA, some in the crowd may well have listened to Mlonzi address 200 people in Mofolo Hall in February 1974, when he called on all government appointees to resign from their schoolboards.[113] And when Mlonzi started to speak he seemed at least to have caught the new mood. 'We shall not rest or sleep until every student had been

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110 Joan Hoffman, 'Fragments of a View', in Lionel Abrahams and Walter Saunders (eds.), *Quarry '77: New South African Writing* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1977), 52-53.

111 Hopkins and Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show*, 126.

112 'Five officials must go, say Soweto principals', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 July 1976. One of the circuit inspectors was removed from his post, transferred to Kimberley on 1 September. The Secretary for the Bantu Education Department, G. J. Rousseau, however was adamant that this not related to the uprising. See 'Inspector in schools row is transferred', *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 July 1976.

113 '200 call for BED inquiry', *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 February 1974.

released', words met with cheers. And as he went on, he went further, placing the current moment in a history as old as 1912, that is to say as old as the ANC. Yet for all his passion and clever referencing, Mlonzi's appeal was ultimately for the children to return to their classrooms. And the reason he used was the old justification. 'These schools are ours,' he said, imploring the children to 'go back to school whilst we parents are continuing to struggle.' Once this sentiment had laid the foundations for the struggle for the classroom. Now it was rejected. Mlonzi was jeered from the stage. Three students then took to the stage and outlined how they now saw things. The issue with Afrikaans, they said, was 'just one aspect of the whole issue', telling the audience how they 'envisaged a future minus oppression.' They told the meeting how 'they are prepared to go on—uncompromisingly', telling the adults on the stage that they 'should go on with their yesteryear attitude of accepting the "status quo" and leave Students to do their thing.'[114]

Having dismissed the idea that old struggle could be returned to, the next day the students held their own meeting behind closed doors at Morris Isaacson to discuss how the new struggle should be written. It was at this meeting that the Action Committee was reconstituted as the Soweto Students' Representative Committee, each secondary and junior secondary school responsible for sending two elected representatives to the Committee, creating a tight bond between the leaders and their peers. Mashinini was elected as chairman and Murphy Morobe selected as the vice-chairman.[115] Keeping the students tightly knit together would become profoundly important to what the SSRC hoped to achieve. As Mashinini said: 'We can only conquer when we have a strong standpoint and stand as one.'[116] The students were showing a remarkable intuition in realising what the schools offered as a basis for organising, as well as what their identity as students meant for the power of their actions. In a statement issued at the end of the meeting, the SSRC declared, 'The statement by [Police Commissioner, General] Mr Gert Prinsloo that the racist regime will not succumb to the demands of a "handful [of] students." Instead we are the voice of the people and our demands shall be met…' The police shootings on 16 June had given Soweto's schoolchildren a rare moral authority, and they would not let go of that identity easily. The SSRC called on the students to remain at school and condemned 'The

114 'Report by anonymous African on a public meeting, Jabulani Amphitheatre, Soweto, 1 August 1976', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 575-578.
115 'Pupils form new body', *The World*, 3 August 1976.
116 'Kids told – get back to school', *The World*, 2 August 1976.

action of elements burning schools. We believe that is no black man's action.' They were asked to keep their discipline and carry on studying. 'We still have our end exams to write and we must have our priorities sorted.[117]And it was to lead a revolution as students that the SSRC announced a three-day general strike from 4 August. On the first day a mass march was planned from Soweto to John Vorster Square in Johannesburg, the police headquarters from whose notorious tenth-floor windows it was widely known that people had been dropped to their deaths.[118] The optimism among the students was unbounded. As one student said of the plan, 'If we get the parents on our side, we can call out a strike; if we call out a strike the economy will collapse; if the economy collapses we will have black rule in 1977.'[119] A new academic year and a new revolutionary era might coincide.

So it was that two days later, Wednesday 4 August, exactly seven weeks after the fateful march to Orlando Stadium, Soweto's students got changed into their school uniforms again before heading to a set of prearranged locations, this time to the railway stations and main intersections, building barricades to block the busses to Johannesburg. As the traditional rush hours passed the students gathered for the start of the nine-mile march along the Soweto Highway to Johannesburg, emptied of its usual traffic. The bravery required of people to start that march was extraordinary. If those who marched on 16 June had had no idea what was waiting them, the estimated 20,000 students and adults knew exactly what lay ahead of them. As the first crowds left the outskirts Soweto they encountered a massive police cordon outside New Canada railway station. The police opened fire, killing at least three people, forcing the massive crowds back into Soweto.[120] That night there was widespread fighting on Soweto's streets for the first time since June, the SSRC's counsel of nonviolence extending only so far as the police chased the students firing at will. Vengeance took hold of some of the students who attacked the homes of black policemen and members of the UBC, including an attack on Makhaya's home.[121] But the following morning the

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117 'Press statement by Tsietsi Mashinini, chairman of the Soweto Students' Representative Council, August 18?, 1976 (handwritten)', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 578-579. For an account of the meeting on 2 August at Morris Isaacson, see Lynda Schuster, *A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2006), 81-82.

118 Seven people are thought to have died at John Vorster Square under the National Party, including Ahmed Timol, a schoolteacher who was found on the pavement outside John Vorster Square having been thrown from the tenth floor on 27 October 1971.

119 As quoted in Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 198.

120 'Police open fire as students riot in South Africa', *New York Times*, 5 August 1976.

121 'Official black leaders have little real power', *New York Times*, 8 August 1976.

SSRC showed the strength of its organisation and the depth of its followers' commitment to nonviolence. On 5 August as many as 5,000 people attempted to march on Johannesburg again. Holding banners, 'DON'T SHOOT', 'WE ARE NOT FIGHTING, WE ARE CRYING', they were soon forced back by members of the Riot Squad who had camouflaged themselves on the open veld.[122]

The two attempts to march on Johannesburg had failed. But the SSRC's call for a general strike was a remarkable success. Between 4 and 6 August, workplaces in Johannesburg reported an average absentee rate of 60 per cent.[123] Soweto's place as a reservoir of cheap labour was being turned against the system. Buoyed by this success, the leaders of the SSRC quickly called for a second three-day stay-away, 23-25 August. This strike built upon the successes of the first, reports that 80 per cent of Soweto's workforce stayed home.[124] Students in the Cape boycotted their schools in solidarity with Soweto. For the first time ordinary white South Africans were made to feel the impact of the uprising in their lives as the cogs of the South African economy began to slow. And with a foreign policy crisis on South Africa's borders following the collapse of Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique and Angola, there were signs of cracks in the intellectual edifice of apartheid at home. In August, Dr Willem de Klerk,[125] the editor of *Die Transvaler*, the newspaper that Verwoerd once edited, publicly called on the government to stop 'windowdressing', urging Vorster to commit to major reforms.[126] These are the types of conditions political scientists look towards to measure the outcome successful revolutions.[127] But for all the National Party's weaknesses, the government's control of the state security apparatus remained unquestioned. And with it Vorster was determined to stop the uprising, no matter the cost. On 10 August, Vorster's cabinet made a fateful decision—that 'the [student] movement be broken and the police should take more drastic and harsh action that will lead to more deaths.'[128]

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122 'March halted by South Africans', *New York Times*, 6 August 1976.

123 'Shots again rout Soweto blacks', *New York Times*, 7 August 1976; See also Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 211.

124 Archie Mafeje, 'Soweto and its Aftermath', *Review of African Political Economy*, 5 (1978), 19.

125 Dr Willem 'Wimpie' De Klerk (b.12 April 1928-d.7 August 2009) was the older brother of F. W. de Klerk. He was an ordained clergyman before becoming editor of *Die Transvaler* in 1973.

126 As quoted in 'Police open fire as students riot in South Africa', *New York Times*, 5 August 1976.

127 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

128 As quoted in Hopkins and Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show*, 116.

As the students' faith in their revolution grew during August, the repression reached new levels, indiscriminate acts of violence committed by men who knew they faced no consequences. Police started to patrol the streets in unmarked cars, their shiny chrome aerials a giveaway to the most eagle-eyed. On 26 August, Johannes Dube was walking with a young friend in Mofolo when an unmarked car pulled up. Inside were four uniformed white men who ordered the two boys to stand still before pulling their guns, one of the bullets severing Dube's optic nerve.[129] And in late August the police hit upon an innovation in their tactics too, exploiting a tension in Soweto which erupted in violence once before, September 1957, when 40 people died in fighting between the Dube hostel dwellers and their neighbours in the course of one bloody weekend.[130]

In 1976 there were ten migrant hostels in Soweto, great concrete compounds for single migrant labourers.[131] Each hostel housed around 5,000 men, the residents forced to share sixteen-person rooms, provided with a small coal stove and a locker to keep their possessions. The only thing that kept these men in Soweto was jobs, employment now threatened by the students' revolt. Of everyone in Soweto the migrant labourers, or the *amoveralls* ('overall wearers') as many who slept in the matchbox houses disparagingly called them,[132] stood to gain the least and lose the most.

On the second day of the second strike, as groups of students stood on the barricades in the streets and picketed the railway stations, a fire was started at Mzimhlope hostel in Meadowlands. Who started the fire has never been proven, but what remains clear is that as the angry residents piled out onto the streets the police were already in position waiting, spending the day corralling the hostel dwellers as around a thousand men armed with 'butchers' knives, pangas, tomahawks, intshumentshu (sharpened spikes), kerries and stones'[133] attacked the students' pickets, broke into people's homes, beating anyone who crossed their path. A sixteen-year-old

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129 Johannes Dube, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 23 July 1996.

130 See 'Report of the Commission appointed by the City Council to enquire into the causes and circumstances of the riots which took place in the vicinity of the Dube Hostel in the South-Western Townships over the weekend 14th/15th September, 1957'.

131 These were Diepkloof, Dobsonville, Dobsonville (New Wing), Meadowlands, Dube, Jabulani, Lifateng, Mapetla, Meadowlands (commonly known as Mzimhlope), Nancefield, and Orlando West. On their construction, see Willem J. P. Carr, *Soweto: Its Creation, Life and Decline* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1990), 81.

132 Eddie Webster, ''Stay-aways' and the Black Working Class: Evaluating a Strategy', *Labour, Capital and Society*, 14 (1981), 27.

133 Report from *The Star* as cited in Archie Mafeje, 'Soweto and its Aftermath', *Review of African Political Economy* 5 (1978), 20.

schoolboy who sought shelter in a church was dragged out and beaten to death.[134] At the end of a day that left many Sowetans packing their homes, a journalist who hid himself in a coal box by Mzimhlope hostel heard the police call an end to the violence with loudspeakers, reprimanding the hostel dwellers for their excesses damaging WRAB property.[135]

The violence in late August was amongst the costliest during the entire uprising. Between 24 and 26 August it was estimated that at least 26 people were killed in Soweto.[136] And in later years as progressive intellectuals sought to diagnose the failure of the Soweto uprising to turn into a revolution what happened in Meadowlands assumed totemic significance. For the likes of Archie Mafeje and Baruch Hirson, the fighting at Mzimhlope hostel ultimately betrayed the narrow class base of the students' revolt, the SSRC's failure to build connections with the workers, a lesson for future revolutionaries to take forward.[137] But this popular analysis obscured the fact that the second strike was an even bigger success than the first, with around 80 per cent of workers staying at home and the residents of the other hostels in Soweto joining the students.[138] And it ignored how the tensions at Mzimhlope were able to be successfully negotiated too. In the days that followed, emergency meetings were held and truces agreed.[139] When the SSRC called for a third strike starting on 13 September, the hostel dwellers at Mzimhlope actually came out on the pickets. This strike was even bigger than the second, and for the first time the SSRC's call began to be heeded by people far beyond the Johannesburg region. In Cape Town as many as 200,000 workers joined the SSRC's strike.[140] Across South Africa as many as 750,000 people participated in the SSRC's third general strike.[141] What was unfolding was beginning to resemble what happened in Russia in 1905, when soldiers fired on a crowd outside the Winter Palace, triggering widespread unrest across the country that threatened to bring the Tsarist regime to its knees.[142] But just as happened in Russia

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134 Hopkins and Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show*, 142.

135 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 216.

136 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 249.

137 Mafeje, 'Soweto and its aftermath', 17-30; Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*. Also Glenn Moss, 'Crisis and Conflict: Soweto 1976-1977', (M.A. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1982).

138 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 208.

139 The SSRC also published leaflets urging solidarity. See for example, ''To All Residents of Soweto, Hostels, Reef and Pretoria.' Flyer in English and Zulu by Soweto Students' Representative Council, September 7, 1976', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 579-580.

140 Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 254.

141 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 230.

142 Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014 [1996]), 173-212.

in 1905 a swelling revolutionary consciousness proved no match in the end for the government's force of arms. As in Russia, it was ultimately a Pyrrhic victory, the bloody reprisals forestalling the end of a regime whose legitimacy emerged from the crisis weaker than ever. But in the moment, it guaranteed the survival of the regime.

The decisive day that sent the Soweto uprising into retreat was 17 September 1976, the last day of the SSRC's third strike, and the day Henry Kissinger was scheduled to arrive in South Africa, part of the frenzied negotiations regarding events in Rhodesia.[143] That President Ford's secretary of state should have chosen to visit South Africa at this time roused great anger in the townships, and the SSRC was determined to protest. But the escalating violence in August had taken a toll. The call for students to carry on going to school had been followed, the schools held onto as beacons of safety and collective organising. But walking to school in a uniform had become incredibly dangerous, and as the violence escalated fewer were prepared to make their way. At the end of August the principal of Orlando High, Thamasanqa Kambule, spoke about the effects of the police's violence: 'It is an Herculean task we face in trying to induce kids to return to the classrooms.'[144]

And it was not only the SSRC's foundations in the schools that was suffering badly from the government's repression, but its leadership too. The most wanted person in South Africa, Mashinini fled into exile, crossing into Botswana on 23 August.[145] Winnie Mandela was arrested on 13 August and detained in Johannesburg's notorious Fort, a day in which arrests were made across the country. Exercising any form of leadership had become very difficult. And so to protest against Kissinger's visit the SSRC changed tactics. An eighteen-year-old student at Naledi High, Khotso 'Tiny' Seatlholo succeeded Mashinini as SSRC leader.[146] Instead of taking to the streets,

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143 See Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and its Search for Survival* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225-259.

144 As quoted in 'Bantu Education Act 'must go'', *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 August 1976.

145 Schuster, *A Burning Hunger*, 88-93.

146 Khotso Seatlholo (b.5 November 1958-d.13 February 2004) was educated at Naledi High. In 1977 he fled into exile after being caught in a gunfight, joining Mashinini in forming the South African Youth Revolutionary Council. In 1981 Seatlholo was arrested after smuggling himself back into South Africa. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison. During this time he completed his matric exams and a BA degree with Honours. Seatlholo was released in 1990.

the scene of such bloodshed, Seatlholo called on the students to occupy their schools, a 'within campus protest'.[147] On this day there could be no claim by the police that they had been provoked.

At Sekano-Ntoane the students gathered in the school on an unusually hot day, fixing protest signs to the school fence. 'DR KISSINGER, GET OUT OF AZANIA'.[148] Late that morning, an armoured personnel carrier approached the school and drove through the locked gates, police shooting at the students with shotguns as they desperately tried to flee the school. Dan Montsitsi was in Sekano-Ntoane. Speaking before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, Montsitsi could not bring himself to describe the attack, only its immediate aftermath, sorting clothes and shoes soaked in blood, transporting bodies to Baragwanath Hospital.[149] A school principal who witnessed what happened said, 'It was ugly, I have never seen anything like it.'[150] The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that 6 people were killed, and at least 35 wounded.[151]

The attack on Sekano-Ntoane has not been well remembered; there was no photographer this time. Nonetheless it was a decisive moment in the history of the uprising. If the shootings on 16 June were responsible for driving a new stark line through society, separating the oppressors from the oppressed, the attack on Sekano-Ntoane marked the moment when a critical mass of Soweto's students decided that the schools belonged on the other side of that line. Earlier hopes in August that the students should carry on going to school as if the start of a new academic year in 1977 and a new revolutionary dawn might appear together were blown away. Attendance at the schools now dropped precipitously.[152] On the weekend of 9 October a school in Jabavu East was set on fire. In Diepkloof the principal's office at Tlotlego Higher Primary was also set alight.[153] Then, during the early hours of 15 October, a decisive message was scrawled on the walls of Orlando High:

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147 'Press release by Khotso Seatlholo, chairman of the Soweto Students' Representative Council, October 29, 1976', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 585-591.

148 'Police kill at least one in Soweto during an anti-Kissinger protest', *New York Times*, 18 September 1976.

149 Dan Montsitsi, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996.

150 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 332.

151 ''We didn't stone police'', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 September 1976.

152 'Soweto schools still half empty', *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 September 1976.

153 'Arsonists strike two schools', *The World* 12 October 1976.

> Vorster and Kruger will write the examinations. Schools will close on November 1. You enter through this gate at your own risk.[154]

Four nights later, Morris Isaacson was set on fire, the school's library destroyed.[155]

And it was on finally releasing their claim on the schools that the SSRC's earlier intuition that their identity as students was integral to their success leading a revolution was proven right. After the schools were abandoned, the SSRC called for a fourth stayaway, 1-5 November, this time to mark a period of mourning in the build-up to what was being called Black Christmas, a period in which there would be no festivities, drinking, or shopping. An SSRC pamphlet distributed in the townships proclaimed, 'Soweto and all Black townships are now going into a period of MOURNING for the dead. We are to pay respect to all students and adults murdered by the police.'[156] The workers had been willing to follow the SSRC's towards a general strike. They would not follow the students into this new macabre phase of the uprising. The SSRC's fourth and final stayaway was largely ignored.[157] Those students who clung to the idea of revolutionary change were now acting alone. And alone the uprising was becoming increasingly unmoored from worldly constraints, pushed towards its most extreme conclusions. In the final months of 1976, the Soweto uprising started to enter new psychic territory around the meaning of death, a politics that betrays easy understanding.

On 17 October the first of a new type of funeral was held for Dumisani Mbatha, a sixteen-year-old boy who went missing on 23 September, six days after the attack on Sekano-Ntoane, part of a desperate final attempt to take the protests into the heart of white Johannesburg. Mbatha was amongst a crowd of around 400 students who disguised themselves amongst the workers, stealing aboard the commuter trains heading to Johannesburg's Park Station.[158] Swiftly arrested on the streets of downtown Johannesburg by the waiting police, Mbatha died in Modderbee Prison two days later. Twenty-two days later, as many as 15,000 people attended Mbatha's funeral in Soweto, the last type of public gathering not banned by police. As a measure of the changes wrought by

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154 'Students plan to boycott examinations', *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 October 1976.

155 'Early hours attack', *The World*, 20 October 1976.

156 ''To All Fathers and Mothers, Brothers and Sisters, Friends and Workers, in All Cities, Towns and Villages in the Republic of South Africa.' Flyer in English and Sesotho by the Soweto Students' Representative Council, October 15, 1976', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 583-585.

157 'It's work as usual as stay-away fails', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 November 1976.

158 'South Africa plans multiracial sports', *New York Times*, 24 September 1976.

months of hopes checked at every turn by violent repression, the difference between the atmosphere of solemn defiance that marked Hector Pieterson's small funeral on 3 July and Mbatha's funeral was extraordinary. People gathered in their thousands, not to mourn Mbatha's passing, but to celebrate a martyr.[159] The following weekend a mass funeral was held for Jacob Zungwane Mashabane, found dead in Johannesburg's infamous Fort prison on 5 October, the police's allegation that he had hung himself. On this day the terrible intimacy that bound the students' protests in the cemeteries to the police's violence was made clear. As the police fired upon the mass crowds in Doornkop Cemetery, the students stood their ground, some standing in the freshly dug graves to shield themselves from the bullets.[160] Seven people were killed and 51 injured that day.[161] Straining to describe these new scenes played out weekend after weekend in the final months of 1976, one historian wrote: 'It was a macabre game, in which the police seemed determined to show that they were the true servants of death.'[162] At the end of October, Seatlholo issued a press statement, as crisp expression as how the meaning of death had begun to change as has been left on record. 'The struggle for my freedom shall go on until each and every one of us drops dead. This is a vow, the vow that the Black youth have taken over the dead bodies, and written with the blood of our wounded brothers.'[163]

Among the most acute observers of the students' changing relationship to death was Steve Biko, kept far from Soweto by the terms of his banning order that restricted him to King William's Town, a small trading town in the Eastern Cape.[164] Speaking shortly before his own death at the hands of the police in September 1977, Biko gave an interview in which he reflected on the new eschatology:

> …you see, the dramatic thing about the bravery of these youths is that they have now discovered, or accepted, what everybody knows, that the bond between life and death is absolute. You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you

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159 'Soweto on the brink', *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 October 1976.

160 Murphy Morobe, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 23 July 1996. See also 'Police shots kill at least 3 more blacks in Soweto', *New York Times*, 25 October 1976.

161 Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm*, 339.

162 Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 208.

163 'Press release by Khotso Seatlholo, chairman of the Soweto Students' Representative Council, October 29, 1976', in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. V., 585-591.

164 Saleem Badat, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment Under Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012).

> can't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicizing thing. So you die in the riots. For a hell of a lot of them, in fact, there's really nothing to lose—almost literally, given the kind of situations that they come from.[165]

With every avenue of protest having been closed by the police, dying had become a last way of asserting one's humanity, of making one's resistance known. And as death became something not to be mourned or avoided, but to be embraced and celebrated, many students turned to the question of whether a commitment to nonviolence had any value in this new world.

One of the first people to think seriously about how the police could be fought back with violence was a recent graduate of Morris Isaacson, Elias 'Roller' Masinga, another member of that small group who led the meeting at the Donaldson Community Centre on 13 June, and who had gone on to lead the SSRC.[166] Masinga though, had other ideas. On 1 July 1976, Soweto's streets deserted of people, Masinga boarded a train in Johannesburg bound for Mozambique, seeking to make contact with representatives from the ANC-in-exile. Through crackled broadcasts on Radio Freedom, the ANC had kept the idea of armed resistance alive. Tuning in on short-wave radios, people had listened to the start of each broadcast, 'This is Radio Freedom, the voice of the African National Congress, South Africa's tried-and-tested revolutionary movement', accompanied with the sound of machine-gun fire before a cry of *Amandla Ngawethu!*[167]

For all the ANC's propaganda, Masinga could not have known how badly placed the ANC were to help the young Sowetans in their fight with the police. The ANC's army was tiny, little more than a thousand recruits in 1975.[168] Trained in rural warfare, its recruits prided themselves on their professionalism and ability to plan complex, sophisticated operations. Unruly schoolchildren with heads filled of dreams of urban war were alien to how Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers thought of themselves and the armed struggle. And if the size of this army raised serious

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165 'Steve Biko on death: The young South African martyr tells how it will happen', *The New Republic*, 7 January 1978.

166 Elias 'Roller' Masinga (b.1953-d. April 2011) was born in Sophiatown. His family was forced to move to Soweto in 1959, relocating to Senaoane. He was educated at Morris Isaacson, graduating in 1975. Masinga was arrested at the end of 1976.

167 As Murphy Morobe remembered listening to Radio Freedom broadcasts before the uprising, 'I think perhaps at that time we were even much more fascinated rather than the content of what was being said but more by the, by the militancy of what was being said was that somehow appealed to our youthful zeal'. See Murphy Morobe, interview with Raymond Suttner, Johannesburg, 26 August 2003, Raymond Suttner Collection.

168 Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 156.

questions about how effective this force could ever be, there was a model for what the ANC hoped to achieve. In 1956 Fidel Castro stepped onto the coast of Cuba with 82 guerrillas, taking to the hills of the Sierra Maestra. Militarily Castro's band hardly posed a threat. But symbolically their example was inspirational, triggering the collapse of the Batista regime. In the space of little more than a year Castro triumphantly entered Havana, showing to the world how a tiny group of guerrillas could 'detonate' a political revolution. The ANC was quick to embrace Castro's example.[169] When police raided the underground headquarters of Umkhonto we Sizwe at Liliesleaf farm in July 1963, they found plans for 'Operation Mayibuye'. Here the ANC's debts to the Cubans were explicit:

> … The objective military conditions in which the movement finds itself makes the possibility of a general uprising leading to direct military struggle an unlikely one. Rather, as in Cuba, the general uprising must be sparked off by organised and well prepared guerrilla operations during the course of which the masses of people will be drawn in and armed.[170]

The route to power led through the countryside, not the cities. Not through the masses, but by a handful of well-trained and dedicated revolutionaries. It was a dream of what South Africa's future might look like but one deeply entangled with the ANC's past. In the bloody annals of the twentieth century, the Cuban Revolution stands out as relatively unstained. And for the ANC at this time, that fact was of supreme significance. A single event, almost entirely forgotten today, had taught them why violence was to be approached with the utmost caution and restraint, how quickly it could turn into something dangerously uncontrollable and self-defeating.

Back in 1952,, when the ANC still existed as a legal organisation, the party launched the Defiance Campaign. Inspired by Gandhi's *satyagraha*,[171] the Defiance Campaign called upon all

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169 Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Penguin, 1961). See also Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2004), 147-189.

170 ''Operation Mayibuye.' Draft memorandum found by police at Liliesleaf farm, Rivonia, Johannesburg, July 11, 1963', in Thomas G. Karis and Gail Gerhart (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. III*, Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 649-656.

171 See Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison, W.I.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 387. On Gandhi's own time in South Africa see Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (London: Allen Lane, 2013). Gandhi's views on violence can be easily simplified. On Gandhi's complex views of violence see Faisal Devji, 'The Paradox of Nonviolence', *Public Culture*, 23 (2011), 269-274.

South Africa's racially oppressed to invite their own arrest, brazenly ignoring apartheid's most flagrant restrictions on their liberties. The Campaign started modestly if well enough. At the Campaign's highpoint in September 1952, 2,500 people were arrested.[172] But as the Campaign dragged on, a pattern of violence soon made the ANC nervous about what forces they might be stirring in society. On 18 October 1952, a crowd rioted in Port Elizabeth, setting fire to a cinema and killing three white men as they tried to escape the flames.[173] Then on 9 November things really exploded. In Duncan Village police arrived swinging batons at an ANC Youth League meeting, unleashing a fury the historians Leslie Bank and Benedict Carton have suggested might have been swirling in the local Youth League's structures for months.[174] As in Soweto in 1976, buildings were torched by angry crowds who took control of the streets before the police quickly hit back. As many as 214 people died during the police's swift and brutal repression. Among the dead, one stood out, Sister Aidan Quinlan, a white nun, pulled from her car and partly cannibalised by one of the crowds.[175]

What happened in Duncan Village deeply shocked the ANC's leadership, who quickly distanced themselves from accepting any responsibility, choosing to stay quiet, even at the cost of repressing what was probably the single greatest massacre in the history of apartheid. But in private conversations, the massacre in Duncan Village was a defining moment in the ANC's history as the party shifted from an above-ground mass membership organisation to an underground Leninist vanguard. The turn-to-violence was deeply contested, advocated by different people for different reasons.[176] But for Nelson Mandela, first commander-in-chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the decision

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[172] See Anne Kelk Mager and Maanda Mulaudzi, 'Popular Responses to Apartheid: 1948-c.1975', in Anne Kelk Mager and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, *1885-1994*, Vol. II., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 372.

[173] See Gary Baines, 'Community Resistance and Collective Violence: The Port Elizabeth Defiance Campaign and the 1952 New Brighton Riots', *South African Historical Journal*, 34 (1996), 39-76.

[174] Leslie J. Bank and Benedict Carton, 'Forgetting Apartheid: History, Culture and the Body of a Nun' *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 86 (2016), 472-503.

[175] Mignonne Breier, 'The Death that Dare(d) Not Speak its Name: The Killing of Sister Aidan Quinlan in the East London Riots of 1952', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 (2015), 1151-1165. See also Breier, *Bloody Sunday: The Nun, the Defiance Campaign and South Africa's Secret Massacre* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021). It is interesting to compare what happened in Duncan Village to what happened in India in 1923 during Gandhi's Noncooperation Movement. Gandhi chose to wait until conditions were more amenable for nonviolent civic disobedience, while the ANC turned to violence. On the counterfactual of what might have happened had the ANC not turned to violence after Sharpeville see Saul Dubow, 'Were there Political Alternatives in the Wake of Sharpeville-Langa Violence in South Africa, 1960?', *The Journal of African History*, 56 (2015), 119-142.

[176] On the ANC's turn to violence see Stephen Ellis, 'The Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle in South Africa 1948-1961', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37 (2011), 657-676; Paul Landau, 'The ANC, MK, and

to take up arms was ultimately made to prevent another event like Duncan Village from ever happening again. In a dangerously constructed type of paradox, Nelson Mandela concluded that it was only by taking responsibility for violence, that the ANC might be able to shield the masses from the apartheid state.[177] The type of violence to be used in this schema was key. The ANC would not attack ordinary white South Africans, but target key pieces of government infrastructure, power stations and electricity pylons. And their attacks would be planned in such a way to limit the cost of life as much as possible. Such actions, the ANC hoped, would 'bring the Government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late.'[178]

Whatever wisdom lay behind the decision, the turn-to-violence effectively sealed the end of the ANC's history as an active organised presence inside South Africa during the history of apartheid. Amidst the repressive crackdown that followed the Sharpeville massacre, Umkhonto we Sizwe's underground cells made easy pickings for the police, its cadres forced into prison or a life in exile. But even as the hope of emulating the success of the Cubans grew more and more distant with every passing year, the lesson of Duncan Village remained sacrosanct. In 1969, the various parts of the ANC-in-exile came together for a major meeting at Morogoro in Tanzania where the party agreed:

> Untimely, ill-planned or premature manifestations of violence impede and do not advance the prospect for revolutionary change and are clearly counter-revolutionary…. The riot, the street fight, the outbursts of unorganised violence, individual terrorism; these were symptoms of the militant spirit but not pointers to revolutionary techniques.[179]

Guerrilla warfare, the ANC agreed, was 'the special, and in our case the only form in which the armed liberation struggle can take.'[180]

"Turn to Violence" (1960-1962)', *South African Historical Journal*, 64 (2012), 538-563; Robert Trent Vinson and Benedict Carton, 'Albert Luthuli's Private Struggle: How an Icon of Peace Came to Accept Sabotage in South Africa', *Journal of African History*, 59 (2018), 69-96; Simon Stevens, 'The Turn to Sabotage by The Congress Movement in South Africa', *Past & Present*, 245 (2019), 221-255; and Simon Stevens, 'Violence, Political Strategy and the Turn to Guerrilla Warfare by the Congress Movement in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47 (2021), 1011-1028.

[177] See Stevens, 'The Turn to Sabotage', 221-255.

[178] As quoted in Stevens, 'The Turn to Sabotage', 241.

[179] African National Congress, 'Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress', *Sechaba* (July 1969), 16-23.

[180] *Ibid*.

And so when Masinga presented himself on the ANC's door in July the ANC not only had no plans in place to assist an urban uprising, but their best made plans to avoid anything like Duncan Village happening again had ended in failure. Still reeling by what they were watching, Masinga was only told that he had the ANC's support. But if Masinga picked up on any doubts, he was undeterred. Not long after he smuggled himself back into Soweto he met with Murphy Morobe and Billy Masetlha,[181] a graduate of Orlando High enrolled at a teachers' training college outside Pretoria.[182] The meeting took place shortly after the attack on Sekano-Ntoane. In Morobe's later reflections, it was at this point, with his emotions exhausted, that he decided to break with the SSRC's commitment to nonviolence.[183] Not long after, Morobe, Masinga and Masetlha crossed the border into Swaziland near the Nerston border post where they met with the ANC's chief operative in the kingdom, Stanley Mabizela. The ANC was no better placed to help now than when Masing first presented himself at their door. Without any offer of meaningful military assistance, the three young Sowetans were given a choice. They could either carry on into exile and join the ANC, or they could turn back to carry on the fight in Soweto. Provided with rudimentary military training, they decided to return, reconstituting themselves in Soweto as the Suicide Squad, outside the SSRC.[184] It was their responsibility as they saw it, 'that every time the police shoot at the students the police should be able to taste a little bit of their medicine.'[185]

For a brief time before most of the Suicide Squad were caught in a police sting operation on 31 December,[186] these young men were responsible for some of the most daring attacks during

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[181] Billy Masetlha (b.21 November 1954-d.14 May 2023) was born in Alexandra. After his release from prison in January 1979, he was soon rearrested. After serving a short prison sentence, Masetlha headed into exile, where he was trained by the ANC in Angola, the German Democratic Republic, and Zambia. In 1988 Masetlha became deputy chief representative of the ANC's intelligence office in Britain and Ireland. In the post-apartheid South Africa, appointed director-general in 1996. Masetlha was fired from his post as director-general of intelligence in 2006 by president Thabo Mbeki.

[182] Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', 388.

[183] Murphy Morobe, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 23 July 1996. On the ANC's presence in Swaziland at this time see Thula Simpson, ''The Bay and the Ocean': A History of the ANC in Swaziland, 1960-1979', *African Historical Review*, 41 (2009), 90-117.

[184] See Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', 387; Thula Simpson, 'Main Machinery: The ANC's Armed Underground in Johannesburg During the 1976 Uprising' *Journal of African Studies*, 70 (2011), 415-436; and Thula Simpson, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2016), 214-215.

[185] Dan Montsitsi, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996.

[186] See Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', 405.Among those arrested were Murphy Morobe who was part of the 'Soweto 11' put on trial for sedition. Other trialists, including Dan

the whole uprising, including an attack on Jabulani Police Station on 24 October and a bomb that exploded at Mzimhlope Railway Station hours later.[187] As the Suicide Squad's name grimly acknowledged, the task of properly fighting back against the police in 1976 was hopeless. But the path Masinga, Morobe and Masetlha beat to the ANC-in-exile proved inspirational. In mid-November the president of Botswana announced that around 500 schoolchildren from South Africa had entered his country since June, many more heading to Swaziland.[188] To try and stop the flow, Kruger announced an amnesty. Anyone who returned to South Africa by 22 November would not face arrest for illegally leaving the country.[189] The amnesty did nothing to stem the exodus. Soon long queues of Sowetans were seen forming on Newton Street in downtown Johannesburg, parents waiting patiently in line for the travel documents that would allow them to search for their missing children.[190] One historian estimates that as many as 12,000 people might have left the country.[191] And on the other side of the border, an amazed ANC was there to meet them. Ronnie Kasrils,[192] a founding member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, remembered how:

> Youngsters were leaving South Africa in droves, heading to for the neighbouring states in search of the ANC, with the single wish: 'To get learn how to shoot, to get a gun and get back to *moer* [finish] the Boers.[193]

Faced with these huge numbers, the ANC chartered planes for its young recruits, flying them to Tanzania and then to Angola, where the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* had recently taken

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Montsitsi, were arrested on 10 June 1977. The other nine triallists were Sello Khiba, Jefferson Lengani, Seth Mazibuko, Sibongile Mkhabela, Reginald Mngomezulu, Kennedy Mogami, Thabo Ndabeni, George Twala and Wilson Twala. A separate trial, the Pretoria 12

187 'Blasts: police on guard', *The Star*, 26 October 1976. See also Dan Montsitsi, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Soweto June 16 Hearings, 22 July 1996; Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, 105; and Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, 338.

188 '500 students flee through Botswana', *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 November 1976.

189 'Africans who flee may face court', *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1976.

190 'Long queues for passports', *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 November 1976.

191 William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238.

192 Ronnie Kasrils (b.15 November 1938-) was born in Yeoville and educated at King Edward VII School in Johannesburg. The grandson of Jewish migrants from Lithuania and Latvia, Kasrils joined the ANC and the South African Communist Party in 1960 following the Sharpeville massacre. After the end of apartheid Kasrils was Deputy Minister of Defence (1994-1999), Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry (1999-2004), and Minister for Intelligence Services (2004-2008).

193 Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: From Undercover Struggle to Freedom* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2004), 122.

control of much of the country.[194] During the course of the Soweto uprising, the strength of MK tripled, modest still, but perhaps the start of something precipitous.[195]

And it was as Umkhonto we Sizwe's ranks swelled, its young new recruits buoyed by the sense that anything was possible, that the ANC's strategic thinking began to change. Now another country's history began to take the place of the Cubans. In October 1978 Oliver Tambo[196] led a small delegation of high-ranking ANC officials to Vietnam, arriving three years after General Võ Nguyên Giáp People's Army marched into Saigon, the end of a war that claimed the lives of two million people.[197] The visit was followed with agreement on a new strategic direction, the 'Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission', or the Green Book, a template for a new strategy in which trained ANC cadres would live among the people, training other cadres, the start of South Africa's own People's Army. That South Africa had no great jungles in which to hide an army did not hold the ANC back. The townships would serve as the ANC's forests. As Thabo Mbeki[198] told a journalist in Lusaka in 1980, 'Our masses have to serve as our bush. The black community is our bush.'[199]

It was an extraordinary change from how Nelson Mandela had envisaged the role of armed resistance, and a change one imagines was only made possible by a party whose years in exile had allowed it to become detached from South African society, its strategic thinking growing ever more abstract.[200] Far from Soweto in Lusaka, the ANC's leadership watched the scenes of burning townships and now decided that its old approach had been much too cautious. Looking forward

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194 Others chose to continue their education in exile, the ANC establishing a special school near Morogoro in Tanzania in 1978, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. On its history see Seán Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile: SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978-1992* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004).

195 Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 351..

196 Oliver Reginald Kaizana Tambo (b.27 October 1917-d.24 April 1993) was born in the Eastern Cape and educated at St Peter's and Fort Hare. Alongside his friend Nelson Mandela, Tambo was a founding member of the ANC Youth League in 1944. In 1951 Tambo and Mandela set up a legal practice together. Tambo went into exile in 1960 and became acting president of the ANC in 1967 after Albert Luthuli's death. In 1991 Tambo was replaced as president of the ANC by Nelson Mandela.

197 Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975* (London: William Collins, 2018).

198 Thabo Mbeki (b.18 June 1942-) was born in Mbewuleni in the Eastern Cape and educated at Lovedale, where he was a contemporary of Chris Hani. In 1962 he left South Africa for exile, enrolling as a student at the University of Sussex where he was looked after in London by Oliver Tambo and his wife, Adelaide. A key figure in the ANC and SACP during the exile years, Mbeki was elected deputy-president in 1994 and succeeded Mandela as president in 1997. He resigned in 2008.

199 As quoted in 'Blacks in exile carry on war against South Africa', *New York Times*, 20 June 1980.

200 On the Green Book see Howard Barrell, 'The Turn to the Masses: The African National Congress Strategic Review of 1978-79', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 64-92.

Umkhonto we Sizwe continued to plan attacks inside South Africa, including a spectacular attack on the Sasolburg oil refinery in 1980 and a bomb that detonated outside the South African Air Force headquarters on Church Street in Pretoria in 1983.[201] But the idea behind these attacks now was not to take violence out of the hands of the masses. It was to inspire as many people in South Africa to take up arms as possible.[202] A potent myth had been unbottled in 1976. In the years ahead there were many who hoped that the myth could be realised. But in this new age, the idea of a liberation army and the masses merging to exercise violence was not the only idea abroad. Another powerful ensemble of ideas about how to live and strive under apartheid was about to grow out of the wreckage of the Soweto uprising. It lived and breathed in parallel to the dream of millenarian violence, and its many proponents challenge any idea that there can be something so simply as the demand of the masses. It is to those ideas that we now turn.

201 Cherry, *Umkhonto weSizwe*, 55-58.

202 In *Sechaba* the ANC declared, 'The goal of transforming the armed offensive into a people's war remains one that we must pursue with the greatest vigour. Our mass military offensive must aim to increase the number of casualties among the enemy's armed forces, to disperse and reduce these forces, make it increasingly impossible to defend themselves and undermine the material-economic base…. In other words it must become part of a policy to involve more and more armed people as organised contingents in support of our struggle and acting under our leadership.' As quoted in Hilton Hamann, *Days of the Generals* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2001), 124.

- III -

Education before Liberation
1977-1984

> We hope we are not the only ones to affirm the belief that the Black student has a natural ambition for education. We have not ignored the struggle, but this does not mean we have got to resort to violence. Let not the SSRC use us as a fighting tools or mumbo-jumbo, for knowledge is power. Let us not use the dead bodies of our brothers and sisters as excuses. We shall keep asking for the release of the detained, but our attitude should not be negative.
>
> - Musi High School students' statement, January 1977 [1]

Amidst the massive outpouring of excitement amongst those who saw the imminent end of apartheid in the scenes of the Soweto uprising, a young political scientist at Harvard University struck a cautionary note, warning against the temptation of turning the students' uprising into the template for the future. In 1979, the year the ANC's national executive agreed upon the Green Book as the basis of its new strategic direction, Theda Skocpol published *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. And in the preface to that now seminal book, Skocpol cast her attention towards South Africa. 'The history of that unhappy land struck me… as an insuperable challenge to commonplace and comforting predictions that mass discontent would lead to revolution against the blatantly oppressive *apartheid* regime'.[2]

Skocpol was not doubting the depth of people's passions, nor the bravery of those who took to the streets in 1976. South Africa's tragedy was that those could never be denied. If a revolution was ever to be made out of the righteous anger and heroism of the masses, South Africa was the place. Rather Skocpol was drawing attention to the fact that no matter how often people might wish otherwise, revolutions are never simply the product of the masses. Dreams of revolution are common in history, but successful revolutions rare. And in the complex set of circumstances on which success has depended, Skocpol drew special attention to the internal fragmentation of the old French, Russian and Chinese regimes on the eve of their demise. Those

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[1] As quoted in 'We'll sit exams, say Musi High', *Weekend World*, 16 January 1977.

[2] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), xii.

regimes that stay united, meanwhile, have been able to withstand the most serious assaults. 'Even after great loss of legitimacy has occurred, a state can remain quite stable—and certainly invulnerable to internal mass-based revolts—especially if its coercive organizations remain coherent and effective.'[3] Look past the scenes of Soweto's students fighting the police with rocks, and for Skocpol that was the great lesson of 1976, a regime whose legitimacy was forever to be stained in the blood of schoolchildren, but which remained united, its control of the security forces unquestioned.

Dispassionate and coolly observed, Skocpol's bracing lesson of what remained standing amidst the ruins of apartheid's delusions of granite strength in 1976 passed largely uncommented upon by scholars of South Africa, a group as prone as any in society to think that something extraordinary might be about to happen. A year after the start of the Soweto uprising, a gathering of progressive-minded scholars at the University of Witwatersrand founded the History Workshop, the start of a new bottom-up way of writing the history of apartheid, built out of a newfound respect and awe of the powers of ordinary people. And for both the ANC watching in exile, and to a new generation of scholars, events after 1976 only seemed to confirm the expectation that South Africa was a society on the brink of revolution.

The Soweto uprising had barely been quelled when a second insurrectionary wave swept the Western Cape's Coloured school system in 1980. For weeks a school boycott had been running at Mount View High School in Hanover Park, sat under Table Mountain, the students' patience at the poor standards in the school come to an end.[4] After two students were killed by police in the Coloured township Elsie's River on 29 May 1980, the protests turned into something much bigger.[5] Just as happened in Soweto in 1976, the townships on the Cape Flats turned into a battlefield, youth fighting armed police with rocks, burning oil drums and barricades filled the streets. White motorists travelling between the city and the airport had their cars stoned. The unrest was only ended when police reinforcements were sent from Johannesburg. But barely had the embers cooled in the Western Cape when history began repeating itself a third time. In January 1984, school boycotts started in Atteridgeville near Pretoria and in Cradock in the Eastern Cape,

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[3] *Ibid*., 32.

[4] Frank Molteno, 'Students Take Control: The 1980 Boycott of Coloured Education in the Cape Peninsula', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 8 (1987), 3-22.

[5] 'South African police kill two minority demonstrators', *New York Times*, 29 May 1980.

exploding in widespread unrest across the Vaal Triangle, an industrialised belt south of Johannesburg. In 1982 Nadine Gordimer told an audience in New York, 'I live at 6,000 feet in a society whirling, stamping, swaying with the force of revolutionary change. The vision is heady; the image of the demonic dance is accurate, not romantic: an image of actions springing from emotions, knocking deliberation aside'.[6] And even now, all these years later, the scenes of South Africa's townships in open revolt still dominate understandings of South Africa's history in the 1980s, casting a long shadow that can be difficult to look past as new generations search for inspiration in their struggles today. Looking back in 2018, one prominent historian has even gone so far as to suggest that the Soweto uprising marked the start of 'the most sustained youth rebellion of the twentieth century'.[7]

But to write the history of South Africa after the Soweto uprising with eyes fixed on the insurrections is to risk write a two-dimensional history, foregrounding a very particular strand of history at the expense of understanding a more complicated history in which ideas of revolution swirled in a much bigger storm. Indeed, it required a peculiar vantage point in that storm to see the insurrections as sustained at all, stood not too close to the destruction to have the faith in revolution disabused, but not too far away to be unaffected by its pull. To see the Soweto uprising as marking anything like the start of the most sustained youth rebellion in the twentieth century, one has to be prepared to accept a telling of history which jumps quickly from place to place, tying discrete events together into a linear narrative, of ever rising militancy, ever more people on the march. It is a deeply misleading way of understanding history, a narrative pulled together from the relative peace of the storm's eye. Tell the history of the insurrections in any place for long enough and their most striking feature quickly becomes clear. Not how sustained the insurrections were after 1976, but how brief.

And the reason why can be understood very simply. The millenarianism that had been unbottled in 1976 was born in a moment of terrifying sense-destroying violence. Confronted with the terrifying violence of the apartheid state that took their youthful innocence, the millenarian story helped young people to make sense of their lives again, to find meaning amidst the death, to live with hope for the future. And as the apartheid state wreaked violence on people again and

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6 Nadine Gordimer, 'Living in the Interregnum', *New York Review of Books*, 29 (1983), 21.

7 Clive Glaser, 'Youth and Generation in South African History', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 19 (2018), 129.

again, the millenarian faith in the future was reached for time and again. Yet this is the key. A narrative that helped people to make sense of their lives again was not a narrative that well equipped people to survive the truths of a new world in which not even a school uniform offered protection against the state. Its sacrifices demanded too much, the forces arrayed against them too merciless and well-armed, its prospect of victory too uncertain. Millenarianism was not a narrative that could be lived with for long. Writing on a great historical canvas Skocpol's detachment allowed her to see clearly what specialists found harder to see. That in the end revolution was a dream, and that looking forward, other answers were needed. Soweto was the first place where the search for alternatives began.

This chapter examines how the students that followed the class of 1976 turned their attentions away from the future and back towards the present to address a paradox that for all the convictions of 1976 had not been solved. To solve the paradox of how the schools should be made sense of in their lives now, they attempted to draw a new line through the problem. Rather than separating the present from the future, they would separate the political from the personal, the public from the private. The millenarianism unbottled in 1976 had made no space for private allowances: everything had to be sacrificed for the future. Now people insisted on the distinction, refusing to give up on the present. In public this new understanding of the limits of politics prepared the ground for a new phenomenon, a flowering of hundreds of small, local organisations, or 'civics', the start of a new highly self-conscious civic culture in the townships, its heightened consciousness dependent on what people had seen swept away in 1976. The civics set their sights on what change might be realised in the present, pushing thoughts of new Jerusalems from their mind. Whether the cost of childcare, food, funerals, travel, or social issues like crime, or access to healthcare, waste collection, electricity, new civics were formed representing women, traders, the children in school, the children left out of school, migrants.[8] The issues were as varied as the people they represented. But together these organisations were united in a new understanding of what might be accomplished. Ordinary people did not have the power to win a revolution, but they did have the power to take back control of the running of their lives. In people's newly sanctified private lives, this separation gave children the space to go to school.

[8] For a study on the way the civics opened new spaces for women see Shireen Hassim, 'The Limits of Popular Democracy: Women's Organisations, Feminism and the UDF', *Transformations: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 51 (2003), 48-73.

I

Insofar as it can be dated, grand apartheid ended on 6 July 1976, 20 days after the start of the Soweto uprising, when M. C. Botha announced that the National Party would no longer seek to implement the fifty-fifty English and Afrikaans language policy.[9] It was a peculiar type of concession—the government had never had any success in implementing the policy in the first place. But as a public admission of defeat for a political project which had never made sense in reality, the announcement marked the start of the unwinding of the basic principles of apartheid that had governed South Africa for more than twenty years and the start of something new.

The full historic significance of the retreat threatened to be lost in the moment. But for one part of the government machinery, the question of what now needed to change in the schools was an unavoidable and immediate consideration. And as officials in the Department of Bantu Education considered the task of how to bring back some kind of order in the schools, a new regional director for the Transvaal was appointed on 1 September 1976, Jaap Strydom, replacing W. C. Ackermann, the man on whose shoulders much of the responsibility for the uprising rested. Weeks before the start of the uprising, Ackermann deigned to tell a meeting of Sowetan teachers that 'no country had its laws changed by students'.[10] Ackermann's replacement would show how untrue that was.

Strydom had an important career in education ahead of him. In September 1982 he was appointed Director of Planning for Education Outside the Homelands, handed responsibility for policing the schools during the 1986 state of emergency, whose devastating consequences we will come to in the next chapter. But at the time of his promotion Strydom was a Soweto school circuit inspector. Fluent in isiZulu and Sotho, Strydom was well-trained in the push and pull of Soweto's classroom politics.[11] He used those connections to take a very different approach than his predecessor's lofty condescension. In late November 1976, as Soweto's schools stood empty, Strydom started his new job by arranging a big community meeting at the Department of Bantu

9 'Schools language rule is dropped', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1976.

10 As quoted in 'Soweto strikers due back in class', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 May 1976.

11 Nigel Mandy, *A City Divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1984), 232.

Education offices in Johannesburg.[12] The mere fact that Strydom was willing to host this type of meeting was a measure of the change being forced upon the government in the face of the students' protests. And in the days before the meeting Strydom suggested that there would be a second major reform of the Bantu Education system in Soweto following the scrapping of the language policy in July. For the first time the government was considering assuming direct financial responsibility for secondary schools.[13] In the face of unprecedented protest from inside an institution meant to guarantee the stability of apartheid, the old verities of Eiselen's plan for Bantu Education were being pulled down.

These were not trivial reforms. Had they been announced a year earlier, they would have likely been celebrated in Soweto, another small step towards what Sowetans thought a state education system should do, rather than the contortions of what the National Party was trying to force them to do. But the shootings on 16 June had changed everything. The big question now was what would these reforms mean to the students who had turned their backs on the schools? Speculating in December, Lennox Mlonzi said: 'I appreciate the department's efforts to help these children, but students seem determined to see all fellow students now in detention set free before they go back to classes.'[14] The divisional head of Soweto's Criminal Investigations Department offered a different opinion. Brigadier Jan Visser said, 'I believe the children will adopt a wait-and-see attitude. I don't think classes will be full on January 5, but things should be back to normal by the end of the month.'[15] In the last days of 1976 there were signs that the unrest would extend into the new year. Some schools were set on fire, while the SSRC ended the year with a renewed call that the school boycott remain in place until Bantu Education had been done away with entirely.[16]

On Wednesday 5 January 1977 the schools official reopened. In the past, the start of a new academic year saw scenes of students queuing patiently outside the schools. Scenes like this were nowhere evident. School numbers were way down, especially amongst older students. At Tsietsi Mashinini's old school, Morris Isaacson, just 90 students arrived for lessons on the first day. Just

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12 'Soweto men in education summit talks', *The Star*, 23 November 1976.

13 'Operation Upgrade in Soweto schools', *The Star*, 24 November 1976. There were rumours that the government was even considering incorporating the entire Department of Bantu Education into the Department of National Education, although this proved to be a redline. See 'Education changes speculation', *The World*, 25 November 1976.

14 As quoted in 'Mixed views on Soweto school plan', *The Star*, 1 December 1976.

15 As quoted in ''School or bust' - pupils', *The Star*, 31 December 1976.

16 'Bantu Education seeks new name', *Rand Daily Mail*, 31 December 1976.

60 students turned up at Orlando High.[17] It seemed as if the SSRC's boycott had held. But in the end, it was Brigadier Visser's prediction that proved correct: these first students were pathbreakers. By Friday 7 January, the West Rand Administration Board reported that primary schools in Soweto were in full attendance while secondary schools had attendances between 70 and 80 per cent. These official figures were confirmed by a journalist from *The World*, who called principals across the township and who reported back a general state of calm.[18] The school boycott had suddenly come to an end.

And it was not only that. Amongst the students there was great enthusiasm to resit the postponed examinations, further defiance of the SSRC, which called for these exams to be boycotted. On 14 January, students at Naledi High in Soweto's western outskirts announced their intention to sit the upcoming exams. In a statement given to the press, they said:

> We told the members of the SSRC that we sympathised with our fellow students in detention, but that it would be pointless for us to sit and fold our arms and not write the exams. We also indicated that boycotting the exams would not affect the oppressor but further frustrate the oppressed.[19]

Notable care was taken to emphasise how the students at Naledi had spoken with the SSRC before issuing their statement. But in a remark that could not avoid being pointed, their statement concluded saying that Bantu Education 'cannot be changed overnight'.[20] After months of violence, here was newfound appreciation for the idea that change can be incremental, and that demands for revolution damaging and self-defeating.

The Naledi students' statement set a precedent soon followed at other schools. At Musi High in Pimville, students also publicly pledged to sit the exams. 'We have not ignored the struggle, but this does not mean we have got to resort to violence. Let not the SSRC use us as fighting tools or mumbo-jumbo, for knowledge is power.' Their declaration ended with an appeal 'for unity and

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17 Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt that Shook Apartheid* (London: Zed Books, 2016 [1979]), 268-9.

18 'School boycott ends', *The World*, 11 January 1977.

19 As quoted in 'Orlando North High School students have not reached a "unanimous agreement" whether they will write the March examinations, Mr J. Harvey, their headmaster, said yesterday', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1977.

20 *Ibid.*

a call for a continued struggle AND a continued education.'[21] It is in these statements that we can clearly see the start of a new way of understanding the paradoxical offerings of Soweto's schools, an approach which did not shy from acknowledging the truths of what happened in 1976, but which insisted on giving people some space to survive the present.

The decision to go back to school was fraught, though. So many lives had been lost, and so much hope still abounded in some quarters, that to see the schools as a deeply meaningful personal resource in someone's life risked being seen as a deep betrayal. On 10 January students at Orlando West High met to resolve their position on the upcoming exams. At this meeting no collective agreement was reached.[22] All across Soweto a tense and emotional debate was being held, with many students having experienced things at the hands of the police that made contemplating a return to school impossible. Sibongile Mkhabela was a student at Naledi High, arrested at the height of the uprising in 1976.[23] She recalled the return to school in 1977 in a memoir published after the end of apartheid:

> I could not understand how I could sit for the examinations whilst a significant number of students and Black leaders were languishing in our prisons. I felt that this would be the worst betrayal of our struggle and our comrades. I agonised about the matter and my anger knew no bounds. How could we even contemplate the normal when the 10th floor of John Vorster Square continued to destroy Black lives with impunity?[24]

Mkhabela's recollection of her anger lends credence to the Soweto chief detective's report in mid-January that parents were coming to him saying their children were accused of 'selling out'. 'We will burn you and your parents out'.[25] But even at Morris Isaacson, where the students were rumoured to be determined to commit to the exam boycott, there was ultimately a change of

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21 'We'll sit exams, say Musi High', *Weekend World*, 16 January 1977.

22 'School boycott ends', *The World*, 11 January 1977.

23 Sibongile Mkhabela was raised in Zola. Part of the 'Soweto 11', Mkhabela was convicted of sedition in May 1977, serving time in Johannesburg's Fort prison, Kroonstad prison and Pretoria Maximum Prison. Mkhabela was released from prison in 1982. After the end of apartheid Mkhabela was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Nelson Mandela Chidlren's Fund. In 2018 Mkhabela was awarded the Order of Luthulu (Silver) by President Cyril Ramapohosa.

24 Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Press, 2001), 64.

25 ''Truce' in Soweto is threatened', *The Star*, 19 January 1977.

heart.[26] After much speculation, most students at both Morris Isaacson and Orlando West High decided that they too would sit the exams.[27]

This dramatic turnaround amongst the students suddenly placed the SSRC on the backfoot. After all, the SSRC claimed to be the students' *representative* council, yet they had badly misjudged what most students wanted. At the risk of becoming even more isolated, the SSRC changed policy. On 19 January it announced that the decision to sit the exams would now be left to individuals to decide for themselves, a matter of personal conscience.[28] They blamed the police's mass detentions for having created a disconnect between the leadership and the wider student body, and called for new student representatives to the SSRC, rebuilding the connection which had held so tightly in 1976. But the SSRC could only concede so much. Led by its third chairman, Dan Montsitsi, after Seatlholo fled to Botswana after a gunfight with police in January, the SSRC was an organisation intent on fomenting revolution.[29] Speaking from exile, Seatlholo told the press in late-January that 'students would be betraying the struggle against the unwanted Bantu Education system if they write.'[30]

The clash between the majority who wanted to return to life back behind a school desk and the small minority who wanted to remain true to the spirit of 1976 was to be a lasting legacy of the Soweto uprising, a rupture that would never completely heal. To try and bridge the divide, students at Madibane High in Diepkloof issued their own statement, pledging themselves to respect the SSRC's ultimate authority regardless of what disagreements might exist. 'We don't want any division in our school and should the SSRC decide to say publicly that we should not write, we shall take their word. The SSRC has been elected by us to represent us and we shall not defy their directives.'[31] But this was a desire for a return of a type of solidarity that had already passed by the start of 1977. Back at the height of the uprising, the SSRC had once been able to command that type of authority, their calls for stayaways heeded far and wide. Before that and in a more limited way, the school principals had enjoyed extraordinary power to decide what happened in

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[26] 'Orlando North High School students have not reached a "unanimous agreement" whether they will write the March examinations, Mr K. Harvey, their headmaster said yesterday', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1977.
[27] 'Upsurge in school turnout', *The Star*, 17 January 1977.
[28] 'Students drop ban on exams', *The World*, 20 January 1977.
[29] Pat Hopkins and Helen Grange, *The Rocky Rioter Teargas Show: The Inside Story of the 1976 Soweto Uprising* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2001), 168.
[30] As quoted in ''It's up to SSRC'', *The World*, 31 January 1977.
[31] As quoted in ''It's up to SSRC', *The World*, 31 January 1977.

the schools. After 1976, responsibility for making sense of the schools was left largely to individuals to decide for themselves. It was part of the fraying of the social fabric in the face of violence that would be greatly tested in the years ahead.

The 1976 end-of-year exams started in February 1977. At first it appeared that the exams might pass without incident. But soon the disruptive capacity of a small minority became clear.[32] At Selekela Secondary in Orlando East students writing their exams were interrupted when a group of boycotters forced their way in tearing up their exam papers.[33] At Orlando West Junior Secondary the Form IV exams were halted when a group of older students wiped the questions from the blackboard, destroying their scripts.[34] More ominously still was a report of a stabbing as two students clashed at Orlando West High. The principal of Orlando North Junior Secondary appealed to people to respect the individuals' choice. Not long after a pamphlet was distributed calling the principals 'sell-outs'.[35] The actions of a minority forced some exams back to early March. But the boycotters failed to derail the exams completely. Coercion, as ever, had its limits. And when the results came back many students were even able to boast good results. In what is possibly the most remarkable testament to how much education had come to mean to people in Soweto, of the 101 candidates who sat the 1976 Junior Certificate exams at Orlando High, 93 passed.[36]

The tussle over the rescheduled 1976 examinations showed two things that would carry into the new era: people's enduring commitment to education, the great thread that runs through the history of Soweto, as well as the precariousness of the peace which accompanied students' return to the classrooms. In the coming years a school in Soweto was liable to go out on boycott at any time, sometimes only for a day or a week, occasionally winning the support of a few surrounding schools, and invariably acting in response to a school-specific issue. In 1984, for example, students at Selekela High started on a brief boycott after a popular science teacher was dismissed, an action swiftly ended when the local circuit inspector ceded to the students' demands.[37] The students had assumed enormous responsibilities in 1976, and they were loath to

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32 'Disruption at exams goes on', *The Star*, 31 January 1977.

33 'Soweto exams disrupted', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 February 1977.

34 'Fears grow of exams boycott', *The World*, 4 February 1977.

35 'Disruption at exams goes on', *The Star*, 8 February 1977.

36 Clive Glaser, 'Learning Amidst the Turmoil: Secondary Schooling in Soweto 1977-1990', *South African Historical Journal*, 68 (2016), 418.

37 'Teacher transfer sparks boycott', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 March 1984; 'Selekela pupils end boycott', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 March 1984.

give up their authority completely. Truancy and impertinence began to creep into the classroom in ways not seen before 1976. In 1983 the principal of Emdeni Secondary was stabbed after four students were accused of cheating in their exams.[38] But even as sporadic boycotts occasionally flared, one thing remained clear. The days of mass boycotts and sustained collective action were over. During the first months of 1977 most of Soweto's students looked at the future with a newfound pragmatism and sense of self-preservation. But there were still major issues that needed to be addressed before the uprising could be put behind people and a new order established.

In April 1977, WRAB announced an 84 per cent increase in Soweto's rents, R6.25 to R11.50 per month, in part justified to cover the loss of revenue following the students' attacks on the beerhalls in 1976.[39] The increase was already highly provocative, asking Sowetans to pay for the damages that paled in comparison to the destruction the police had caused and which the government refused to meet, the Indemnity Act (No. 33 of 1977) exempting the police for any liability for any actions between 16 June 1976 and 16 March 1976.[40] But once it became known that members of the Urban Bantu Council had been given advance notice, fresh anger was roused against this institution, so symbolic of the old era.[41] The leadership of the SSRC adroitly seized upon the anger, demanding that all members of the 'Useless Boys' Club' resign immediately.[42] Seven councillors had already resigned since the start of the uprising, but now many more followed. By the start of June the UBC had collapsed and the rent increase was cancelled.[43] Buoyed by this success that distracted from its failings in the schools, the SSRC soon set its sights on another hangover of the old order. In July 1977, Trofomo Sono, the fourth chairman of the SSRC following Montsitsi's capture by police, launched a fresh assault on the ramparts of the Bantu Education system, calling on all members of the school boards to resign.[44] These boards had once

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38 'Police seek 4 pupils', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 July 1983.

39 Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 271.

40 John D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 271.

41 Gail Gerhart, 'The 1976 Soweto Uprising', paper delivered at Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 2 May 1994.

42 Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa, June-December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), 284.

43 Philip Frankel, 'Municipal Transformation in Soweto: Race, Politics and Maladministration in Black Johannesburg', *African Studies Review*, 22 (1979), 49-65.

44 Little is known of Trofomo Sono's life. A Form IV student at Madibane High at the time he was elected president of the SSRC, in August 1977 Sono went into exile. In a notebook written shortly before he left Soweto he wrote, 'I don't know how I became leader, but it was neither guts nor intellect – yet suffering. My sufferings

acted like bulwarks, resisting the Department of Bantu Education's machinations. After 1976 the idea of exercising autonomy within the state's own structures was hopelessly compromised, and everyone knew it. Mass resignations had forced the collapse of ten boards by the end of July. By the end of August, every school board in Soweto had collapsed.[45]

But the attack on the UBC and the school boards proved to be the SSRC's final success. By the winter of 1977 the leadership of the SSRC had been all but broken. On 11 June, as most Sowetans wore black and gathered in sombre crowds at the churches to commemorate the first anniversary of the uprising, police raided a house in Diepkloof, catching an in-session meeting of the SSRC executive.[46] Sono was amongst the few who managed to escape, but police repression had now made it almost impossible for the SSRC to operate. In August 1977 the fourth and final chairman of the SSRC slipped across the border into Botswana.[47] It was a symbolic passage to make. The millenarian dream of building a new Jerusalem out of the ruins of the old order would go on to live outside Soweto. For those who stayed behind the collapse of the UBC and the school committees in 1977 marked the start of something much more modest, the creation of new institutions to fill the void left behind by the violence of 1976. The concerns of the present began to return.

The task of rebuilding Soweto's civic life began at a historic meeting held in the offices of *The World* on 27 June 1977. Sixty-one people attended, some of Soweto's most prominent people in the fields of medicine, business, church, and education. These were representatives of that class which had so confidently led Soweto before the shootings on Vilakazi Street turned their world upside down. Now they took control again. It was at this meeting that the Soweto Committee of Ten was formed, led by Dr Nthatho Motlana,[48] a doctor who had treated some of the first children

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are not the kind of suffering that I suffer because of my suffering as an individual – yet a national suffering of all black men.' As quoted in Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, 'In Good Hands: Researching the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the State Archives of South Africa', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 312.

45 Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 277.

46 Harry Mashabela, *A People on the Boil* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2006), 129. On the remembrance culture that surrounded the Soweto uprising see Rachel E. Johnson, ''The Day that Fell Off the Calendar': 16 June, South African Newspapers, and the Making of a National Holiday, 1977-1996', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42 (2016), 1143-1160.

47 'Third student leader said to have eluded police, fled S. Africa', *Washington Post*, 25 August 1977.

48 Dr Nthato Motlana (b.16 February 1925-d.1 December 2008) was born in Marapyane near Pretoria and educated at Kilnerton High and the University of Fort Hare before studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, winning one of only twelve places available to black students. Whilst at Fort Hare Motlana joined the ANC Youth League. He was involved in planning the 1952 Defiance Campaign and was arrested,

rushed to his practice after the shootings on 16 June, and a former member of the ANCYL who had been arrested alongside Nelson Mandela during the 1952 Defiance Campaign. Under Motlana's leadership the Committee of Ten sought to assume responsibility for governing Soweto, drawing up an ambitious plan to raise funds from international donors.[49] The full-scope of the idea was never realised; the money never came. But the principle that ordinary people in the townships should regroup to take control of their own affairs outside the system took hold. In 1979 the Committee of Ten transformed itself into the Soweto Civic Association. 'We, the people of Soweto, shall govern and decide our own lives', its manifesto declared.[50] The SCA sat at the apex of a new vibrant organisational life that headed local branches and worked alongside a proliferation of community organisations in the churches, schools, workplaces, and sports clubs. The model was replicated elsewhere in the foundation of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Association and the Cape Housing Action Committee and hundreds of other organisations, too many to names. This was the start of the rise of the 'civics', each intimately tied to their locality but sharing a basic set of political principles. They refused to cooperate with the state, constituting themselves as a new voice outside state institutions. The dangerous self-delusions of working inside the state was a lesson of 1976 that was never forgotten. But unlike the millenarians, they refused to give up on the present. No matter how seemingly small the issue, whether electricity prices, rent increases, water provision, sewerage, streetlights, bus prices, they set out to fight for their rights in the present. And throughout it all, their commitment to non-violence was inviolable. As Soweto's students returned to school, new organisations picked up the mantle of protest. The full repercussions would only become clear later, but quietly a great political realignment was underway.

This realignment pulled at the schools. Following the SSRC's attack on the schoolboards, on 25 August 1977 the government that it was now taking full control and financial responsibility for Soweto's schools, closing the schools immediately and reopening after an extended spring vacation with strict new requirements. On reopening all students were to be forced to officially re-

sentenced to nine months in prison. In 1954 Motlana opened Soweto's first private practice. After the end of apartheid Motlana was a key figure in black economic empowerment, founding New Africa Investments Ltd.

[49] The Committee of Ten initially envisioned fifty councillors elected to oversee a budget of R5,000 million, raised through local taxes and donations from organisations like the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation of African Unity. See Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 273.

[50] As quoted in Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1998), 111.

register, a screening process intended to catch known troublemakers. And it was ruled that any student who missed five days of school faced summary expulsion.[51] Ever since the start of the uprising Soweto's teachers had remained dutifully in their posts. This forced change in the school's status, from the community schools on which the teachers had built their careers, to state schools, precipitated a crisis in conscience, turning them into basic employees of the state. On 6 September 1977, a meeting was held at the Methodist Church Youth Centre, where around 500 teachers and principals agreed to tender their resignations.[52] Describing their reasons, the principal of Orlando High, Thamsanqa Kambule, put the matter succinctly: the 'schools ceased to be what they should have been.'[53] Teaching had once been a vocation and a highly esteemed profession amongst people in Soweto. For many now it became an option of last resort, a way of earning a living.

But just as the ruin of the UBC was followed with the establishment of the Committee of Ten, a new organisation was created to fill the gap left in the wake of some of Soweto's most committed pedagogues. The Soweto Teachers' Action Committee was formed in 1977, led by Curtis Nkondo, the teacher we last encountered quitting his job at Lamula High in Meadowlands following the pink card debacle in 1974. Prominent members of the SATC included other key figures from the old struggle, Kambule and Lekgau Mathabathe. Alongside the Committee of Ten, the STAC was at the heart of what soon came to be called the 'Regina Mundi clique', after Soweto's largest church, the imposing Catholic church in Rockville under whose rafters so many community meetings were held in the years ahead.[54] A politics that had dared to work within the system and a politics that had turned their back on the system and taken to the streets had come to an end. But inside Soweto's community halls and churches, Soweto's political life went on.

The consequence of the mass resignation of Soweto's teachers in September 1977 ran deep. Without the teachers the government was forced to announce that Soweto's secondary

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51 'Govt acts on schools in Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 August 1977. See also Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, 133 and Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, 277.

52 'Top principals join mass resignations', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 September 1977. Many of these teachers returned to work, some quite soon after. Two hundred teachers rejointed the school system in 1978. See 'Position hazy as schools open', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 February 1978; 'Soweto lost 479 teachers last year', *Post*, 19 March 1978. It was the source of considerable anger that those teachers who returned lost their employment benefits. See ''DET taking revenge' – Kambule', *Post*, 26 March 1978.

53 As quoted in 'Bantu Education's enemy No 1', *Sunday Post*, 11 February 1979.

54 Philip Frankel, 'The Politics of Poverty: Political Competition in Soweto', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 14 (1980), 211.

schools would remain officially closed until the end of 1977.[55] And when the schools reopened in 1978, the situation remained essentially unchanged. In January 1978 the government was only able to reopen 13 post-primary schools in Soweto, just 2 for matriculation students.[56] Had they been filled these schools could have accommodated 27,000 students. Not even this much lowered ceiling was reached. At Leratong Higher Primary in Orlando East, 173 students enrolled for school in 1978. At J. S. Mpanza Higher Primary in Diepkloof there were 158 students.[57] In total 1,500 secondary school students returned in 1978.[58]

Where were the missing students? Some such as Murphy Morobe and Dan Montsitsi were now in prison, locked away on Robben Island with the ANC's grandees from a previous era's protests.[59] Others like Trofomo Sono, Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo were in exile. But these students did not account for the majority who might have otherwise filled Soweto's classrooms. The vast majority were instead busy seeking alternative forms of education wherever they could find them. In 1978 a group of well-meaning white college students at the University of Witwatersrand organised a Students' Tuition Society. Their initiative was soon overwhelmed by an enormous demand from the townships. As many as 1,000 schoolchildren presented themselves on campus, only for campus security to send them home.[60] The most commonly sought alternative though was to look far outside Johannesburg, at schools in the homelands.[61] The irony as Soweto's students travelled to the countryside for an education was inescapable. In its moment of final collapse, the Bantu Education system had at last succeeded in realising one of its founding objectives. But by then only the most committed apartheid ideologues were able to see this as

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55 Glaser, 'Learning Amidst the Turmoil', 421.

56 The schools were Lofentse Junior Secondary, Madibane High, Seanamarena, Lamula, Kwa Mahlobo, Orlando West, Senaoane, Jabulani, Jabulani Technical, Orlando North, Sekano-Ntoane, Mncube, Immaculate and George Tabor Vocational. See 'Students due back at school today', *Post*, 1 January 1978.

57 'Empty classrooms, but Soweto is quiet', *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 January 1978.

58 'Students drift in slowly', *Post*, 2 January 1978; 'Few applying for Soweto high schools', *The Star*, 4 January 1978.

59 On the arrival of the 1976 generation in Robben Island see Fran Lisa Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

60 'Rush for 'mystery' classes', *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 February 1978; 'Tuition for only 1000 Soweto boycotters', *The Star*, 23 February 1978.

61 'Blacks send children to homelands', *The Star*, 10 January 1978; 'Exodus of pupils to Natal', *The Star*, 8 March 1978; 'Students trek to find a school', *Post*, 9 March 1978; 'Transkei check on students', *Argus*, 3 July 1978. See also Phydian Matsepe's account, as quoted in Elsabé Brink, Gandhi Malungane, Steve Lebelo, Dumisani Ntshangase and Sue Krige (eds.), *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2006), 166.

anything other than a symptom of a deeply broken system. Twenty-three years after the Bantu Education system first opened, it was clear a new start was needed.

II

In September 1978 P. W. Botha, Vorster's defence minister since 1966, became prime minister. A cautious and doctrinaire thinker wedded to Verwoerd's orthodoxies, Vorster had shown himself completely incapable of grasping the scale of the challenge presented in 1976, insisting that nothing had to change, even as most members of the National Party realised that the old game was up. Botha replaced a premier described by one sympathetic historian as 'physically and mentally exhausted',[62] the end of his 12-year government an ignominious corruption scandal that nakedly laid bare a world of dark money the National Party used to try and buy influence at home and abroad. The so-called Muldergate scandal was itself a moment of reckoning for a party that could no longer rely on the facade it presented to the world, faced with the rot in government it had ignored for so long.[63]

Botha was determined to take the National Party in a radically different direction, forcing his party to accept the realities of contemporary life in South Africa. To follow the path Treurnicht had insisted on following in 1976 was a road to ruin. In a major speech before the National Party faithful in Durban in 1979, Botha declared: 'The world does not remain the same…. We have to adapt our policy to those things that make adjustments necessary, otherwise we die.'[64] The next day a newspaper immortalised Botha's words on its front page: 'ADAPT OR DIE'.[65]

In its simplest terms adaptation meant building up a new contented middle class in the townships around the major cities whose share in a common prosperity would make them loath to challenge the existing order. The old Bantustans with their illusions of independence were

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62 Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London: C. Hurst, 2003), 585.

63 See Mervyn Rees and Chris Day, *Muldergate: The Story of the Info Scandal* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1980); and Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996), 232-3. For more on the National Party's attempt to influence foreign opinion see Ron Nixon, *Selling Apartheid: South Africa's Global Propaganda War* (London: Pluto, 2016).

64 As quoted in Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 141.

65 Botha was not the only world leader to have his words defined in history by a newspaper in 1979. In Britain, James Callaghan's breezy response to a question during the 'winter of discontent' was followed the next day by the *The Sun*'s headline, CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

essentially ignored by Botha, chronically underfunded, the home of a quickly rising and much neglected 'surplus population'.[66] Botha effectively turned the logics of Verwoerd's vision inside out. A great tranche of reforms turned the government's attention on the cities. Section 10 rights which determined who could live in a town were significantly eased, including getting rid of the requirement that the authorities be notified when a person changed their job. New legislation permitted 99-year leases on people's homes in the townships, allowing families to look forward to their future in the cities with confidence. In 1983 Sowetans were given the right to purchase their council homes.[67] 'Buy now, improve and feel secure', government advertising proclaimed.[68] And the recommendations of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions of Inquiry into Labour Legislation and Manpower Utilisation was followed with the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act (No. 94 of 1979), legally recognising black trade unions outside the Bantustans, a new industrial relations framework intended to resolve people's demands before they turned into anything greater.[69] In the early 1980s an electrification programme in Soweto employed 2,000 workers, erecting 37 kilometres of power lines and laying 5,000 kilometres of underground wiring.[70] By the mid-1980s nearly every home in Soweto had access to water-borne sewerage, electricity and inside taps.'[71] In all these reforms, Botha never properly loosened his grip on power. This was described as 'sharing power without losing control'.[72] But its changes in society were significant nonetheless.

In his plans Botha had a special interest in education. A month after taking office, a draft of the Education and Training Bill was published in the Government Gazette. It was the first major legislation regarding black South Africans' education since the Bantu Education Act. The Education and Training Act (No. 90 of 1979) kept some of the old features of segregated schooling

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66 See Laurine Platzky and Cheryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985). See also Roger J. Southall, 'Botha Reformism, the Bantustan Strategy and the Marginalization of the South African Periphery', *Labour, Capital and Society*, 15 (1982), 6-39; and James Ferguson, 'Declarations of Dependence: Labour, Personhood, and Welfare in Southern Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19 (2013), 223-242.

67 Alan Morris (ed.), *Change and Continuity: A Survey of Soweto in the Late 1990s* (Johannesburg: Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999), 3.

68 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 104.

69 On the history of the trade unions see Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986); and Jeremy Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of Cosatu* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991).

70 Nigel Mandy, *A City Divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1984), 211.

71 Morris, *Change and Continuity*, 3.

72 Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Demise of the Afrikaners* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2019), 226.

in place.[73] There were still punishing fines for anyone caught running an unregistered school, increased from R100 to R500.[74] Mother-tongue language was retained as the medium of instruction until Standard IV.[75] But the most striking part of the new legislation was how it stripped the old system of its reactionary ambitions. The government now assumed full financial responsibility for African education for the first time, opening unprecedented sums that saw a narrowing of the vast inequality which separated spending on white and black education. In 1970 the government had spent nineteen times more on white education than black. By 1984 that gap had fallen to seven times more.[76] For those watching in Soweto, the new legislation was accompanied with the promise of 106 new classrooms in 1979, including the construction of four new secondary schools.[77] For so long the National Party had sought to hold back secondary education; now it was determined to meet it. There were 155,000 secondary school students in 1976. Fourteen years later there were 570,000, a 268 per cent increase.[78]

This was ambitious. But the first responses to the legislation among people in Soweto immediately put lie to the idea that Botha could hope to build a new legitimacy for the National Party's rule out of the wreckage of 1976. Speaking on behalf of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee in January 1979, Nathan J. K. Molope,[79] said, 'Education for Blacks with a separate department is far from what Blacks have wanted, no matter what name is chosen. All along the line we have always known that separate means inferior and no amount of arguing can convince us to the contrary'.[80] Providing the view of the Committee of Ten, Dr Nthato Motlana said, 'I must make it clear the Draft Education Bill is completely unacceptable. We don't want a separate Bill for blacks. Education should fall under one department.'[81] Yet these damning indictments were notably not joined with calls for fresh protests in the streets. And when the time came for

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73 'Education Bill today', *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 November 1978.

74 'The new Bill has a 'sting'', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 November 1978.

75 'Aspects of the Education Bill', *Post*, 14 November 1978.

76 Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999), 169.

77 'Black parents will not be forced to pay the proposed levy for the erection or maintenance of their schools, Mr T N H "Punt" Janson, Minister of Education and Training, said during his visit to Soweto on Friday', [newspaper unknown], 14 January 1979.

78 'A boat with too many holes', *The Star*, 15 June 1991.

79 Unfortunately little is known about Molope other than he had once worked as a school principal.

80 As quoted in 'Time for relevant teachers by N J K Molope', *Voice*, 13 January 1979.

81 As quoted in 'One education dept for all', *Sunday Post*, 31 December 1978.

Soweto's students to discuss what the new education system meant to them, it became clear that this reluctance to go back out onto the streets was not simply limited to what some dismissed as Soweto's petty bourgeoisie.[82] Restraint and caution were principles widely embedded in Soweto.

On Sunday 21 January, two days before the start of the new academic year, around 2,000 people gathered at Regina Mundi Church. Soweto's recent history would have hung heavily under the church's high vaulted roof. During the worst violence in 1976 Regina Mundi had been sought as a safe haven, its outside walls pitted with bullet holes. As a place to discuss the future, it was a reminder of just how high the stakes had become in the classrooms. The meeting had been called by Soweto Students' League, an ephemeral organisation founded the year before by a small group of students who sought to carry the legacy of the SSRC.[83] In keeping with that legacy the SSL had advocated for boycotts in 1978. But by January 1979 the SSL had shifted to the new centre ground. Strangely echoing Lennox Mlonzi's words before the crowd of baying students in the Jabulani amphitheatre in August 1976, the SSL's chairman, Ewan Maphana, told the crowd that 'students should go back to school while the fight against Bantu education continued'.[84] This was the all-important distinction between the private business of going to school and the public business of opposing apartheid education that would recur again and again. And Maphana's call for a return to school was widely shared among those in the church. Rev Elia Mashai Tema,[85] the chairman of another new organisation, the Soweto Action Committee,[86] told the crowd that 1979 would be a 'crucial year', rallying the students to return to school. But Tema also set a deadline for the abolition of segregated education by the end of the year. And he concluded his speech by saying, 'If this is not done, we might have to take other steps in 1980.'[87] It was in this way that the politics of 1976 always followed Soweto. Like a dark cloud on the horizon, the threat of a return to the politics of

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[82] See for example 'Committee of Ten', *Work in Progress*, 10 (1979), 7-10.

[83] Little has been recorded of the SSL's history which, like the SSRC, suffered intense police harassment. Two of the SSL's founding members, Oupa Mlangeni and Teboho Moremi soon fled Soweto, first to Bloemfontein, and then into exile where they joined with Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Seatlholo in the South African Youth Revolutionary Council. I have found no further references to the SSL after 1979.

[84] As quoted in 'Soweto pupil told 'Go Back', *The Citizen*, 22 January 1979.

[85] Tema was trained at the Stofberg Theological College in Pietersburg and Vrije University in Amsterdam. He was an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. See Howard G. Hageman, *Two Centuries Plus: The Story of the New Brunswick Seminary* (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 200.

[86] Later that year the Soweto Action Committee was absorbed into the Azanian People's Organisation.

[87] 'Soweto pupil told 'Go Back', *The Citizen*, 22 January 1979.

1976 pressured anxious authorities to bend to people's will whenever anger rose. By deciding not to boycott, people were still exercising their power.

Two days later Soweto's schools opened. For the first time a problem not seen since January 1976 returned. Streams of students filled the streets on Tuesday 23 January, a demand for school places that quickly threatened to overwhelm the capacity of the new Department of Education and Training. Weeks into the new academic year, school principals were still admitting on average 50 new students a day. Schools already full were reporting hundreds of students still being sent to them.[88] By the end of April the demand had still not ceased, creating great tensions in the system.[89] On 5 March, hundreds of students angrily marched on the regional headquarters of the Department of Education and Training in Booysens, an industrial area south of downtown Johannesburg. The *Post* newspaper (successor to *The World* after it was banned in 1977) had started publishing the Department's lists of school places to help parents and students in the scramble for places.[90] But students had become incensed by a rumour *Post* was deliberately holding back the full lists to increase their circulation. They marched on Booysens, demanding to see the lists themselves.[91] In the end Strydom's attempt to carefully stage manage the reopening gave way to chaotic scenes. As many as 45,000 secondary students enlisted in Soweto's schools in 1979, 10,000 more than had started school in January 1976.[92] For Strydom, his inability to control the admissions would have been a reminder of his time working as a circuit inspector before the uprising. If the National Party's policy ambitions in society were more realistic under Botha, its authority was weaker than ever.

The pressures inside the schools were intense. Notwithstanding the government's pledge to provide textbooks for free, a sign of the National Party's new largesse, the academic year started with a basic shortage of teaching materials. For many students, life under the new Department of Education and Training started with groups of two or three forced to share one exercise book, others adopting a system where a class used textbooks for a week before passing them on to

88 'Students get action vow', *Post*, 7 March 1979.
89 'Pupils desperate', *Post*, 2 March 1979.
90 'Students in uproar', *Post*, 6 March 1979.
91 'Students get action vow', *Post*, 7 March 1979.
92 'Crisis in Soweto schools', *Post*, 8 March 1979.

another class.[93] And so much time had been wasted at the start of the year. Students who had been placed late were especially worried that their academic progress had been placed in jeopardy. Some schools set on extra lessons.[94] In order to cope with the numbers, double-sessions were brought back, a practice which had almost disappeared during the school boom in the early 1970s.[95]

Right from the start the government's ambition to create a new privileged class in the townships was let down by their own lack of financial commitment to its promises and a basic lack of state capacity. But as ever, there was no shortage of ambition at the top of the National Party. On 31 August 1979 Botha visited Soweto, alongside seven of his ministers. It was the first time any South African prime minister had set foot in Soweto. The visit was meant to be conciliatory, to showcase the distance between himself and his predecessor's pledge to 'maintain law and order at all costs'.[96] Botha spent seven hours in Soweto. In a speech before a carefully selected audience, he spoke of how his visit was 'proof we are prepared to open our hearts'.[97] As a goodwill gesture an R.11.5 million debt owed by the Soweto Community Council was cancelled.[98] Soweto was given city-status for the first time, a gesture meant to bury Verwoerd's legacy.[99]

But not counting the massive police presence, Soweto's streets were deserted, most people simply turning their back on the country's prime minister in quiet protest. Botha's announcement that Soweto's schoolchildren be given a special school holiday passed by deliberately unrecognised. On 4 September Soweto's children deliberately went to school. As Selinah Seake, a sixteen-year-old student from Diepkloof said, 'With exams around the corner and our syllabus still behind, due to the Department's lousy system of running schools, I feel this is a waste of time.'[100] Other remarks reveal a more gaping chasm between the people and their trust in their institutions. Many thought the registration debacle at the beginning of the year had been 'a trap to get them arrested.'[101] This was the deep distrust Botha had to overcome if his government aspired to

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93 'Failure fears for Soweto', *Post*, 12 April 1979. This issue would not start to be resolved until July 1979 when the DET was able to finally deliver new textbooks. See 'Textbooks arrive… at last', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 July 1979.

94 'Extra lessons laid on', *Post*, 26 April 1979.

95 'Double session schooling', *Argus*, 28 February 1979.

96 'Text of Vorster Statement', *New York Times*, 19 July 1976.

97 As quoted in 'Soweto Black ghetto gets first visit by a premier', *New York Times*, 1 September 1979.

98 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 106.

99 'Soweto gets city status, *Soweto News*, No. 10, 1979.

100 As quoted in 'Holiday confusion', *Post*, 5 September 1979.

101 'Tough lot of the black school kid', *Post*, 27 September 1979.

anything more than simply holding the line. And it was this deep distrust Botha failed to make any headway addressing.

Meant to make people content, the Department of Education and Training was making people angry. Following the mass resignation of teachers in 1977, the Department sought to address an acute teacher shortage in Soweto by hiring white teachers in significant numbers for the first time. Sixty white teachers were employed in 1978, rising to 129 in 1979, including 12 new white principals.[102] These teachers represented a small minority of the estimated 1,500 people employed in Soweto's schools at the time.[103] But they were highly visible, and brought with them some of apartheid's most petty discriminations. White teachers were paid more than their black colleagues and provided with separate staff rooms. At the newly opened Molapo Technical College there was great outrage that white teachers were given access to better toilet facilities.[104]

More than anything it was the behaviour of these teachers inside the classroom which troubled people. Some of the white teachers were certainly kind and well-intentioned. Dumisane Nkabinde, a student at Musi High in Pimville, remembered how his white English teacher brought him texts by African and African American writers.[105] In 1990 Elizabeth de Villiers published a memoir of her time teaching in Soweto's schools, in which her sense of moral seriousness and social responsibility shines through.[106] But as de Villiers observed too, many of her white colleagues were cruel and brutal disciplinarians. These were people who had found themselves in Soweto's schools through no choice of their own, and who exercised little restraint turning their frustrations on their students with violence and racist abuse. 'You are baboons', one student remembered their teacher telling them.[107] White teachers banned their students from leaving school premises at lunchtime, traditionally a time when students bought their lunch from the street vendors that gathered by the gates. This in case the students picked up 'subversive ideas'.[108] The ban betrayed

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102 'Whites fill 60 teaching posts', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 January 1978; 'Tales of gun-toting teachers', *Post*, 18 February 1978; 'Whites get more', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 June 1979.

103 'The tangle of Soweto schooling', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 February 1980.

104 'Teachers complain of racism', *The Sowetan*, 14 March 1983.

105 As quoted in Mark Orkin, ''Democracy Knows No Colour': Rationales for Guerrilla Involvement among Black South Africans', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 642-669.

106 De Villiers taught at Unitas Senior Secondary School in Klipville from 1984 to 1985. See Elizabeth de Villiers, *Walking the Tightrope: Recollections of a Schoolteacher in Soweto* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1990).

107 As quoted in Orkin, ''Democracy Knows No Colour'', 660.

108 'Students hit fees, uniforms', *Post*, 28 January 1980.

the deep paranoia with which the teachers viewed their students. And the students were no less suspicious of their teachers. It was widely rumoured that many of the white teachers were active members of the security forces, whose heavy presence was still being maintained outside the school gates.[109] As Randall Peteni, the president of the African Teachers' Association of South Africa,[110] said: 'It is quite frightening for the children and although the teachers are doing a good job I believe their presence upsets the children psychologically.'[111]

For those who wished to take Soweto back into insurrection, the presence of these white teachers seemed most flammable. In January 1980, the recently formed Congress of South African Students (COSAS)[112] and Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO) co-hosted a meeting at the Orlando YMCA, the hall where the march on 16 June 1976 had been planned.[113] The meeting was meant to prepare ahead of a much bigger community meeting at Regina Mundi the following weekend, a meeting where people would once again decide how they would face the new academic year. But it was at this first meeting on the last weekend in January that a resolution was agreed: 'We… propose that the presence of white teachers in Soweto should be eliminated. This can be done by students not entering white-run schools until they leave Soweto.'[114] It was the first serious call for a school boycott since 1976.

Before the meeting at Regina Mundi there was a keen sense of expectation in Soweto. At Musi High in Pimville, 300 students broke ranks and started a boycott with pickets at the school

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[109] It unclear whether there were actually servicemen teaching in the schools. On 3 February 1980, the Secretary for the Department of Education and Training publicly stated: 'The fact of the matter is that there is not a single national serviceman contributing to education of Blacks in Soweto'. In February 1980, the DET's chief liason officer, Mr G. Engelbrecht told the press that the only servicemen teaching in DET schools were seven teachers in Katlehong and Germiston. See ''Student boycott call politically motivated', *The Citizen*, 4 February 1980; 'Black school boycott a damp squib', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5

[110] Randall Langa Peteni (b.6 December 1915-d.8 September 2000) was born in Zingcuka in the Eastern Cape and educated at Fort Hare. He published a novel, *Hill of Fools* in 1976. In 1989 he was appointed chancellor of the University of Transkei.

[111] As quoted in 'Black teacher crisis as enrolments soar', *The Star*, 1 November 1978.

[112] The Congress of South African Students was founded in 1979 in Roodepoort. COSAS was banned in July 1985 under the Section 4 (1) of the Internal Security Act (No. 74 of 1982). It was the first time a political organisation had been banned since Black Wednesday, 1977. For more see Tshediso Matona, 'Student Organisation and Political Resistance in South Africa: An Analysis of the Congress of South African Students, 1979-1986' (B.A. Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1992).

[113] AZASO was founded in 1979 as the original student-wing of the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (AZAPO). In 1981 AZASO broke with AZAPO and pledged its commitment to the Freedom Charter. In December 1986 AZASO renamed itself the South African National Students' Congress.

[114] 'Students hit fees, uniforms', *Post*, 28 January 1980.

gates.[115] On the day of the meeting local businesses closed in solidarity, the popular Kaizer Chiefs football team rescheduled a league fixture so as not to distract. Then at 1 p.m. Saturday 2 February, more than 2,000 people filed through the doors of the famous church to decide their future. The resolution that 'Soweto students boycott classes… until all white national servicemen teachers were removed' passed.[116] Yet convincing a meeting was one thing. It soon became clear that most people had other ideas. When the schools reopened on Monday boycotts were reported at just four schools, Morris Isaacson, Thomas Mofolo Junior Secondary, Thabo Junior Secondary, and Tladi Junior Secondary, with students at the latter two schools telling reporters that they were only staying away because students at other schools had forced them. The situation across Soweto's 47 other junior and secondary schools was reported as 'normal'.[117]

The boycott had failed, but not because of a lack of political organising or the absence of a desire for change. Those things were both abundantly present in Soweto. The boycott failed because of an additional ingredient in Soweto: the sense of self-preservation born of the National Party's reprisals in 1976. That ingredient was not present everywhere. In April 1980, students rose up in the Western Cape's Coloured school system, the start of the second of the three great waves of youth unrest that rocked South Africa, 1976, 1980, and 1984.[118] Led by the Committee of 81, students in the Western Cape marched to the soundtrack of Pink Floyd's recent release 'Another Brick in the Wall'—'We Don't Want No Education [sic]'. They called for consumer boycotts and worker stayaways, fighting roaming street battles with the police.[119] By the year's end the government had closed 84 schools in South Africa in an attempt to contain the unrest,[120] the boycotts having spread to Durban and other pockets of the country.[121] Not once did Soweto's students show a serious sign of joining the insurrections during that tumultuous year.

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115 'Leaders angry over schools grievances', *Post*, 30 January 1980.

116 'Soweto call for boycott', *Sunday Times*, 3 February 1980.

117 'Black school boycott a damp squib', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 February 1980.

118 The history of the 1980 school boycotts is very underwritten. See Molteno, 'Students Take Control', 3-22. For a first-hand account written by a white American teacher who taught in Grassy Park, near Cape Town, see William Finnegan, *Crossing the Line: A Year in the Land of Apartheid* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1994).

119 The lyrics were changed to 'We want equal facilities; We don't need any forced control; Hey, cops leave us kids alone; All in all, it's just another peaceful protest'. As a result the song was banned by the government. See Roseinnes Phahle, 'We Don't Want No Education', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, 11 (1982), 135.

120 'Compulsory education for blacks: An issue steeped in controversy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 November 1980.

121 See Kumi Naidoo, 'The Politics of Youth Resistance in the 1980s: The Dilemmas of a Differentiated Durban', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 143-165.

That something was happening in Soweto leading people in a new political direction was made clearer when the government set about introducing compulsory education in Soweto. Clearly aimed at blocking future student protest, Section 3 Article C of the Education and Training Act stated: 'it shall be the aim and objective with the co-operation of the parents to introduce compulsory school attendance and free tuition'. Section 37 meanwhile reserved the minister special rights to 'declare that regular attendance at any kind of school specified in such notice [the *Gazette*], to such extent and under such circumstances as may be so specified, shall be compulsory for every Black person belonging to an age group who is resident in an area so specified'.[122] As the Western Cape erupted, the Department of Education and Training started the process of introducing compulsory education in Soweto at the end of 1980.

From the government's standpoint it was reasonable to think that the process might be straightforward. After all, calls for compulsory education had been a regular feature of Soweto's struggle for control of the classroom before the Soweto uprising.[123] That was to mistake the magnitude of 1976. But even after the violence of 1976 destroyed the idea that the schools belonged to the people inside Soweto, the demand for compulsory education continued to be heard in places less brushed by violence of 1976. Earlier in 1980 four regions in the Orange Free State and Transvaal had been selected as pilot sites for the introduction of compulsory education, totalling twenty-four townships. All backed the reform. Soweto was intended to be the fifth region.[124] Yet Soweto's recent history would lead the township to a different conclusion.

The process officially started in November 1980, when Ferdinand Hartzenberg, the Minister of Education and Training,[125] met with representatives from Soweto's 350 school committees for a consultation. The school committees however refused to accept responsibility for the decision, telling Hartzenberg that they needed time to consult with the wider community,

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122 Education and Training Act (No. 90 of 1979).

123 In November 1969, for example, Thamsanqa Kambule told a meeting of educationists in Johannesburg that 'Compulsory education should be the order of the day. See 'Compulsory education plea by Soweto headmaster', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 November 1969.

124 'Is this a new political tool against boycotts? By Sheryl Raine', *The Star*, 20 November 1980; 'Soweto still undecided on education', *The Citizen*, 21 November 1980.

125 Ferdinand Hartzenberg (b.8 January 1936-d.12 March 2021) was educated at Hoër Volkskool in Potchefstroom and Pretoria University. Hartzenberg was elected to parliament in 1970 and appointed Deputy Minister of Development in 1976. He was Minister of Education between 1979 and 1982. Following Treurnicht's death in April 1993, Hartzenberg became leader of the Conservative Party before its merger with the Freedom Front in 2003.

a decision befitting Soweto's new arm-length engagement with the state and refusal to work inside the system.[126] Community meetings were held before the committees reconvened with Hartzenberg in the Johannesburg City Hall on 1 December. Hartzenberg was told that of the 24 school districts in Soweto, just 2 had opted in favour of compulsory education, Jabulani and Klipspruit-Pimville (Klipspruit-Pimville soon reversed their decision).[127] And the reasoning they offered provides fascinating insight into the way people understood the schools at this time. As reported in *Rand Daily Mail*, parents said, 'they did not want compulsory education introduced under the present educational system because the pupils had already rejected the system.'[128] Unlike the students in the Western Cape Soweto's students had *already* turned their backs on the schools. And to make their continued opposition known, they did not need to continue with boycotts.

The rejection of compulsory education was unshowy, and like the history of the struggle for education before 1976, this is the type of protest which has tended not to attract the attentions of historians. But protest in apartheid South Africa did not have to be loud to be effective. As his many predecessors who occupied the office had found, Hartzenberg's ambition to impose the government's policy in the classrooms met its match in the power of ordinary people to simply refuse the demands of the state. Faced with near unanimous opposition, Hartzenberg chose not to force the policy upon Soweto with Section 37, recognising the limits of what people were prepared to accept from the government now. All he could do was publicly bemoan the fact that a policy once demanded by Sowetans was being rejected 'now that the Government had started to introduce it'.[129] In 1982 Hartzenberg took his frustrations and resigned from the National Party, following Treurnicht in forming the new Conservative Party. It was in the ranks of the Conservative Party that Verwoerd's uncompromising vision of apartheid would live to the end.

Sowetans' simultaneous rejection of compulsory education and school boycotts in 1980 encapsulated the strange, seemingly contradictory double-movements that came from seeing the business of going to school as separate from the business of classroom politics. Having rejected compulsory education on *political* grounds in 1980, there was no let-up in the *personal* demand for

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126 'Soweto still undecided on education', *The Citizen*, 21 November 1980.

127 See 'Compulsory schooling in two pilot areas', *The Star*, 2 December 1980; 'Forced learning starts in Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 December 1980; 'Compulsory education scheme in progress', *The Star*, 11 December 1980; ''No' to compulsory schooling plan', *Cape Herald*, 17 January 1981.

128 'Compulsory education gets a 'no', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 December 1980.

129 As quoted in 'Minister talks of attempts to ruin education plan', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 January 1981.

places in January 1981, even after five new high schools opened in 1980.[130] The government was never able to turn this deep ambivalence about what it meant to go to school after 1976 into an embrace of the system. But in a bold new partnership with business, it was at least able to better start meeting the demand for school places.

We have seen how the old Department of Bantu Education fiercely guarded its financial control over the schools. As prime minister Verwoerd had looked upon market-based policy solutions with suspicion, placing his faith in the state to solve society's problems. But Botha's reforms were built out of an embrace of public-private partnerships, hoping to kickstart a slowing economy plagued by a balance-of-payments crisis, high inflation, unemployment, and low growth.[131] And in the field of education the government had no shortage of partners. Big business had been rocked by the fallout of 1976, the political unrest triggering capital flight and a loss of confidence in the South African economy. There was no sector of society in which the call to reform apartheid was heard louder.

An early sign of what business now demanded from the government came in December 1976, when Harry F. Oppenheimer, the chairman of Anglo American and De Beers, founded the Urban Foundation. The Urban Foundation aimed at coordinating business' investments in modernising the South African economy, while lobbying the government to get rid of those parts of apartheid that were seen to most inhibit economic growth.[132] Investing in education was at the heart of the Urban Foundation's ambition. In 1985, 74 per cent of the Anglo American Corporation Chairman's Fund was spent on education.[133] And it was not only South African companies that turned their attentions to the township's schools, but American businesses too, navigating a new era of sanctions after the Soweto uprising gave new life to the global anti-apartheid movement. In 1977, the Rev Leon Sullivan of the Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia

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130 'Soweto to get eight new schools', *The Sowetan*, 16 February 1981; 'School crisis goes on', *The Sowetan*, 25 February 1981.

131 See Charles H. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 224-251.

132 On the Urban Foundation, see Dan Smit, 'The Urban Foundation: Transformation Possibilities', *Transformation*, 18 (1992), 35-42. See also Michael Mann, 'The Giant Stirs: South African Business in the Age of Reform', in Philip Frankel, Noam Pines, and Mark Swilling (eds.), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (New York, N.Y.: Methuen, Inc., 1988), 52-86.

133 Nicola Swainson, 'Corporate Intervention in Education and Training, 1969-89', in Elaine Unterhalter, Harold Wolpe, Thozamile Botha, Saleem Badat, Thulisile Dlamini and Benito Khotseng (eds.), *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1991), 97.

drew up a code of conduct for American companies doing business in South Africa, its signatories pledging to respect non-segregation in the workplace, fair employment, equal pay and a commitment to improving social conditions. By 1985, 146 companies had signed up to the Sullivan Principles.[134] American companies spent between 5 to 10 per cent of their total wage bills on 'corporate social responsibility' programmes, with education given special attention.[135] The public-private funding partnerships fuelled a boom in school expansion. Twelve years after the students uprising there were 60 secondary schools in Soweto, many built with the financial support of the world's major companies, IBM, Coca Cola, Chase Manhattan, Citibank, Kodak, among others.[136] The most ambitious of these schools was Pace College in Jabulani. With funding provided from the American Chamber of Commerce, Pace opened its doors in 1981, a sleek modern two-storey building built 'to resemble many of the advanced colleges in the US, Europe and South Africa'.[137] Its motto, 'Ex Asper Is Ad Astra'—From Hardship to the Stars.

The reason why big business had suddenly become interested in Sowetans' education was not lost on people, who bristled at being made pawns in these high-level political games between the board rooms and the government. When a high-profile delegation from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) visited South Africa in December 1981, Lekgau Mathabathe, member of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee, said, 'As far as we are concerned the Reagan Administration is perpetuating apartheid in this country. Money is valueless if this is how they want to help us.'[138] Indeed, the value of the private sector's investments in education was often highly questionable. It was symptomatic of the failure of Botha's reforms to grapple properly with the scale of the challenge that the new technical schools built with their corporate sponsors

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134 Rev Leon Sullivan (b.16 October 1922-d.24 April 2001) was born in Charleston, West Virginia, and educated at West Virginia State College, Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, before settling in Philadelphia. In 1971 Sullivan joined the board of General Motors. He visited South Africa in 1974 where he was humiliated by police, made to undress before boarding his flight home. In 1987 Sullivan pushed harder, urging corporations to divest from South Africa. For more on the Sullivan Principles, see James B. Stewart, 'Amandla! The Sullivan Principles and the Battle to End Apartheid in South Africa, 1975-1987', *The Journal of African American History*, 96 (2011), 62-89; Jessica Ann Levy, 'Black Power in the Boardroom: Corporate America, the Sullivan Principles, and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle', *Enterprise & Society*, 21 (2020), 170-209; Zeb Larson, 'The Sullivan Principles: South Africa, Apartheid and Globalization', *Diplomatic History*, 44 (2020), 479-503.

135 'Disinvestment means less pressure to provide aid', *Business Day*, 8 August 1986.

136 'Need for inspection at Soweto schools – DET's official', *The Sowetan*, 22 August 1988.

137 As quoted in 'Soweto's new college', *The Star*, 20 August 1981.

138 As quoted in 'Black educationists reject US aid plan', *Argus*, 29 December 1981. See also ''AID' team will help black education', *The Star*, 3 December 1981.

were often not able to run their workshops because the government had not provided enough electricity. New outhouses for technical workshops were often left empty, repurposed by teachers as a place to park their cars in the shade.[139] And while a school like Pace College was able to employ people as impressive as the acclaimed poet Oswald Mtshali,[140] most schools struggled to recruit teachers. Principals at schools which failed to attract the attentions of multinational corporations used the vacations to travel to Natal, scouring the countryside for teachers who might be convinced to join Soweto's troubled schools.[141]

This was new. In its essential poverty, Bantu Education had acted as a perverse type of social leveller. Botha's public-private partnerships started to establish a clear hierarchy of better and worse schools. It was an early sign of the future of education in South Africa, and an affront to this civic-minded community, long accustomed to putting narrow self-interest aside for the sake of the common good. Speaking on behalf of the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee, Fanyana Mazibuko, an ex-teacher fired from his job at Morris Isaacson after 1976[142] summed up people's frustration with the inequities that private funding produced: 'The whole fallacy of free education has been exposed for what it really is.'[143]

But of all the features of Botha's new education settlement meant to satisfy people but which instead only ended up causing frustration and anger, the most commonly encountered was the age-limit restrictions. First introduced in May 1981, the age restrictions barred anyone sixteen and older from attending primary school, eighteen and older from starting Standard Eight, and twenty and older from Standard Ten.[144] Like compulsory education, the age-regulations was clearly aimed at blocking student militancy, forcing older students out of the system. In practice the age

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139 'Soweto pupils face technical 'black-outs'', *The Star*, 12 April 1984.

140 Oswald Mtshali (b.17 January 1940-) was born in Vyrheid, Natal and educated at Inkmana High School before studying via correspondence at the London School of Journalism. *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, his first collection of poetry, was published in 1972. His second volume, *Fireflames* (1980), was dedicated to 'all our heroes, especially the brave schoolchildren of Soweto, who have died, been imprisoned and persecuted in the grim struggle for our freedom'. It was banned by the South African government. He left South Africa in 1988 and studied for a doctorate at Columbia University.

141 'Schools heads hunt teachers', *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 March 1981.

142 Fanyana Mazibuko was educated at St Matthew's Roman Catholic school in Moroka and the University of Witwatersrand. Mazibuko taught science at Morris Isaacson between 1967 and 1977. Banned by the government under the Suppression of Communism Act, Mazibuko was barred from teaching for life. After the end of apartheid Mazibuko was appointed principal of Pace and the Director of the Trust for Educational Advancement in South Africa.

143 'School fees row: 'We don't decide' – Det', *Post*, 25 January 1980.

144 See 'Atasa denies DET age claim', *The Star*, 2 February 1982.

limits badly discriminated against those who had had their education badly disrupted in the past through no fault of their own, harshly punishing those who failed their exams, a far from uncommon outcome in Soweto's overcrowded and still grievously underfunded schools. In 1983 50 per cent of candidates failed their matriculation exams in Soweto, many now officially debarred from repeating the year.[145]

Yet like so much else strict enforcement of the age regulations proved beyond the government's power. To manage the great anger when officials tried turning students away, Strydom increasingly found himself exercising personal discretion, the technocratic sheen of Botha's reform era giving way to a much more personable form of government at street-level, just as the cold logics of Verwoerd's principles had become enmeshed in the intimate push-and-pull before 1976. When students at Thabo Jabula High in Klipspruit were refused re-admission in early 1982 for example, Strydom quickly intervened, personally authorising the students' admission.[146] As the Regional Director for the Transvaal was repeatedly at pains to make clear, 'People must not get the impression that we do not want them to be educated.'[147] No matter how often exceptions were granted though, the policy remained officially in place, its arbitrary enforcement enflaming people's sense of injustice. The problem recurred every January. And in the never-ending scramble for places, there was one key piece of information: schools run by black principals showed a willingness to bend the rules that white principals refused. Under black principals, class sizes in the early 1980s often reached as many as 100 students. White principals doggedly stuck to the Department's 40-student limit.[148]

In January 1984 it was this issue that took Soweto closest back to the scenes of disorder and violence. In Dhlamini, the white principal of Ibhongo Secondary refused entry to 52 students in breach of the age regulations.[149] The school had a recent history of protest, the type which flared occasionally after 1976. In 1983 students at Ibhongo had started a boycott after the school first appointed a white principal.[150] Now, on 27 January 1984, the students started on a boycott again,

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145 'Students outcry over age-bar', *City Press*, 29 January 1984.
146 'Older pupils can still go to school', *The Sowetan*, 15 March 1982.
147 As quoted in 'DET helps students', *The Sowetan*, 17 March 1982.
148 'Most schools in Soweto are overcrowded', *The Citizen*, 23 January 1982.
149 'Teacher transfer sparks boycott', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 March 1984.
150 'Goodbye to black year of violence', *The Star*, 3 January 1984.

picketing the school with *sjamboks*.[151] But it was clear that the boycotters were a minority. Many students went to school, and the protests soon started to fizzle out. Then something happened, the exact details probably lost forever. On 20 February a student was stabbed to death, by who and for what reason we do not know. In response a group of students stoned a man to death. Three students were immediately arrested, Thami Mcerwa, George Ngwenya, and Stanley Sigojane, all active members of the Azanian Students' Movement, the youth wing of the Azanian Peoples' Organisation. Shortly after sixteen more students were seized by police. Yet just as quickly as these events threatened to develop a momentum of their own, they came to a halt. The sixteen students appeared in Johannesburg Magistrate's Court, their family and friends packed into the gallery. When it was announced that the boys had been acquitted, the gallery poured into the bustling streets of downtown Johannesburg, the students' mothers ululating in relief. The next day Ibhongo's students returned to their classrooms.[152] It was a remarkable de-escalation of a highly charged situation, made all the more remarkable by events elsewhere in the country. January 1984 marked the start of the third wave of youth insurrections. Yet even as the insurrections spread to the townships on the East and West Rand, Soweto's schools remained calm. It was not what made the headlines, but it was extraordinary nonetheless.

Conclusion

The history of what happened in Soweto after 1976 has rarely been studied by historians, years when the most important events in South Africa seemed to be unfolding elsewhere. Indeed, as much as Soweto's post-insurrectionary history has been of interest to scholars, it is to note the curiosity that a place which heralded a new era of mass protest remained quiet even as so much of South Africa seemed in flames. As to why, little explanation has been offered. The most serious attempt to find an answer is to be found in an unpublished paper from 1988 entitled, 'Why was Soweto different?', delivered by Jeremy Seekings at the University of Witwatersrand. Compared to those places in insurrection, Seekings argued that Soweto was too internally stratified by class, too

151 'Pupils beaten as boycott runs on', *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 February 1984.

152 See '16 Ibhongo pupils freed', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 February 1984; 'Jubilation as Ibhongo pupils freed', *The Star*, 28 February 1984; 'Ibhongo pupils back at school', *Rand Daily Mail*, 29 February 1984; 'Teacher transfer sparks boycott', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 March 1984.

well policed, and too introspective.[153] At least here, Seekings suggested, we might consider that Botha's reforms had their intended effects.

But just as the years before 1976 appear much less quiescent the closer one looks, historians need to be careful not to mistake the lack of insurrection for acquiescence after 1976. Between the poles of acquiescence and open rebellion lay a much more variegated political world. Botha's reforms did not appease Sowetans so much as they created new injustices and fresh sources of anger. Yet in response Sowetans now reacted in a way the outside world had not been trained to expect, creating new organisations outside the state to take up the mantle of resistance, affording students the space to go back to school. The fear instilled in people after the reprisals in 1976 might have easily destroyed Soweto's civic life. Fear instead had turned Soweto's politics in new directions.

Understanding this much overlooked chapter in Soweto's history has implications that go well beyond Soweto's long struggle for education. However much Soweto's history might seem anomalous compared to those places in insurrection, the fact is that Soweto was not very different at all. Soweto was the place that suffered the most in 1976. But in all those places that suffered badly from the state's reprisals in 1976 and in 1980, two closely related phenomena started to track each other. New civics were founded to take responsibility for politics of everyday life, and children went back to school, eschewing insurrectionary politics when the opportunity was presented. And if the import of this ethos was at first hard to measure, it was out of the flowering of hundreds of new civics that a new organisation was able to be formed. On 20 August 1983, a massive meeting bringing thousands of activists together from across the country was held in a community hall in Mitchell's Plain on the windswept Cape flats, the scene of such terrible bloodshed in 1980. It was at this meeting that the United Democratic Front was formed, tying together 565 civics, church groups and trade unions under one flag. At its founding the UDF claimed to represent around two million people. Nothing like it seen in South Africa for decades, not since the ANC was forced to flee into exile. Indeed, this was a deliberate attempt to resurrect the old days when the ANC had led mass organised resistance inside South Africa. Though careful never to make any explicit claim that it represented the banned ANC, it was clear that this was an organisation built in the ANC's

[153] Jeremy Seekings, 'Why was Soweto Different? Urban Development, Township Politics, and the Political Economy of Soweto, 1977-1984', (African Studies seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

heritage. From three corners of South Africa, the first three co-presidents, Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha[154] and Archie Gumede,[155] were all well-recognised from the ANC's past. And in their meetings and publications the UDF made no secret of the fact it looked to the Freedom Charter for its ideals of what South Africa's future might look like—non-racial, redistributive, social democratic.

But this was not a simple attempt at resurrection. The UDF was eager to show that it had learnt the lessons from the past, not to repeat the ANC's historic mistakes. The UDF was not a centralised organisation like the ANC had been at the time of its rout in the early 1960s, its small underground cells quickly swept up by the police in the crackdown following the Sharpeville massacre. The lesson the UDF took was not to build power from the top, but the bottom-up. The government had proven itself brutally able to arrest thousands, but it could not arrest millions of people, members who in any case were not officially part of the UDF, only by extension, through their organisation's affiliation. As the ANC knew, mass mobilising under a government like this was a dangerous business. The explosion of violence in Duncan Village had rocked the ANC's strategic thinking that there was any space to consider the kind of politics that the UDF was about to embark upon. But there had been other lessons to learn since then. The paroxysm of violence in Soweto in 1976 might have inspired many at a distance to think big. But those who had come face-to-face with apartheid's Leviathan were left with little space to consider the romance of anything like a People's War. Mass organising did not just offer the best chance of forcing the National Party to accept defeat. It offered the best chance of protecting people from the violence of the apartheid state. In April 1985 the UDF held its first national conference in Azaadville, Krugersdorp, where it adopted the slogan, 'From Protest to Challenge, From Mobilisation to Organisation'. As a slogan it was a neat encapsulation of what the UDF hoped to turn the legacy of Soweto uprising into; something bounded, manageable, and above all else, peaceful.

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[154] Oscar Mafakafaka Mpetha (b.5. August 1909-d.15 November 1994) was born at Mount Fletcher in the Transkei and educated at Adams College. He moved to Cape Town and became actively involved in trade union politics, becoming general-secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union in 1951, the same year that he joined the ANC. In 1983 he was sentenced to five years in prison after his role in a protest in Nyanga in 1980 that left two people dead. He was released from hospital detention on 15 October 1989.

[155] Archibald Jacob Gumede (b.1 March 1914-d.27 June 1998) was born in Pietermaritzburg and educated at Lovedale and Fort Hare. He joined the ANC in 1949. He led the Natal delegation to the to the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955 and later trained as an attorney. Elected president of the UDF in 1983 and re-elected in 1985, he was issued a banning order in 1988. He was elected to parliament in 1994.

The UDF's first challenge was to thwart elections to the new Black Local Authorities in late 1983, part of Botha's reform to check political unrest by granting greater powers to people in the townships to oversee municipal governance. The UDF called for a boycott of these elections. Turnout was low everywhere, but especially in Soweto, where just 10 per cent of registered voters cast ballots.[156] No sign of acquiescence here. Then came Botha's most ambitious reform yet, a new Tricameral Parliament to replace the existing white bicameral parliament with three separate chambers for whites, Indians, and Coloureds.[157] Ahead of the new parliament's first elections in August 1984 the UDF organised a Million Signatures Campaign, an echo of an old ANC campaign from the 1950s.[158] UDF activists headed out into the townships for signatures, its campaign carried far and wide in *UDF News* and a host of other publications.[159] When the election came, Botha's hopes of co-opting the Indians and Coloureds met with failure. Just 30 per cent of Coloured voters cast ballots, only 20 per cent of the Indian electorate.[160] The principled commitment to non-cooperation and nonviolence that had grown out of 1976 and led to the founding of the Committee of Ten, the Soweto Teachers' Action Committee and hundreds of other organisations was now being written by the UDF on the national stage. As Azhar Cachalia,[161] a founding member of the UDF described: 'The struggle for the washing line became the struggle for the vote.'[162]

There were, in sum, two very distinct legacies of the Soweto uprising. There was the millenarianism which flared brightly in places, gripping people's attentions, its attentions fixed

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156 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 115.

157 The voguish term among policymakers in South Africa to describe these new constitutional arrangements was consociationalism, heavily associated with the work of Arend Lijphart and others. See, for example, Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1968); and *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1977). With such a receptive audience Lijphart himself soon developed a special interest in the South African case. See Lijphart, *Power-Sharing in South Africa* (Berkeley, C.A.: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1985).

158 Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983), 74.

159 A million signatures proved too ambitious. In the end, 400,000 signatures were collected, and the campaign was brought to a premature end. For more see Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1994* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000).

160 'Election turnout about 20% in South African elections', *Washington Post*, 29 August 1984.

161 Azhar Cachalia (b.26 June 1956-) was born in Edinburgh and educated at Damelin College in Johannesburg, the University of Durban Westville and the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1983 Cachalia was appointed to the executive of the Transvaal India Congress. In 1987 he was twice detained under the state of emergency. Between 1996 and 1999 he served as Secretary for Safety and Security before returning to legal practice.In 2005 he was appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal.

162 As quoted in Emma Gilbey, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (London: Vintage, 1994), 144.

firmly on the future. And then there were the civics, their quiet commitment to the present. The distinctiveness of those legacies has proven difficult to see, in large part because both the ANC and the National Party had an interest in tying the two legacies together. Faced suddenly with a mass organisation that broke no clear law but whose opposition was obvious and uncompromising, the National Party tried responding to the UDF in the same way it had broken the ANC in the early 1960s, persecuting its top-level leadership and sending them to prison. In January 1986 a major trial started in the town of Delmas, treason charges brought against 22 of the UDF's leading figures, including Popo Molefe, general secretary of the UDF,[163] Mosiuoa 'Terror' Lekota, the organisation's publicity secretary,[164] and Moses Chikane, the secretary of the Transvaal branch of the UDF.[165] The case made against the accused was clear: the UDF was nothing more than a front for the exiled ANC, its aims nothing less than the revolutionary overthrow of the government.[166] Watching from exile, the ANC was eager not to disabuse the government of the idea the UDF acted as its internal front, an organisation it had played no hand in founding, and whose leadership it had no control over, but whose ability to survive the government's repression made it an integral part in its plans for People's War.[167] Over the years historians have been no less tempted by the link connecting the UDF to the insurrections. Providing crisp expression of a widespread working assumption amongst historians, Tom Lodge wrote, 'the UDF inspired an insurrectionary movement that was without precedent in its combative militancy, in the burden it imposed upon government resources, and in the degree to

163 Popo Molefe (b.1952-) was born in Sophiatown. He joined the Black People's Convention in 1973. In 1979 Molefe was chairman of the Soweto AZAPO. Molefe resigned from AZAPO in early 1981 before becoming active in the Soweto Civic Association and the United Democratic Front. He was one of the accused in the Delmas Treason Trial.

164 Mosiuoa Lekota (b.13 August 1948-) was born in Kroonstad in the then named Orange Free State. Lekota matriculated from St. Francis College, Mariannhill, alma mater of Steve Biko and Ellen Kuzwayo, amogst others. Lekota then studied at the University of the North, where he became active in the South African Students' Organisation. In 1974 he was sent to prison on Robben Island and released in 1982.

165 Moses 'Moss' Chikane (b.14 August 1948-17 October 2018) was born near Groblersdal and was involved in SASO. In the early 1990s he was responsible for organising the return of ANC members in exile. Elected to parliament in 1994 he left in 2004. In 2005 he was appointed the South African ambassador to Germany. In 2008 he was appointed ambassador to Zambia.

166 See Franziska Rueedi, 'Narratives on Trial: Ideology, Violence and the Struggle over Political Legitimacy in the Case of the Delmas Treason Trial, 1985-1989', *South African Historical Journal*, 67 (2015), 335-355.

167 Howard Barrell, 'Conscripts to Their Age: African National Congress Operational Strategy, 1976-1986', (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1993) 266-296.

which it internalised hostility toward apartheid'.[168] But the struggle against apartheid was not just a fight against the National Party. It was a struggle amongst people with very different ideas as to how the fight should be won. The truth behind the UDF's politics was very different than that which has been commonly supposed. As Albertina Sisulu plainly described, 'The UDF formation was pushed by the leaders when the leaders saw the people getting out of hand…. Leaders try to stop uprisings. It is the government that wants uprisings.'[169] In the next chapter we will see how big the gap between those two legacies was, and how great the challenge of carving out an alternative form of politics under a government which shared none of the horrors of what it had done in 1976.

[168] Tom Lodge, 'Reform, Recession and Resistance' in Tom Lodge, Bill Nasson, Steven Mufson, Khehla Shubane, and Nokwanda Sithole (eds.), *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (London: Hurst & Co., 1992), 29.

[169] As quoted in Anthony Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1992), 134-5.

- IV -

'People's Education for People's Power!' 1984-1986

> Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence…. Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate *raison d'etre*. Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object.
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> - Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [1]

In January 1984 anger was rising amongst the students in Atteridgeville, a township six miles west of Pretoria and around forty miles north of Soweto. At Saulridge High schoolchildren returned for the start of the academic year to find that 19 exam scripts had never been sent for marking, automatically deeming those students to have failed last year's examinations, barred from progressing to the next year. Meanwhile at Hofmeyr High, 50 pupils were refused readmission, considered to be in breach of the Department of Education and Training's age regulations.[2] Just as happened in Soweto in 1976, students in Atteridgeville started a boycott to protest against a government that got in the way of their education. And just as happened in Soweto a boycott that started with specific remediable grievances turned into something far bigger following an act of police violence. On 14 February 1984 police drove a Land Rover through a crowd of students outside D. H. Peta High, crushing a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl to death.[3] Like Hastings Ndlovu and Hector Pieterson's deaths before, Emma Sathekge's death transformed everything, turning a set of localised students' demands for control over their classrooms into an insurrection aimed at nothing less than overthrowing the state.

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[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 204.

[2] Monica Bot, *School Boycotts 1984: The Crisis in African Education* (Durban: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Natal, 1985).

[3] 'Black girl dies in South African clash', *New York Times*, 14 February 1984.

Meanwhile, faraway in Cradock, a small sheep-farming town in the hills of the Eastern Cape, a school principal had been busy organising a grassroots movement that would lead to an even more dramatic clash between the people and the state. In 1983, the charismatic principal of Sam Xhallie Junior Secondary school, Matthew Goniwe,[4] founded the Cradock Residents' Association, to protest against municipal rent increases, as well as the Cradock Youth Association, to promote greater self-pride and discipline amongst the students.[5] Neither organisation aimed at setting a match to the existing social order. But in a small conservative town in rural South Africa even this was enough to draw the watchful eye of the state. On 29 November 1983 the Department of Education and Training announced that Goniwe was to be moved to another school district from the start of 1984. Goniwe's removal was the catalyst for an uprising even more ferocious than Atteridgeville. Cradock's students started on a fifteen-month school boycott, the longest in apartheid history, the small town convulsed by waves of mass civil disobedience and counter-reprisals.[6] On 27 June 1985, Goniwe was travelling on the long road back to Cradock from a meeting in Port Elizabeth when he and three travelling companions, Fort Calata,[7] Sparrow Mkhonto,[8] and Sicelo Mhlauli,[9] were abducted by the security forces and murdered. Three weeks later 70,000 people descended on Cradock, the massive funeral gathered under the red and black flag of the Communist Party, and the green, black and gold of the ANC, holding cardboard cut-outs of AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles above their heads.

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[4] Matthew Goniwe (b.27 December 1957-d.27 June 1985) was educated at Sam Xhallie Junior Secondary school and Fort Hare, where he received his teaching diploma. He returned to Cradock and taught mathematics at Sam Xhallie. In July 1976 Goniwe was arrested for political activity having been part of a Marxist reading group. In prison Goniwe studied for a B.A. in political science and education by correspondence with the University of South Africa. He was released from prison in 1981.

[5] On the history of protest in Cradock see Michael Tetelman, *We Can! Black Politics in Cradock, South Africa, 1948-1985* (Grahamstown: Institute for Social and Economic Research & Cory Library, Rhodes University, 2012). For an urban history of Cradock see Jeffrey Butler, *Cradock: How Segregation and Apartheid came to a South African Town* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

[6] By September 1984, one-hundred of Cradock's seven-thousand school students were attending lessons. See 'Early break for schools in riot townships', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 September 1984.

[7] Fort Calata (b.5 November 1956-d.27 June 1985) worked as a teacher under the principalship of Goniwe, where the two men became friends. Calata's grandfather, James Arthur Calata, was secretary general of the African National Congress between 1936 and 1949. Calata's wife, Nomonde, was pregnant at the time of his death. Sicelo Mhlauli (b.25 May 1949-d.27 June 1985) grew up and was educated in Cradock where he was childhood friends with Goniwe. Mhlauli studied teaching at Lovedale College. He taught at Tembalabantu High School in Zwelitsha in the Ciskei before becoming a principal in Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape.

[8] Sparrow Mkhonto (b.24 December-d.27 June 1985) grew up and was educated in Cradock before working on the railways. Mkhonto was a senior officer in the Cradock Residents' Association.

[9] Sicelo Mhlauli (b.25 May 1949-d.27 June 1985) grew up and was educated in Cradock where he was childhood friends with Goniwe. Mhlauli studied teaching at Lovedale College. He taught at Tembalabantu High School in Zwelitsha in the Ciskei before becoming a principal in Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape.

Atteridgeville and Cradock proved to be just the first of dozens of townships to throw themselves into insurrection in 1984 and 1985, bigger than anything in 1976 and 1980. On 3 September 1984, the day P. W. Botha's vaunted tricameral parliament opened in Cape Town, the Jacobin mood seized the townships of the Vaal Triangle, a sprawling industrialised belt 40 miles south of Soweto, home to around 500,000 people. Here the immediate trigger was an increase in the local authority's rent and service charges, but just as in Atteridgeville and Cradock, it was the students who led the fight into the streets. Filled with millenarianism, students boycotted their schools, built barricades in the streets, and fought roving street battles with the police.[10] Within weeks the insurrections had spread to the townships on the East Rand, in Katlehong, Duduza and KwaThema. In November as many as 800,000 workers joined forces with 400,000 students to commit to a two-day stayaway, bringing activity in the Johannesburg region to a halt.[11] Then, after police fired on a funeral procession in Langa near Uitenhage on 21 March 1985, killing at least 20 people, the insurrectionary mood swept large parts of the Eastern Cape.[12]

This was big, but to begin with at least, Botha signalled his trust in the police to hold the line, signalling his ambition to check the insurrections with bold new reforms. A much anticipated 'Rubicon' speech to be delivered by Botha at the opening of the Natal National Party provincial congress in August 1985 showed the government looking forwards with confidence. In cabinet the likes of Chris Heunis, the Minister of Constitutional Reform,[13] and Pik Botha, the Minister for Foreign Affairs,[14] won Botha's ear to use the speech as a commitment to far-reaching reforms. Senior ministers discussed sanctioning Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the reincorporation

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[10] For the first book-length history of the Vaal Uprising see Franziska Rueedi, *The Vaal Uprising of 1984 and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2021). For first-hand accounts see Johannes Rantete, *The Third Day of September: An Eye-Witness Account of the Sebokeng Rebellion of 1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984); and Patrick Noonan, *They're Burning the Churches: The Final Dramatic Events that Scuttled Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011).

[11] The Labour Monitoring Group, 'Report: The November Stay-away', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 10 (1984), 76.

[12] Thole Majodina, 'A Short Background to the Shooting Incident in Langa Township, Uitenhage', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 8, (1986), 488-493.

[13] Chris Heunis (b.20 April 1927-d.27 January 2006) was born in Cape Province and educated in George, where he trained as a lawyer. Heunis was elected to the House of Assembly in 1970. In 1974 Heunis was appointed Minister of Indian Affairs and Tourism and in 1975 Minister of Economic Affairs. In 1982, P. W. Botha appointed Heunis as Minister of Constitutional Reform. Heunis retired from politics in 1989.

[14] Roelof Frederik 'Pik' Botha (b.27 April 1932-d.12 October 2018) was born in Rustenburg, Transvaal and educated in Potchefstroom and the University of Pretoria, where he studied law. Botha joined the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1953 and in 1970 was elected to parliament. In 1977 Vorster appointed Botha foreign minister, a position he held until 1994.

of the Bantustans into the state of South Africa, and a means of providing electoral representation for black South Africans in cabinet.[15]

But Botha's reforms had always had another strategic dimension built into them, whose full implications only now threatened to become clear. Between 1977 and 1985 spending on the military doubled.[16] In 1985, R47 billion was being spent on the defence.[17] And it was to marshal these vast resources that Botha oversaw the creation of an extraordinary security state apparatus, blurring the lines separating civilian and military government. It was called the National Security Management System, and at its top sat the State Security Council, chaired by Botha himself, bringing together a select group of key power-brokers, the ministers of Defence, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Development, as well as the heads of the Defence Force, Police, National Intelligence, the Prisons Service and others. The State Security Council oversaw eleven regionally based Joint Management Centres, which in turn oversaw 60 sub-Joint Management Committees, connected to around 450 more mini-JMCs. The National Security Management System was like one massive spider's web covering the country. Any trouble anywhere set off a warning, allowing the country's full resources to be made quickly available in response.[18]

In pairing civic reforms with military repression, Botha was following a model, the counterinsurgency wars the European empires fought during their final days in Kenya, Malaya, Algeria, Indochina and elsewhere. The European empires had not survived those wars. But amongst the lessons one thinker stood out to the South Africans, André Beaufre, a highly cerebral French general who had fought in Indochina, Suez and Algeria.[19] Beaufre's 1963 book, *An*

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15 See Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 175-206.

16 Robert Davies and Dan O'Meara, 'Total Strategy in Southern Africa: An Analysis of South African Regional Policy Since 1978', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11 (1985), 194.

17 Anthony Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1992), 109.

18 See Philip Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians: Civil-Military Relations in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); James Selfe, 'South Africa's National Management System', in Jacklyn Cock and Laurie Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 149-158; Annette Seegers, 'South Africa's National Security Management System, 1972-90', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29 (1991), 253-273; Chris Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Annette Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

19 André Beaufre (b.25 January 1902-d.13 February 1975) was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine and educated at École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr. After fighting in the Second World War, Beaufre fought in Indochina and Algeria. He commanded the combined British and French forces attempt to seize the Suez Canal in 1956. On Beaufre's place in the Algerian War see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York, N.Y.: New York Review of Books, 2006), 166.

Introduction to Strategy, offered a bold vision of what a government should do when faced recalcitrant population and militant foe, coordinating every government resource, pulling every lever available to them, never to suffer the delusion that a war against a guerrilla army could be simply won on the battlefield. Society itself had to be conceptualised as the battlefield.[20] Beaufre's totalising approach gave the National Party the confidence to think they might succeed where the Europeans failed. Botha's reforms were one half of the strategy, meant to win over the hearts and minds of the majority, making it easier for the security forces to isolate and eliminate the enemy. And the key to winning a counterinsurgency war, Beaufre argued, was to always act on the front foot, never to give an inch.[21] The National Security Management System became fully operational in 1983.[22]

Ten months after the start of the Vaal uprising, with his reform agenda bedevilled by the UDF and his government's claim to uphold law and order mocked by the youth on the streets, Botha decided to act. On 20 July 1985, Botha announced a partial state of emergency in South Africa across 36 magisterial districts, in the Eastern Cape, the Vaal Triangle, the East Rand, and Soweto too, its reputation preceding it even as its streets remained quiet. In the end the Rubicon speech was delivered, but gutted of its mooted content. A defiant Botha appeared before television cameras instead, the reformer turned into a general. 'Don't push us too far', the finger-wagging president told shocked world audiences.[23] Thousands of soldiers and police reinforcements were sent into the townships to reimpose order, no matter at what cost.

The effect of the state of emergency was curious though, albeit tragically explicable. Instead of suppressing the uprisings, the state of emergency increased the bellicose mood in South Africa, bringing unrest to new parts of the country, increasing the ferocity of the fighting everywhere. Two days after Botha announced a state of emergency, Oliver Tambo delivered a historic speech on the airwaves of Radio Freedom. For months the ANC had been closely watching events, gauging when best to stage their call for an escalation.[24] Now Tambo called all

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[20] André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defence, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*, trans. R. H. Barry (London: Faber and Faber, 1965 [1963]).

[21] On Beaufre's influence in South African politics see Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and its Search for Survival* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), 108-111, 277-279 and 328.

[22] Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, 96.

[23] 'Excerpts from Botha's speech on the outlook for South Africa', *New York Times*, 16 August 1985.

[24] See 'Planning for People's War.' Discussion document by Joe Slovo, Maputo, November 1983 (abridged), in Gail M. Gerhart and Clive Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. VI*, Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 530-536.

oppressed South Africans to rise up and fight a People's War, the term penned in the ANC's Green Book in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising. Tambo told his listeners that no one should be spared the cost of fighting. 'It is vital that all areas of our country should join in the general offensive to make the apartheid system unworkable and South Africa ungovernable'. And People's War was to be an aggressive war, taken out of the townships. 'We cannot and should not allow a situation of relative peace and tranquillity to obtain in the white areas of our country while the black townships are in flames. We must take the struggle into the white areas of South Africa and there attack the apartheid regime and its forces of repression in these areas which it considers its rear.'[25] The message was chillingly clear. The ANC's leadership in Lusaka wanted to see what was happening in Cradock, Atteridgeville and the Vaal Triangle replicated everywhere. On 2 August 1985, an address on Radio Freedom proclaimed, 'The whole country must go up in flames.'[26]

In the weeks that followed South Africa witnessed a terrifying escalation of violence. On 1 August 1985, Victoria Mxenge, a legal activist and regional treasurer of the UDF in Natal[27] was gunned down in Umlazi near Durban, marking the start of major violence in the region.[28] In Cape Town the first major unrest returned to the Nyanga, Langa and Guguletu since 1976.[29] On 26 July African students met at UWC stadium and committed to a school boycott. On 29 July, an eighteen-year-old student, Sthembele Matiso, was killed by police in widespread violent clashes.[30] Violence came to places like Kroonstad and townships in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal area which had until then had been quiet.[31] Between July 1985 and February 1986, 600 people were killed in the

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25 Oliver Tambo, 'Address by Oliver Tambo to the Nation on Radio Freedom, 22 July 1985 [https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/address-oliver-tambo-nation-radio-freedom-22-july-1985] Accessed 25 April 2021.

26 As quoted in James Myburgh, 'How the Necklace was Hung Around Winnie's Neck', *Politicsweb*, 17 April 2018. https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/how-the-necklace-was-hung-around-winnies-neck (13 July 2022).

27 Victoria Mxenge, née Nonyamezelo (b.1 January 1942-d.1 August 1985) was born in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape and educated at Forbes Grant Secondary School and Healdtown before training to be a nurse at Victoria hospital. She married Mlungisi Griffith Mxenge and trained as a lawyer in his legal practice. Victoria's husband was assassinated in November 1981.

28 See Heather Hughes, 'Violence in Inanda, August 1985', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1987), 331-354.

29 Martin Murray, *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Testimony, the Upsurge of Popular Protest* (London: Verso, 1987), 341.

30 Fhulufhwani Hastings Nekhwevha, 'The 1985 School Crisis in the Western Cape' (M.A. diss., University of Cape Town, 1991), 115-116. See also Colin Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1987), 303-330.

31 The history of violence in smaller places like Kroonstad is extremely underwritten. For a recent history of Kroonstad, see Tshepo Moloi, *Places of Thorns: Black Political Protest in Kroonstad since 1976* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015).

unrest.[32] To use a terribly crude metric, this meant the average daily death toll in the fighting more than doubled, from 1.67 a day in the months before the start of the state of emergency on 20 July 1985, to 3.44 people a day after.[33] And the typical profiles of those killed made sober reading for those like Chris Hani and Joe Slovo[34] in the ANC leadership who thought what they were watching might soon end in revolutionary triumph. Tambo might have called upon people to take the war to the doorsteps of white South Africans. The brutal fact was that Botha's state of emergency saw the government's lavishly funded security forces laying waste to the people in their townships. Most of those died were young and black, shot close to their homes.

Yet as hard as it was for people to step back from South Africa's tilt into violence and to resist thinking in the language of war, there remained in the eddies of society that other legacy from the Soweto uprising, the lesson which remembered what happened when the security forces were given licence to quell insurrection, which urged caution rather than exuberance when confronting the state, which knew how it was not true that there was nothing more to lose, and which looked to the future less in anticipation of a new revolutionary dawn and more in terms of what of today might still be salvaged for tomorrow. The power of that lesson whose contours we started to trace in the previous chapter has not been picked up by historians who have studied the insurrections of the mid-1980s. To understand what drove the township revolts in the mid-1980s, scholars have focused on material conditions; the sharply rising rents, inflation and unemployment that drove a desperate people towards insurrection.[35] This has missed the profound ways in which the events of 1976 cast long shadows over the events of 1985-6. Remarkably overlooked is the fact that not one of the townships wracked by violence in 1976 was to be found included in a list

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32 Tom Lodge, 'Resistance and Reform, 1973-1994', in Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Vol. II, *1885-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 446.

33 The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *The War Against Children: South Africa's Youngest Victims*, (New York, N.Y.: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986), 16.

34 Joe Slovo (b.23 May 1926-d.6 January 1995) was born in Lithuania and moved to South Africa when he was eight. Educated at King Edward VII School in Johannesburg, Slovo left school early and became involved in trade union politics and the South African Communist Party, later completing a law degree at the University of Witwatersrand. Slovo went into exile in 1963 where he served as Umkhonto chief-of-staff of Umkhtonto we Size until 1987. After the 1994 election Slovo served as minister of housing up until his death from cancer.

35 On the historiography of the 1980s see Hilary Sapire, 'Township Histories, Insurrection and Liberation in Late Apartheid South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 65 (2013), 169. See also Jeremy Seekings, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation and Protest in the Final Phase of the 'Struggle' in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 62 (2010), 7-28.

of places when insurrections re-emerged in January 1984, just as not one of the places that joined the insurrections in 1984 and 1985 had a history of insurrection in 1976.

Hidden just beneath the surface of events the pattern is extraordinary, and changes the way we might understand the history of the mid-1980s. Take the history of Kagiso, for example, a township fifteen miles west of Johannesburg, and, like Soweto to its south, not part of the third insurrectionary wave. In an article from 1992, Jeremy Seekings used Kagiso to ask an important and too-often neglected question: Why did some townships in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal region experience major unrest only after the start of the state of emergency?[36] Seekings' study was followed by Ineke van Kessel, who selected Kagiso as one of three case-studies in her book, *"Beyond Our Wildest Dreams": The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (2000). But the way these two academics sought to understand events in Kagiso is interesting, and telling of the assumptions that have guided historians. Seekings argued that Kagiso 'lacked the specific foci around which township-wide popular action crystallised or could be mobilised', and how 'extra-state organisation remained weak'.[37] Both drew particular attention to what van Kessel called, 'the absence of an active COSAS branch'.[38] It is however an argument which strains against the available evidence, downplaying the strength of the Krugersdorp Residents Organisation and making much of a supposedly inactive period in the local COSAS on the eve of the state of emergency.[39] Even more curious is what both scholars make no mention of. In 1976, Kagiso was the scene of some of the most terrible bloodshed anywhere in South Africa, a brutal repression which saw police fire upon a crowd of students out in solidarity with Soweto's students on 18 June with a machine gun.[40] In truth people in Kagiso did not fail to join the insurrection because they

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[36] Jeremy Seekings, 'From Quiescence to 'People's Power': Township Politics in Kagiso, 1985-1986', *Social Dynamics*, 18 (1992), 20-41.

[37] *Ibid*., 22.

[38] Ineke van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

[39] The Krugersdorp Residents' Organisation was founded in 1981 out of an active civic life, its foundation immediately followed by the local authority's decision to suspend planned rent increases which would prove so incendiary in the Vaal Triangle. And as both scholars in fact acknowledge, Kagiso did have an active COSAS branch, their downplaying of its significance dependent on a backward type of reasoning.

[40] On 17 June 1976 a crowd of around three hundred people protested on the streets of Kagiso in solidarity with Soweto's student. Unlike in most places though, protest in Kagiso was met with barely restrained violence. Police reinforcements were sent into Kagiso on the evening of 17 June and immediately started firing on the protesters. That night the local hospital reported five people killed and over fifty wounded. The next day, 18 June, police encountered a crowd of eight hundred students. The police captain ordered the crowd to disperse. When they refused, Captain Le Roux shot someone with his R1 rifle. The crowd stayed in place, and Le Roux ordered one of his men to open fire with a machine gun. Speaking before the Cillié Commission, Le Roux

were insufficiently organised. It was because people were sufficiently organised after the horrors of that year that they were able to make the decision not to start on an insurrection again. And the historical echoes of 1976 are found repeated again and again. Alexandra is another place noted for its supposed quiescence in the mid-1980s. On the same day police used a machinegun on students in Kagiso, 29 people were killed by police in Alexandra, one of the most ferocious counter-reprisals in 1976.[41] And we can compare what happened in Kagiso and Alexandra to what happened in the East Rand, on the frontlines of the third insurrectionary wave. In 1976 the only reported killing on the East Rand was a black policeman, Tallman Temba Jafta, shot by a white East Rand Administration Board official in a case of mistaken identity as he spoke to a friend outside a police barracks in Katlehong.[42]

It is not accurate to describe places like Soweto, Kagiso, and Alexandra as quiescent in the mid-1980s, a label which much too quickly forgets how these places experienced their own history of insurrections and counter-insurrection not even ten years previously. And failing to remember recent history, the quiescent tag fails to appreciate the importance of what had been happening in these places since. The townships left scarred by the security forces in 1976 were not dormant places but active, albeit active in a very different way than the townships in insurrection, their scenes of burning buildings, upturned cars and youthful crowds *toyi-toying* in the streets.[43] There was little of this activity in the '1976 townships' which so reliably attracted the attentions of

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described what happened next: 'He did this is a semi-circular movement and it was very effective… They fell over each other in their haste to get away.' See Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa, June-December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), 15-16 and 24; Paul Blomfield, *Report of IUS Solidarity Mission to South Africa* (London: International Union of Students, 1976), 12-13; and Piet Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977,* Vol. II (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1980), 25. On attempts to resurrect the history of what happened in Kagiso in 1976 today see Thabile Mange, 'Recognise the 1976 Kagiso Student Protest', *Krugersdorp News*, 17 June 2016. https://krugersdorpnews.co.za/299560/recognise-the-1976-kagiso-student-protest/ (16 March 2022).

41 Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 209. The Cillie Commission's figures must be treated cautiously, but they provide the best means of comparing the intensity of violence. The Commission reported 22 dead in Mamelodi compared with 4 in Atteridgeville. See Piet Cillié, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th February 1977,* Vol. II (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1980).

42 Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Kathorus: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 2001), 70.

43 On the toyi-toyi and how it reached South Africa's youth in the townships in the 1980s by way of the Zimbabwean African People's Union's military training in Algeria in the 1960s, see Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, 'The Travelling Toyi-Toyi: Soldiers and the Politics of the Drill', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46 (2020), 923-940.

television cameras elsewhere.[44] But in stark contrast these places had significantly higher rates of civic associations and local political mobilisation. It appears strangely counterintuitive to us now given how the history of the 1980s has come to be written, but in 1984 the UDF actually had its strongest presence in places where the insurrections were weakest, just as the townships in insurrection were places which had no or only a very recent history of community organising.[45] In Cradock, for example, Goniwe was attempting to follow exactly the Soweto model before his efforts were brought to a premature end. In Tumahole, near Parys, there was almost no history of political organising at the time its insurrection started in July 1985. On the eve of its insurrection, the COSAS regional structure in the Free State was unable to find anyone to represent Parys.[46] In the Vaal Triangle, the Vaal Civic Association was founded in October 1983, but only really started to establish itself *after* the start of the uprising.[47] Again and again we find that a culture of political organising in the townships was a product of the insurrection, not its cause.

But if the civics had once provided enough support and an outlet for people's frustrations to fend off the demands of those who clung onto insurrection, the start of the state of emergency shifted the balance of power, weakening the civics' foundations and its promise that another way was possible. Both had brought a war to people's doorsteps, whether people wanted one or not. On 15 October 1985, police hid amongst crates on the back of a truck and drove into the heart of a crowd of protesters in Athlone near Cape Town. Opening fire they killed three people: Jonathan Claasen, twenty-one-years-old, Shaun Mahmoed, fifteen-years-old, and Michael Miranda, eleven-years-old.[48] The so-called Trojan Horse massacre was just one amongst a spate of police massacres under the state of emergency. On 17 November police raided a community meeting in

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[44] On coverage of the uprisings see Deborah Posel, 'Symbolizing Violence: State and Media Discourse in Television Coverage of Township Protest, 1985-7', in N. Chabani Manganyi and André du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 154-171. See also David L. Krantz, 'Politics and Photography in Apartheid South Africa', *History of Photography*, 32 (2008), 290-300.

[45] This remarkable correlation has been noted by Jeremy Seekings, albeit interpreted very differently. See Jeremy Seekings, ''Trailing Behind the Masses': The United Democratic Front and Township Politics in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal Region, 1983-84', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 93-114.

[46] See also Chitja Twala and Jeremy Seekings, 'Activist Networks and Political Protest in the Free State, 1983-1990', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa,* Vol. IV, Part I, *1980-1990* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010), 792.

[47] See Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 293.

[48] 'South Africa acquits police in killing', *New York Times*, 12 December 1989.

Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, killing 14 people.[49] Four days later, 19 people were massacred in Mamelodi after police opened fire on a peaceful women's march, many shot in the back. Amongst the dead were two babies, asphyxiated by teargas.[50] Faced with these atrocities, how could the heart of the millenarian story be denied that the National Party and the people were locked in a great war for the future of South Africa from which only one side could emerge triumphant? How could it be maintained that there existed a meaningful difference between someone's personal and political life faced with a government that saw no distinctions, anyone who dared register discontent a mortal enemy? Those who remained determined to find an alternative to violence needed something bigger and bolder to keep the peace. That answer was to be found in Soweto's schools. It was called People's Power, its radical idea that going to school under a government like this could in itself be a revolutionary act.

As a slogan People's Power quickly became ubiquitous in South African political discourse, such that its precise history has been difficult to see from the outside. If People's War was the plan to make the country's townships ungovernable, then People's Power has generally been understood as the next stage, when people filled the vacuum created by their destruction of state authority to set up their own courts, street committees and self-governing institutions. The activist and intellectual Raymond Suttner was one of the first to write about it in these terms, paving the way for how academics have understood People's Power since.[51] But this neatly sequentialised history is much too idealised a reading of what was happening in South Africa's townships, albeit in keeping with the rapid retrospective explication of revolutionary theory in ANC publications like *Sechaba*, *Mayibuye*, and *The African Communist*.[52] Leaving those clever exercises in revolutionary theorising aside, People's Power was never the next step in a successful People's War, but a profound challenge to the faith that a war against the security forces could ever be won. And it was not led by the ANC-in-exile, but by those inside the townships who knew best at what cost violence came. That this clash of ideas was able to be successfully navigated and the new idea of

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[49] Ayabonga Cawe, 'Your Bullets Will Not Stop Us: A Recollection of the 1985 Queenstown Massacre', *Daily Maverick*, 19 November 2015. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-11-19-your-bullets-will-not-stop-us-a-recollection-of-the-1985-queenstown-massacre/#.WgNfDluCzct (16 March 2022).

[50] Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *The War Against Children*, 47.

[51] Raymond Suttner, 'Popular Justice in South Africa', paper delivered at Sociology Department seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 5 May 1986.

[52] See, for example, Alex Mashinini, 'Dual Power and the Creation of People's Committees', *Sechaba*, April 1986, 25-30.

People's Power swiftly incorporated into the ANC's platform speaks volumes to the ANC's ability to exercise leadership from afar, always giving the impression of marching at the head of the masses. But to understand the history of People's Power properly means starting from the bottom-up, in the townships, where the stakes were highest, where history was being made, and where, for a time at least, an alternative future to the bloodshed seemed possible.

I

Two days before the eighth anniversary of the start of the Soweto uprisings, Tlhabane Mogashoa, a member of his local COSAS branch in Atteridgeville, spoke at the annual general meeting of the Southern Transvaal region of the National Education Union of South Africa in Johannesburg.[53] 'It is our duty', he said, 'to destroy the present education system, and no one can shake us from doing that. It is our historical mission; a noble cause. We shall prove that the struggle taking place is the one against misery and suffering.'[54] Mogashoa was bringing fresh revolutionary rhetoric from a newly opened frontline in the struggle for national liberation. The Sowetans in the audience had long gotten used to listening to this type of talk without following its actions. Ever since the insurrections started in Atteridgeville at the beginning of the year, the situation in Soweto's schools had remained broadly calm. But Soweto could not escape the consequences of the third insurrectionary wave completely. As nervous government officials anticipated what Soweto might do next, police surveillance was stepped up in the schools. In June principals were told to provide weekly reports on the schools, much to the alarm of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee who knew how provocative such an intrusion might be.[55] 'Are we about to witness another

[53] On 10 June 1986, Mogashoa was among a group of six people who were shot dead by security forces in an ambush in Limpopo near the Botswana border. The National Education Union of South Africa was a progressive teacher organisation founded in 1980 in Johannesburg. It established branches in Pietermaritzburg, 1983, in Durban, 1984, and in the Eastern Cape and Northern Transvaal, 1985. The national president of NEUSAS was Curtis Nkondo.

[54] As quoted in 'Students' ask is to rid SA of apartheid – Mogashoa', *The Star*, 15 June 1984.

[55] Founded in 1981 in Johannesburg, the Detainees' Parents Support Committee was inspired by the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. The DPSC was banned in 1988. For more on the DPSC see Terry Shakinovsky and Sharon Cort, *The Knock on the Door: The Story of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2018).

conflagration as in 1976? Let us pray not, but there are certain similarities in the underlying conditions and the authorities do not appear to have learned many lessons.'[56]

Conditions certainly seemed propitious. On 3 September 1984 Sowetans watched the start of the Vaal uprising, 120,000 students piling out of their schools, joining 6,000 students already on boycott in Atteridgeville.[57] Soweto was halfway between two great conflagrations. And yet when Soweto's students gathered for a major meeting on 7 September 1984, it was not to discuss whether to boycott their schools and join the insurrections. They met to pray for the fates of their peers.[58]

The government showed remarkably little interest in maintaining this peace. After the sudden explosion of violence in the Vaal Triangle where 31 people killed in the first few days of fighting, the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training announced the immediate closure of all schools in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) region on 10 September.[59] This blanket measure was applied blind to the significant differences among the 29 major townships in the region. In the Vaal Triangle and Atteridgeville, the school closures merely served as a face-saving reassertion of control. In Soweto students arrived at school on 10 September bewildered to find their schools closed a week before the spring vacation without warning. In a strangely parallel world to what was happening in the Vaal Triangle, the COSAS branch in Soweto demanded that the schools be re-opened immediately.[60] The closures, they said, was 'an attempt to deprive students of their rights to solve their educational problems together.'[61] People in Soweto knew the importance of staying together and the dangers of being forced apart during a moment like this.

What the COSAS branch in Soweto feared next soon began to transpire. With the schools closed, Soweto's school population of around 200,000 students suddenly had nowhere to go. And so it was inevitable perhaps that small groups of students should have taken to the streets, where a massively reinforced police presence was already there waiting for them. Days after the

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56 'Authorities have learnt little from lesson of '76' by the Detainees' Parents Support Committee', *The Star*, 18 June 1984.

57 'The Du Plessis portfolio – a race against racial time bomb', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 August 1984.

58 'Cosas says schools must be re-opened', *The Star*, 12 September 1984.

59 'Confusion as DET closes schools early', *The Star*, 10 September 1984.

60 'Cosas says schools must be re-opened', *The Star*, 12 September 1984.

61 'Reopen schools, says Cosas', *The Sowetan*, 13 September 1984.

announcement clashes were reported between students and police on the streets.[62] In Soweto the school closures had created the unrest that it was meant to head off. Then on 13 September, Bongani Khumalo, the nineteen-year-old secretary of the local Sowetan branch of COSAS and a student at the Turret Correspondence College, was shot dead on the streets.[63] The police alleged that Khumalo was killed as he threw a petrol bomb, a fact denied by those close to him. If the bomb was real, the police at least admitted it never exploded.[64]

Khumalo's death inevitably brought back memories of Hector Pieterson, Hastings Ndlovu, and more recently Emma Sathekge's death in Atteridgeville. To suppress the outpouring of anger Johannesburg's chief magistrate ordered that Khumalo's funeral be held on a weekday, to try and limit the number of attendees, as well as placing a ban on political speeches.[65] The authorities were right to plan for a reaction. On Wednesday 26 September, the day schools in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal region reopened after their extended vacation, Khumalo's funeral was held at Regina Mundi. Thousands packed into the church's pews.[66] That morning attendance at the schools dwindled. At 10 a.m. the authorities closed Soweto's schools for the day. But Khumalo's death was not the catalyst that would lead Soweto towards joining the insurrections. The funeral procession marched along Potchefstroom Road to Avalon Cemetery peacefully, the mourners bound in a carefully restrained rage, determined not be provoked by the watching security forces, who followed their every step. The next morning school attendance in Soweto returned to normal, even as an estimated 90,000 students continued their boycotts in the Vaal Triangle.[67]

Khumalo's death nonetheless provoked an intense debate about what course South Africa's most famous township should take during these increasingly febrile times.[68] On one side

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62 'Club, houses petrol-bombed in Soweto', *The Star*, 13 September 1984

63 Turret Correspondence College had a relationship with the University of London and was popular amongst students who had the education badly interrupted by police detentions.

64 'Soweto unrest: police bullets kill students', *The Star*, 14 September 1984; 'First Soweto victim to be buried', *The Sowetan*, 20 September 1984; 'In memory of Comrade Bongani Khumalo', *The Star*, 14 September 2017.

65 ''Banned' funeral date set', *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 September 1984.

66 'Students mourn Bongani', *The Sunday Times*, 30 September 1984.

67 'Massive stayaway as schools reopen', *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 September 1984; 'Vaal pupils in massive class boycott', *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 September 1984; 'Now 220,000 pupils stay away', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 October 1984.

68 On 17 September, a fifty-six year old man, Isaac Rathebe, was shot by police in Soweto and died three days later. Rathebe's daughter had been killed by a stray bullet in 1976. See 'Mortuary 'told to keep body'', *City Press*, 30 September 1984.

stood those who urged restraint and a continued commitment to non-violence. Speaking on the day of Khumalo's funeral, Dan Vaughan, the acting head of the South African Council of Churches, an organisation closely linked to the UDF, used the moment to appeal for students everywhere in South Africa to return to their schools.[69] 'We believe, with the other leaders of our community, that the cause of freedom for all in South Africa can only be achieved as our people are built up and trained for the leadership roles they are to occupy one day, and that discipline is essential for ultimate victory'.[70] But there were others in Soweto, including Curtis Nkondo, chairman of Soweto Teachers' Action Committee, who had grown increasingly restless. In 1984 Nkondo joined the executive committee member of the Release Mandela Committee, a new organisation founded after leading community figures like Aubrey Mokoena[71] had grown frustrated with what they regarded as the UDF's excessive moderation.[72] Following Khumalo's death the Release Mandela Committee called for a general stay-away on 17 September, in the hope of escalating the insurrections. But when the figures came back Soweto's past history was evident once again. On 17 September, 66 per cent of Sowetans stayed at home, compared with 85 per cent on the East Rand and 90 per cent in the Vaal Triangle.[73] And unlike the East Rand and the Vaal Triangle, life in Soweto soon returned to normal.

It was not only Soweto's adults debating what to do. The same debate was being held amongst the students. In early October 1984, boycotts were reported to have started at Vulwani, Senoane, and Hlengiwe.[74] Three schools was far from a critical mass. But the mood among

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[69] The South African Council of Churches was an ecumenical forum founded in May 1968. Its founding mission was to bring different Christian denominations together to stand against apartheid, and to offer moral and spiritual guidance across the country. Led by Desmond Tutu (1978-1984), Beyers Naudé (1984-1986), and Frank Chikane (1987-1994), it advocated for peace, reconciliation and human rights. For more see Peter Walshe, 'South Africa: Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29 (1991), 27-60.

[70] 'SACC call to students: go back to school', *The Citizen*, 26 September 1984.

[71] Aubrey Mokoena (b.12 April 1948-d.12 July 2021) was born in Orlando West and educated at Turfloop, where he became active in the Black Consciousness movement. Mokoena was vice-president of the Turfloop SRC at the time Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro was president. After being expelled from Turfloop following Tiro's 1972 speech, Mokoena enrolled at the University of South Africa. He became involved in the Black People's Convention and was detained multiple times in the political crackdown following the Soweto uprising. Mokoena formally joined the ANC after the party was unbanned in 1990 and was elected to parliament in 1994.

[72] Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1994* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), 74-75.

[73] Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge,* Vol. VI., 71.

[74] 'Unrest: Soweto school closed until Monday', *The Star*, 4 October 1984; 'Schools' stayaway spreads further', *Rand Daily Mail*, 5 October 1984; 'Soweto pupils vote to boycott', *The Star*, 6 October 1984.

Soweto's students was growing increasingly tempestuous. On 16 October, a meeting held at a church in Rockville, co-hosted by COSAS and the recently formed Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO), a new organisation meant to bring non-school attending children into the political fold.[75] The meeting decided against calling for a school boycott, but called for the end-of-year exams to be boycotted.[76] Soweto was caught between two very different courses of future action.[77] In deciding which direction Soweto would take, no organisation had a greater say than the Soweto Parents' Committee. Founded at a community meeting a few weeks after the start of the Vaal uprising, the SPC set out to reconcile two desires that seemed irreconcilable in the present: the demand for radical political change and education and peace.

On 9 November 1984, three men, Dr Manas Buthelezi, a Lutheran church minister and the chair of the Black Parents' Association in 1976, Frank Chikane, a pastor in the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Deputy President of the Soweto Civic Association and regional vice-president of the Transvaal UDF,[78] and Molefe Tsele, an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church,[79] travelled to Pretoria to meet with Sam de Beer, the deputy Minister of Education and Development.[80] The three men were careful how they presented themselves. The demands they presented de Beer with were not of their own making, but the demands COSAS had been campaigning on nationally since the start of the Atteridgeville uprising; the end of corporal

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75 See "Inauguration: Soweto Youth Congress Dobsonville: 1983-07-31," police transcription, exhibit M24 in Pietermaritzburg Treason Trial [S v Ramgobin and Others, 1986]. HPW/A2675/III/801.

76 'Police, pupils clash in Soweto', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 October 1984.

77 The body which noticeably had no part to play in these discussions was the Soweto Council. The mayor of Soweto, Ephraim Tshabalala attended a council meeting at Jabulani Amphitheatre on 14 October, in which he proposed a resolution expressing to the Government the students' desire to sit their examinations. The meeting was poorly attended though, and. See 'Council may meet with MP', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 October 1984.

78 Frank Chikane (b.3 January 1951-d.) was born in Bushbuckridge and grew up in Soweto. He graduated from Orlando High School in 1971 and attended the University of the North where he became active in the Students' Christian Movement. He was suspended by the Apostolic Faith Mission in August 1981 because of his political activities. Chikane joined the Institute for Contextual Theology and signed the Kairos Document in 1985. In 1988 he became general secretary of the South African Council of Churches. In 1989 he survived an attempted assassination by police. On the Evangelical churches and their relation to politics during this time see Philippe Denis, 'The Splintering of South African Evangelicalism during the Last Decade of Apartheid', *South African Historical Journal*, 10 (2021), 1-21.

79 Molefe Tsele (b.7 December 1956-) was born in Daveyton on the East Rand and educated at the University of the North before finishing his education at University of South Africa. Tsele was ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1982, appointed to parishes in Soweto. He was detained for two years, 1986 to 1988, and left the country after his release, earning a Th.D. at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. He returned to South Africa in 1995. In 2001 Tsele was appointed General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

80 Samuel de Beer (b.19 August 1944-) was born in Johannesburg and educated at the University of Pretoria. A minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, de Beer was elected to parliament in 1974. De Beer was Deputy Minister of Education and Training between 1984 and 1989. In 1998 he joined the United Democratic Movement. In 2001 he joined the ANC.

punishment, end of sexual harassment by male teachers, the end of age restrictions, and the end of exam leakages.[81] And as the SPC was eager to signal their deference to the students, the SPC sought to make clear from the start that they would not be cowed by the government. Buthelezi, Chikane, and Tsele gave de Beer a final deadline to meet their demands, 9 December, and an immediate deadline to hear the government's response, Sunday 11 November, at which the SPC pledged to report back their progress at a community in the St Margaret Catholic Church in Diepkloof.[82]

The caution with which the SPC approached the negotiations was well justified. To have any chance of success building an alternative to the boycotts and the call to simply carry on going to school, the SPC had maintain its credibility in the eyes of the people while not falling outside the narrow bounds of what the government was prepared to tolerate. Too militant and they risked being dismissed by the government out of hand. Too accommodating and they risked being seen as sell-outs, no more credible than Soweto's ostensible mayor, Ephraim Tshabalala,[83] elected with just 1,115 votes.[84] In December 1984 the danger of getting that balance wrong was made clear in the East Rand. After he entered discussions with the Department of Education and Training, the chairman of the local Parents' Interim Committee had his house ransacked in Tembisa by a crowd of students.[85] As Vusi Khanyile, a leading figure in the Soweto Civic Association who became integrally involved in the SPC looked back on these months, 'As the committee settled down to its work it became clear there was little room for manoeuvre, as on the one hand the SP[C]C was pressurised by community demands and on the other by the DET.'[86]

The careful balancing act might have easily derailed from the start. The SPC's 11 November deadline passed without a response from the government, and the SPC was forced to return to St Margaret Church empty handed. But those at the meeting gave the organisation their continued support. And so on 23 November, an SPC delegation travelled back to Pretoria, this

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81 'Political posturing is all that they are bent on doing', *Sunday Mirror*, 2 June 1985.

82 'Schools: Minister's reply today', *Sunday Times*, 11 November 1984; 'Parents wait for DET reply', *The Sowetan*, 14 November 1984.

83 Ephraim 'E.T' Tshabalala (b.1910-1994) was born in Vrede in the Orange Free State where he was a herd boy before moving to Sophiatown. He earned his first wages driving horse-drawn carts. With savings he bought a bus that became the starting point of transport business that after the Second World War grew into a very successful meat business. By the 1980s he was known as South Africa's richest black man.

84 Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1998), 115.

85 'Students critical of parents teachers', *Sunday Mirror*, 9 December 1984.

86 As quoted in 'Black education: details of co-operation before court', *Business Day*, 10 April 1987.

time to meet de Beer's senior in government, Gerrit Viljoen, the Minister of Education and Training.[87] But then, just as the SPC's stature grew, the government decided that they could not accept the SPC as a legitimate negotiating partner.[88] Amidst accusations the SPC had shared confidential contents of their meetings in Soweto a scheduled follow-up meeting was cancelled. In December, a spokesperson for the Department of Education and Training announced: 'The department cannot recognise the Soweto Parents Committee as the sole representatives of the whole black community…. The Soweto Parents Committee is welcome to submit suggestions and recommendations to the deputy minister before January 9.'[89]

The SPC was quick to respond, determined to build the national platform that would make it impossible for the government to ignore. In late December 1984, following an exam season in which a significant minority of schoolchildren heeded the call for a boycott in Soweto,[90] the SPC organised a National Conference of Parents' Committees at the Ipelegeng Community Centre in Jabavu. The conference invited parents' organisations from across the country and established a National Ad-Hoc Coordinating Committee, with Vusi Khanyile appointed chairman. The SPC now had the national platform from which to speak from. They discussed the different regional situations and the difficulties parents faced everywhere maintaining a constructive relationship with the students.[91] But the issue they focussed on as a way of brokering peace in the schools was the SRCs. A draft copy of a new SRC constitution was agreed which was designed to give students' greater formal autonomy. And looking forward the delegates agreed to give the National Ad-Hoc Coordinating Committee a mandate to 'deal with the matter at the highest level with the DET. All further matters arising from this crisis will be dealt with by the national body.[92]

But for all the support the SPC was amassing, there was a fundamental delusion in thinking that the growing schools crisis in South Africa could be solved with an agreement on a new SRC

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87 Gerrit Viljoen (b. 11 September 1926-d.29 March 2009) was born in Cape Town and educated at Afrikaanse Hoër Seunskool in Pretoria before attending the universities of Pretoria, Cambridge, and Leiden, where he received his doctorate in Greek poetry. In 1974 Viljoen succeeded Treurnicht as the chair of the Broederbond. In 1978 he was appointed Administrator-General of South West Africa before being appointed Minister of Education and Training in 1980. He retired from politics in 1992.

88 'Breakthrough in education crisis', *Sunday Mirror*, 2 December 1984.

89 'Deadlock in talks about SRC is denied', *Sunday Times*, 16 December 1984.

90 'Matric exam not affected – Det', *The Star*, 6 November 1984.

91 'National parents' committee set up', *The Star*, 3 January 1984; 'Division on schools boycott', *The Sowetan*, 4 January 1985.

92 As quoted in 'Parents to urge pupils to drop boycott', *The Star*, 4 January 1985.

constitution. In February 1985 the government's proposal for a new SRC constitution suffered a bruising defeat in February 1985 when the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association met at their conference in Soshanguve near Pretoria and dismissed the government's offer.[93] It was a significant intervention from a union that had tried to skirt national political controversy, but which through its association with the African Teachers' Association of South Africa (under the leadership of H. H. Dlamlenze, ex-principal of Vulamazibuko in Diepkloof), was beginning to become more politically engaged with the general crisis.[94] With Dlamlenze playing an active leadership role, the SPC now had the backing of the major teaching unions, the support of people in Soweto, and a growing national organisation.[95] But the SPC had not found a way of leveraging its support into a form of power capable of influencing the government. An eight-week notice period the SPC handed to the government to consider their draft SRC constitution passed by unanswered in early 1985, much to Khanyile's chagrin, who told the press in April 1985. 'We do not merely look upon the department's silence as a tragic omission but as a calculated obstructive measure.'[96] When the government finally replied they insisted that school principals be included in the SRCs and have the right to expel SRC members, both red lines for the SPC.[97] If all this risks sounding technical, that was the SPC's failing. The SPC had seized on the idea of a new SRC constitution as a demand for autonomy. To demand that autonomy be recognised by the government was to already make a major concession, increasingly out of sync in these violent times. To succeed, the SPC needed to think much bigger.

In truth the SPC's negotiations with the government was a minor distraction from what was happening in the townships' schools. While Soweto kept hold of its precariously held peace at the start of 1985, the fighting on the East Rand and Vaal triangle raged, the unrest spreading to new parts of the Eastern Cape, including in Port Alfred, Fort Beaufort, Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage and Queenstown.[98] And in these places the government resorted to much less complicated

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93 '400 Tuatu members reject DET SRCs', *Sunday Mirror*, 24 February 1985; 'Editorial: A victory', *The Sowetan*, 25 February 1985.

94 Jonathan Hyslop, 'Teachers and Trade Unions', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11 (1986), 96.

95 Linda Chisholm, 'Broadening the Education Base: From a Revolt to a Search for Alternatives', *Work in Progress*, 42 (1986).

96 As quoted in 'Parent body to act on school SRCs', *The Star*, 10 April 1985.

97 ''Political posturing is all they are bent on doing'', *Sunday Mirror*, 2 July 1985.

98 'School boycotts continue', *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1985.

measures. In October 1984 Operation Palmiet was launched, 7,000 soldiers sent into Sharpeville, Sebokeng and Boipatong, carrying door-to-door searches on thousands of homes and arresting hundreds.[99] It was the first time soldiers had been deployed in the townships since 1960. And as the insurrections spread, the repression grew. On 22 March 1985, the Minister of Law and Order, Louis le Grange,[100] announced a year-long ban on all public meetings in South Africa under the terms of the Internal Security Act (No. 74 of 1982).[101] In April 1985, at least five members of parents' committees across the country were arrested, including one of the SPC's most important members, Frank Chikane.[102] And not only did the detentions threaten the SPC's organisation. The government's growing repression was pushing Soweto towards the scenes of violence the SPC was working so desperately to avoid.

Not long after le Grange's ban on public meetings, 105 people were arrested at a COSAS meeting in Soweto. On 17 July 1985, the day the arrested students were due to appear in court, 300 youths stormed the Putco bus depot in Ikwezi. They commandeered seven buses, transporting a massive crowd to the Protea magistrate's court rooms until the police arrived and forcibly dispersed them.[103] That night there was significant unrest on Soweto's streets, including an attack on the home of Soweto's new official mayor, Edward Kunene, following an election in which fewer than 10 per cent of voters cast ballots.[104] What happened was a pale imitation of events of the East Rand and Vaal Triangle, where far worse scenes were a regular occurrence. No one was killed in Soweto. But four days later, its reputation preceding it, Soweto was included by P. W. Botha as one of the 36 magisterial districts subject to the state of emergency. A week later le Grange announced that COSAS had been made an officially banned organisation under the

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99 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. III (Basingstoke: Macmillan Reference, 1998), 604-605

100 Louis le Grange (b.16 August 1928-d.25 October 1991) was born in the Orange Free State and educated at Potchefstroom Hoer Volkskool before training to be a lawyer at the University of South Africa. He later received a bachelors degree in political science from the University of Potchefstroom. Le Grange entered parliament in 1966 and was made Deputy Minister of Information in 1975. He served as Minister of Law and Order between 1982 and 1986 before becoming the speaker of the House of Assembly.

101 'Ban on indoor public meetings', *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 March 1985.

102 'Bodies to adopt SRC constitution', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 April 1985.

103 'Just one spark set Soweto alight', *The Weekly Mail*, 19 July 1985. On the culture of bus hijackings in Soweto during the mid and late 1980s see Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001), 92.

104 'Mayor' home burnt', *The Sowetan*, 18 July 1985; 'Black youths on rampage in South Africa', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1985; 'A day in the uneasy life of Soweto's black mayor', *New York Times*, 29 September 1985.

Section 4 (1) of the Internal Security Act (No. 74 of 1982).[105] In Soweto, Brigadier Jan Coetzee vowed to arrest every COSAS member he could find in Soweto.[106] Over the coming weeks a social fabric was torn apart.

In the weeks before the state of emergency, the police had been seen practicing cavalry manoeuvres on the open veld outside Soweto.[107] Now the horses arrived, mounting cavalry charges on people in the streets, wire tied across the streets by people in a desperate attempt to stop the horses.[108] It was an innovation in police tactics which sought to turn the tables on people's mobility.[109] And just as police sought to avoid becoming bogged down, tight new controls were brought in to restrict Sowetans' mobility. Roadblocks were set up, police stamping people with ink. A strict curfew was imposed. Between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. no one was allowed outside their homes. During daylight hours of 8. a.m. to 4 p.m., any young person outside school faced arrest.[110] Anyone found guilty of disobeying faced a ten-year prison sentence or a R20,000 fine.[111] Many students stayed at home. But those who dared to venture out, or who were forced out of their homes by the soldiers who went door-to-door searching for the missing students soon found conditions intolerable.[112] At the Pimville and Molapo campuses of the Soweto College of Education a boycott quickly started a boycott after 8 classmates were detained. At Emadwaleni Secondary School in Orlando West, a boycott started after two of their classmates were detained.[113] Soon there was a total boycott at Meadowlands High School.[114] After police shot three students at Naledi High in a search for petrol bombs, a reporter described the school as looking like 'a military camp'.[115] A month after the start of the state of emergency there were boycotts at Aurora,

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105 'Cosas banned – US slams SA action', *The Citizen*, 29 August 1985; 'Cosas assets placed under liquidation', *The Citizen*, 30 August 1985; 'Why Cosas ranks first on Le Grange's hit list', *The Weekly Mail*, 6 September 1985. An appeal to have the ban lifted in September 1986 failed. See, 'COSAS has to wait for outcome', *The Sowetan*, 24 September 1986; 'Cosas banning upheld', *Natal Witness*, 2 October 1986.

106 'Police won't stop until Cosas is destroyed', *The Weekly Mail*, 6 September 1985.

107 'Azaso pleas to police', *The Sowetan*, 10 July 1985.

108 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 116.

109 'Just one spark set Soweto alight', *The Weekly Mail*, 19 July 1985.

110 'Curfew will cause much hardship in Soweto', *The Star*, 16 August 1985; 'News bulletin', *The Sowetan*, 21 August 1985.

111 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 117.

112 'News bulletin', *The Sowetan*, 21 August 1985.

113 'Soweto college row rages', *The Sowetan*, 31 July 1985; 'News bulletin', *The Sowetan*, 2 August 1985.

114 'Stoning, arson, class boycotts', *The Star*, 2 August 1985.

115 'Cops search school for petrol bombs', *The Sowetan*, 1 August 1985.

Daliwonga, Ibhongo, Loefentse Girls High, Orlando West High, Pace College, Phefeni Senior Secondary, Selekela, St Matthews, Thaba-Jabula, and Veritas. Soweto's best attended schools had just half their students.[116]

Being young in Soweto had suddenly become very dangerous. A school uniform offered some protection against the chance of being shot at or arrested by the police. But a uniform placed the wearer in jeopardy against the self-styled comrades, who found a new militancy in the face of the security forces. Young comrades called for a consumer boycott, which was often brutally enforced. A seventeen-year-old student from Diepkloof told a reporter how he watched the women coming off the trains with his friends. If anything was found purchased outside the townships the women were forced to consume it on the spot. 'Even if it is a five litre can of cooking oil she must be stopped and forced to drink it until she vomits…. We have made them eat their meat parcels raw'.[117]

Excesses like these elicited deep anxieties. Great outrage was provoked when a group of young comrades stoned a bus carrying children to the Philip Kushlick School near Baragwanath Hospital, a government-funded school for children with cerebral palsy.[118] Some youth activists tried to speak out. Representatives from SOYCO censured self-styled comrades who extorted residents for 'donations', or what we might more simply call protection money.[119] But without the space to hold meetings it was impossible for people to tell who was acting on behalf of whom and why. Private vengeance was beginning to spill onto the streets. Anyone who raised an objection risked being labelled a sell-out. The type of local collective organising which had helped bring peace back to Soweto after 1976 had been made all but impossible. In October a report in *The Sowetan* described the state of affairs: 'Without leadership the student movement, the protest

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116 'Pupils plunder delivery truck', *The Star*, 9 August 1985; 'To go or not to go', *City Press*, 11 August 1985; 'Raids cause boycotts – pupils', *The Sowetan*, 16 August 1985.

117 'Soweto's children: burning with hate', *Business Day*, 27 September 1985.

118 'Don't molest handicapped – plea', *The Star*, 23 October 1985; 'Thus menace brain damaged kids', *The Sowetan*, 23 October 1985. The Philip Kushlick School was part of the very limited provision of special education for non-white children in South Africa which can briefly be sketched here. The first school for blind students in South Africa was the Athlone School for Coloured students near Cape Town, established in 1927. In the Transvaal, the first special education school for African students was the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf, founded in 1944 in Roodepoort. In 1961, special education was transferred from the Department of Union Education to the Department of Bantu Education. See 'Special education as conducted by the Department of Education and Training – historical and philosophical perspectives', *Educamus*, October 1986.

119 'Soweto Youth Congress will fight thugs', *The Sowetan*, 23 October 1985; 'Root out thugs', *The Sowetan*, 24 October 1985.

movement has become an amorphous mass, with rag-tag groups sprouting all over and assuming leadership.'[120]

Most terrifying of all in this vacuum of accountability was how the young white men in uniforms acted. Hollow warnings were given to children to disperse before buckshot was fired.[121] Mass arrests were made indiscriminately. At Hlengiwe Secondary in White City police surrounded the school, arresting all 700 students.[122] Under the state of emergency schoolchildren were routinely placed in overcrowded cells and tortured by police. Once torture been the preserve of the Special Branch. Now officers at all ranks practiced it, flailing children with hosepipes and connecting electrodes to their bodies.[123] The stories children told their captors fuelled more arrests, sparking recriminatory violence amongst the youth frightened of what their friends might be saying.[124] There were chilling reports of the police's use of sexual violence. In August Dr Nthatho Motlana told a meeting in Johannesburg how he had treated a sixteen-year-old girl after she had been raped by two policemen.[125]

The terror under the state of emergency is almost impossible to describe. In 1986 the independent Ravan Press published *Two Dogs and Freedom*, a collection of young Sowetan schoolchildren's first-hand accounts of those months. Two of the contributions are quoted here, their spelling left deliberately unchanged. Thulisile, thirteen-years-old, wrote:

> Our students are not going to school because teaching and learning is difficult. There are hippos everywhere around Soweto. These men which are called boers run shoot beat and kill our students, they even rape them. Our students are burning cars and stoning buses. If you go to school having books they burn your books. They say people mustn't go and buy in town. The soldier are very cruel and when we see hippo's come we run away because we are afraid that they would arrest, shoot, beat or kill us. I don't like what is happening in Soweto.

Bheki, fourteen years old, described:

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120 'Schools – anarchy is ruling supreme', *The Sowetan*, 17 October 1985.

121 'News bulletin', *The Sowetan*, 21 August 1985.

122 'Pupil's arrest unfortunate-de Beer', *The Star*, 17 September 1985.

123 For a testimony of one young Sowetan's experience of torture see Moses Madia, 'A Child's Experience' in Victoria Brittain and Abdul S. Minty (eds.), *Children of Resistance: Statements from the Harare Conference on Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa* (London: Kliptown Books, 1988), 1-8. See also Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 119

124 In January 1986, it was reported that there were 2,000 unsentenced juveniles under the age of nineteen in South Africa's prisons. See Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *The War Against Children*, 163.

125 '300 pupils held in Soweto for 'loitering'', *The Star*, 23 August 1985.

> On Tuesday afternoon when it was at our school children were out of the school yard and the police came with a yellow corolla and they shot twice. After that they throwed teargas in the school and children ran away those police caled the hipos and they surround our school ask who are the cosas in our school the big boys told them nothing and those police left the school.[126]

With the full scale of the crisis brought home, Soweto's civic leaders now realised the futility of hoping that agreement on a new SRC constitution might be enough to preserve the peace. In September the Soweto Civic Association announced a crisis meeting at St Margaret's Church in Diepkloof on Sunday 29 September, two days before the start of the last semester of 1985.[127] Meetings like these had come to play an important role in township life after 1976, helping Sowetans make sense of their ambivalence about the schools. All too often meetings like these had been times when the call for boycotts were rejected. And so there was deep frustration when Brigadier Jan Coetzee announced two days before the meeting that it was banned.[128] But when Soweto's schools reopened on 1 October and student numbers still dwindled under fifty per cent, Coetzee reconsidered. A special exemption was made for a meeting on Sunday 13 October.[129]

As police circled outside the church in armoured cars, around 2,000 people crammed into St Margaret's. The situation in Soweto was desperate. Dr Ntatho Motlana told the gathering how important it was that children stay in school, how 'unlearned children cannot rule'. But this was no easy ask. One of the students explained how hard it was to go to school. 'When I'm on the streets in my shoes, I've got no protection. When I'm in school, I've got no protection. When I'm in my mother's yard, I've got no protection.' A civic leader said, 'we may never be able to meet again as we are today.'[130] There was no talk of new SRC constitutions. In the end the meeting agreed to give the SPC a new name, the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee, and a mandate to negotiate the government on two issues: the immediate withdrawal of the South African Defence Force and a postponement of the end-of-year exams, in the hope that functioning education might

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126 As quoted in *Two Dogs and Freedom: Children of the Townships Speak Out* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 21 and 14.

127 'Efforts to bring Soweto schools back to normal', *The Star*, 27 September 1985.

128 'Soweto parents slate ban on schools indaba', *The Star*, 30 September 1985.

129 'Meeting on schooling', *The Star*, 10 October 1985.

130 As quoted in Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Boston, M.A.: Beacon Press, 1990), 246-7.

be restored quickly.[131] Providing their view of what lay ahead of the SPCC in the negotiations, *The Sowetan*'s editorial said:

> There are going to be people of a more radical bent who will look askance at the Crisis Committee. The same feelings emerged after the Committee of Ten was formed. We think such people are silly. If you are a sane man, faced with a practical problem, to sit back and let it get messier by the day, to let people lose their lives, to have children be out of school and perhaps get killed to have the general undirected and undisciplined scene of mayhem around you and your children and sit tight is being silly. We know in the end the revolution must come. We do not think we should allow it to go in this fashion…. It is better to die for a cause with some dignity and a certain amount of direction and control. But to be involved in a haphazard type of ungovernability where the targets are mostly black people, is plain silly.[132]

Just weeks after Tambo's People's War speech, here was an open challenge to the ANC's idea of ungovernability, which now filled the airwaves of Radio Freedom's broadcasts from Lusaka.

But the task of imposing some order under the state of emergency was mountainous. A series of meetings between the SPCC and the government in Pretoria and Johannesburg during October and early-November 1985 made little headway.[133] And yet, as a measure of people's desperation perhaps, the SPCC kept people's support. On 17 November 1985, around 2,000 people defied the security forces and met at Regina Mundi, renewing their pledge to support the SPCC.[134] And that faith seemed well placed when Adrian Vlok, the Deputy Minister of Law and Order and Defence,[135] met with the SPCC at the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg on 23 November and offered to withdraw the SADF from Soweto.[136] But Vlok demanded that peace be restored first, a demand that failed to recognise the fact that it was the soldiers who were the agents of the disorder. As an SPCC member bitterly surmised, 'We say, 'Get the troops out of the township,

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131 'Meeting on schooling', *The Star*, 10 October 1985; 'In the townships, parents obey as children call the tune', *The Star*, 16 October 1985.

132 'Editorial: Grateful for meetings', *The Sowetan*, 11 November 1985.

133 'New move in school crisis', *The Sowetan*, 17 October 1985; 'Pull army out of Soweto', *The Sowetan*, 12 November 1985.

134 'Parents to meet Govt officials', *The Sowetan* 18 November 1985.

135 Adriaan Vlok (b.11 December 1937-d.8 January 2023) was born in Cape Province and educated at Keimoes High School and the University of Pretoria. He was elected to parliament in 1974. Vlok was appointed Minister of Law and Order in December 1986, which he held until 1991. Vlok was one of only two government ministers to seek amnesty after the end of apartheid. In 2006 Vlok washed Frank Chikane's feet. In 2007 Vlok was handed a ten-year suspended sentence for the attempted assassination of Chikane in 1989.

136 'Troops go when Soweto is peaceful', *The Star* 24 November 1985.

and there'll be an atmosphere conducive to lifting the boycotts and getting education again. They say to us, 'You make the atmosphere conducive, and we'll remove the troops. It's Catch-22.'[137]

Blinded by the logics of counterinsurgency to the consequences of its actions, the deep unrest continued. The end-of-year examination season started on Friday 25 October. With soldiers stood guard outside the exam centres, just 27 per cent of candidates in Soweto chose to cross the military's lines.[138] On Monday the figure dropped to 7 per cent, falling even lower in the days ahead.[139] In the end just 420 students in Soweto completed their matriculation exams in 1985, a figure which brought Soweto in line with the lowest figures being reported anywhere in South Africa, in Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape.[140] The collapse of the 1985 examinations marked the end of education for many, a final deferment of any plans to go to university.[141] For the few left who looked forward with optimism, the prospect of any schooling returning in 1986 seemed slim. As 1985 drew to a close, people started to talk about the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising, as a 'no school year'.[142]

With the schools crisis threatening to slip beyond anyone's control, the SPCC convened another community meeting, at the Funda Adult Education Centre in Diepkloof, recently built with R4 million of funding from Oppenheimer's Urban Foundation, its promise of training Soweto's next generation of teachers being made a mockery by the violence.[143] The meeting on 8 December was fractious. Many of the students took a hard-line position, arguing for a total school boycott at all age-levels in 1986, a strict interpretation of the boycott which tended to consider younger students exempt. They argued that alternative education spaces be set up instead, resurrecting that old idea from the 1950s when the ANC proposed setting up Cultural Clubs. But by the end of the meeting, the more cautionary voices in the room won the argument for a return to school in 1986, thanks in part to a history lesson by those who remembered what happened in

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137 As quoted in 'School boycott is erasing dreams in South Africa', *New York Times*, 1 December 1985.

138 'No more exams?', *City Press*, 27 October 1985.

139 '93 out of 100 matrics boycott Soweto & Cape exams', *City Press*, 3 November 1985.

140 'Tough measures taken to break', *The Star*, 21 November 1985.

141 'The frustration of pupils who want to write exams', *The Sowetan*, 24 January 1986.

142 'A decade after Soweto… can blacks afford to make 1986 the Year of No Schooling?', *Sunday Times*, 15 December 1985.

143 'R4m education project launched', *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 July 1983; 'Funda Centre: A unique first for SA adults', *The Sowetan*, 18 April 1984.

the 1950s when the Cultural Clubs had failed.[144] The most important decision taken at the Funda Centre, though, was one which would have repercussions far beyond Soweto's classrooms.

It was decided that the SPCC would organise a national consultative meeting at the end of December in Johannesburg. The meeting invited what was left of civil society in the townships after five months of mass arrests, banning orders and killings. Seven hundred delegates attended, representing 161 organisations. And unlike the SPC's modest conference at the Ipelegeng Community Centre a year earlier, this meeting brought together a wide-range of groups now all united with a first-hand reckoning of what a war against the security forces in the townships looked like. The African Teachers' Association of South Africa attended, Lulu Johnson, the ex-head of the banned COSAS attended, alongside Muntu Myeza,[145] the national publicity secretary of AZAPO, as well as a strong representation from the Azanian Students' Movement from Soweto.[146] What this diverse range of organisations agreed not only changed the course of the struggle for education, but the history of the struggle for national liberation. The principle of ungovernability was about to give way to a new principle of self-preservation, People's Power.

The two-day conference started on 28 December 1985 in the Great Hall on the University of Witwatersrand's campus in downtown Johannesburg, its imposing neo-classical architecture and freshly mowed lawns a world away from the townships, where the police and army patrolled the streets. With the SPCC's leaders sat on the stage of the Great Hall overseeing events like conductors, the delegates divided into five groups, each given a specific aspect of the crisis to discuss: school attendance, student organisations, parent organisations, teacher organisations, and what was intriguingly listed as 'people's education'. It was out of these discussions that a bold new plan was made. At the end of the conference, Nthatho Motlana told the press that parents should stop paying their school fees and ignore the official start of the new academic year, 8 January.[147] Instead they should ready themselves for a return on 28 January, electing new delegates to

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144 '30 groups call for return to school', *The Star*, 9 December 1985.

145 Muntu Myeza (b.3 December 1950-d.3 June 1990) was born in Natal and educated at Orlando West High School before completing his matric at Ohlange High in Inanda. He enrolled at the University of Zululand and was elected president of SASO in July 1973. In 1975 Myeza was amongst the 'SASO 9', charged with treason. He was sent to Robben Island and served six years of his sentence. On his release he became active in the Azanian People's Organisation. He died months after Mandela's release from prison in a car crash.

146 'Back-to-school call adopted', *Business Day*, 30 December 1985.

147 'Back to school', *The Sowetan*, 30 December 1985.

represent them in a newly strengthened National Education Crisis Committee.[148] And should the delegates find enthusiasm for a return to school under the NECC's terms, Motlana said that the students' return would be conditional, dependent upon the government meeting a list of core demands by a 1 April deadline; the withdrawal of the South African Defence Force from the townships, the end of the state of emergency, the unbanning of COSAS, and the release of political detainees.[149] Should the government not meet the 1 April deadline, the NECC warned of terrible consequences. Not only would the students boycott the schools, it was left to Bishop Desmond Tutu[150] to warn that everyone, 'teachers, parents, workers, church leaders, university staff', would put down their tools.[151] The threat of true ungovernability was what would force the government to bend to the people's will.

Simple as the plan was it was unprecedented. In the past school boycotts had been reactive phenomena, almost invariably in response to extreme police violence, the death of young students. People's Power sought to turn the tables, wielding the threat of boycotts in the future to extract concessions, while delivering on people's hopes for peace in the present. But as simple as the plan was, it was risky and hugely ambitious. What the NECC proposed to do could only be achieved if a large majority could be convinced to embrace the idea. And unlike boycotts where a small minority could enforce its will through intimidation, the NECC could not force anyone to go to school. And the challenge of convincing the youth in places like Duduza and Atteridgeville still in the throes of insurrection to hold one's head high and walk by the soldiers outside the schools was immense. To succeed, the NECC needed the support of the ANC, whose current strategy depended on the township's students serving as the foot soldiers in the People's War.

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148 The National Parents' Crisis Committee was composed of three SPCC members and seven others, representing Natal, Orange Free State, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Border region, and Transvaal.

149 See 'Resolutions re: Education Crisis taken at National Consultative conference, 28-29 December 1985'. HP/AK2117/CA41.

150 Desmond Tutu (b.7 October 1931-d.26 December 2021) was born in Klerksdorp and educated at Western High in Sophiatown. Winning a space at the University of the Witwatersrand to study medicine, Tutu's family was unable to pay the fees. Instead Tutu trained to be a teacher. Tutu left the teaching profession following the Bantu Education Act, deciding to become an Anglican priest instead. Ordained in 1960, Tutu was General-Secretary of the South African Council of Churches between 1978 and 1985. After the end of apartheid, Tutu was appointed chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

151 As quoted in 'Bishop Tutu's 'ultimatum' over black pupils' demands', South African Press Association bulletin, 29 December 1985.

Not long after the Funda Centre meeting, Vuzi Khanyile crossed the border into Zimbabwe. On Christmas Day 1985, Khayile met with four high-ranking members of the ANC in Harare, Chris Hani, Mac Maharaj,[152] Pallo Jordan,[153] and Thomas Nkobi.[154] Khanyile was bringing with him a hard lesson to four of the greatest advocates of People's War in the ANC's ranks of what a war with the National Party really looked like in the townships. Little has been recorded of what was said, but according to a later NECC pamphlet, 'The meeting made clear… that the students should be urged to go back to school, that the need for learning could not be postponed, and that the school was the only place in which the students could become organised.'[155] Khanyile had managed to win the ANC's blessing. The liberation party now started to shift from People's War, and how it did so was skilful. There was no repudiation of past policy, and many in the ANC's leadership never gave up hope in the possibility of revolution.[156] But Khanyile had what he wanted. When he returned to Johannesburg for the NECC's conference Khanyile was able to tell the assembled delegates in the Great Hall 'that the slogan "liberation now; education later" does not come from the ANC.'[157] The state of emergency regulations prevented Khanyile from being any more explicit, but what he said was clear enough. People's Power for People's Education came with the ANC's endorsement.[158] As for the ANC, its change in tone after the meeting with

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[152] Sathyandranath Mac' Maharaj (b.22 April 1936-) was born in Newcastle, Natal, and educated at St Oswald's and the University of Natal. He was arrested in July 1964 and charged with sabotage. Maharaj served a 12-year sentence on Robben Island. On his release he went into exile in 1977, returning to South Africa undercover in 1988 as part of Operation Vula. He was elected to parliament in 1994, and appointed minister of transport. He left parliament in 1999 and became a prominent business figure.

[153] Pallo Jordan (b.22 May 1942-) was born in Kroonstad in the Orange Free State and educated at the University of Wisconsin-Maddison. Jordan began working for the ANC in London in 1975. In 1985 he was elected to the ANC's National Executive Committee. He was elected to parliament in 1994 where he has played a prominent role. In 2009 Jordan announced that he was stepping down as Minister of Arts and Culture after it was revealed that he had never completed his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Maddison.

[154] Thomas Nkobi (b.22 October 1922-d.25 September 1994) was educated at Adams College, Natal, Bantu High School (later Madibane) in the Western Areas, and Roma College in Lesotho. Nkobi joined the ANC in 1950. In 1963 went into exile. He was elected Treasurer General of the ANC in 1973. Nkobi was posthumously honoured with the Order of Luthuli in Gold in 2004.

[155] The National Education Crisis Committee, *Report on the Second National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education* (Johannesburg: The National Education Crisis Committee, 1986), 3. HP/AK2117/CA42.

[156] In 1986, Oliver Tambo appointed Mac Maharaj to authorise a highly secret plan called Operation Vula unknown to even other high-ranking members. On the history of Operation Vula, see Padraig O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2007), 239-259; and Tim Jenkin, 'The Story of the Secret Underground Communications Network of Operation Vula', *Mayibuye*, 6, Nos. 1-6 (1995).

[157] As quoted in 'They're 'not behind schools boycott' – claim', *Sunday Times*, 29 December 1985.

[158] The Congress-alignment at the conference did cause a minor split amongst the delegates. AZASM only attended the first day of proceedings after withdrawing because of their indignation that the PAC had not also

Khanyile was subtle but unmistakeable. In January 1986, a spokesperson for the ANC told *The Observer*, 'We are not talking of overthrowing the government but [of] turning so many people against it that it would be forced to do what Ian Smith had to do.'[159]

The NECC's first hurdle came on 8 January, the official date of the new academic year. To try and block People's Power from the start, the Department of Education and Training announced that anyone who failed to register for school on time would be unable to register later.[160] But in Soweto, the East Rand and the townships adjoining Pretoria, as well as in the Eastern and Western Cape, almost no one attended school. Attendance was only marginally better in the schools around Durban.[161] The real challenge though was convincing students to return to school. After the University of Witwatersrand conference, the NECC's delegates returned to their homes to discuss that question. In Port Elizabeth, 700 people met at the Dan Qeqe stadium on 6 January and decided that the boycott in the region should come to an end.[162] A mass meeting in Natal attended by hundreds of teachers, parents and students reached the same conclusion.[163] Smaller meetings were held across the country. And while the police prevented some meetings from taking place, agreement with what the SPCC proposed was widespread. In Bosmont, Lenasia and in many other places people came together and agreed to go back to school.[164] On 28 January, amidst a massive military presence, students in townships across South Africa returned to school in huge numbers.[165] The slogan 'People's Education' was beginning to take real-world shape.

Faced with this new movement in the schools, the government strained to attack the NECC as something it was not, the NECC's Christian and respectable leadership recast as socialist militants and agents of anarchy.[166] Following the government's insistence that the schools be reopened on 8 January, Sam de Beer now insisted that the re-sits for the 1985 examinations be

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been consulted alongside the ANC. See 'Ideological differences cause split at education talks', *The Star*, 30 December 1985. For more on the split which would become increasingly bitter, see Chapter V.

159 As quoted in Lodge, 'Resistance and Reform', 465.

160 'Parents failed to submit schools proposal – DET', *The Star*, 6 January 1986; 'Black schooling request rejected', *The Star*, 7 January 1986.

161 'Attendance low at black schools in S Africa', South African Press Association bulletin, 8 January 1986; 'Black pupils keep up stayaway', *The Star*, 8 January 1986; 'Soweto's white police chief: 'Change is coming'', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 January 1986.

162 'Decision by 30,000 to suspend class boycott', *Eastern Province Herald*, 7 January 1986.

163 'Back to school move gets support at Durban meeting', *Natal Witness*, 6 January 1986.

164 'Delay in formation of a national committee', *The Star*, 10 January 1986.

165 'Back to school: But not as DET wants it', *The Weekly Mail*, 21 February 1986.

166 'Education is used for political purposes, says Viljoen', *The Citizen*, 27 March 1986.

held in February, a month earlier than the NECC demanded. This left students who had only just returned to school with scant time to prepare. Indeed, de Beer saw an opportunity here to attack the SPCC's integrity, telling the press that the SPCC had agreed upon a February deferral at a meeting in Pretoria in October 1985.[167] It was a weak attempt at delegitimization. The government had not agreed to postpone the examinations then, and so much had changed since. The NECC was resolute, insisting on its demands made at the University of Witwatersrand.[168] In the end the examinations started on the NECC's insisted upon date, 3 March. And in a remarkable show of the NECC's growing power over the education system, huge numbers of students wrote their exams. In Soweto it was estimated that 70 per cent of candidates sat their exams, as high as 100 per cent at some schools.[169] Such a turn of events had seemed impossible just a few months before.

It is important to recognise though that the return to school was not total. In Soweto as in many places, a small minority of students made clear their intent to disrupt the resumption of education. On 28 January in Soweto, a group of students hijacked a yellow truck and drove it to D. P. H. School where they started physically forcing students out of their classrooms.[170] The NECC quickly published a statement condemning their actions in the strongest terms. Those who resorted to intimidation were 'pseudo-radicals'. 'Only *agents provocateurs* and political megalomaniacs can embark on such dangerous gimmicks.'[171] As disruptive as these actions were—and in smaller rural places like Dennilton in Sekhukhuneland, and Thandukukhaya in KaNgwane they could decisively tip the balance[172]—their impact was much more limited in the bigger townships near the major cities, where the weight of opinion was firmly with the NECC. And in these places the self-

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167 'Minister denies SPCC exams claim', *The Star*, 6 February 1986; 'Row over Soweto examination dates', *The Star*, 6 February 1986.

168 'Don't write on Monday, parents tell pupils', *The Weekly Mail*, 7 February 1986.

169 'Thousands due to write vital Soweto exams today', *The Star*, 3 March 1986; 'Thousands start exams in Soweto', *The Sowetan*, 4 March 1986; 'Det 'happy' as Soweto exam turnout tops 70pc', *The Star*, 4 March 1986.

170 'Thugs disrupted classes – SPCC', *The Sowetan*, 30 January 1986.

171 As quoted in 'Classes disrupted at re-opening of Soweto schools', *Business Day*, 30 January 1986.

172 'Boycott over – for now', *City Press*, 16 March 1986; 'Schools: Parents meet', *Natal Witness*, 27 March 1986; 'Straight talk at Durban indabas', *The Sowetan*, 1 April 1986; 'A year black education took a caning', *Business Day*, 22 December 1986. On events in Sekhuneland see Ineke van Kessel, ''From Confusion to Lusaka': The Youth Revolt in Sekhukhuneland', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19 (1993), 593-614; Peter Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), 172-215; and Sello Mathabatha, 'Missionary Schools, Student Uprisings in Lebowa and the Sekhukhuneland Students' Revolts, 1983-1986', *African Studies*, 64 (2005), 263-284. On events in KaNgwane see Shireen Ally, 'Peaceful Memories: Remembering and Forgetting Political Violence in KaNgwane, South Africa', *Africa*, 81 (2011), 351-372.

control and discipline the students exercised was sometimes extraordinary. When Mapetla Tswana High was set on fire during the rescheduled exam season, students worked hard to put out the fire, allowing their peers to carry on writing.[173] In Kagiso not even the police's ambush of a student meeting on 27 January that left a fifteen-year-old student, Franscina Legoete, dead failed to end the students' determination to return to school.[174] Indeed, in the first months of 1986 the insurrectionary temper in the country was focused largely on one place, Alexandra, where the students' return to school on 28 January[175] had been derailed by a vicious cycle of violence in mid-February, leaving at least 46 dead.[176] Rather than derailing People's Power though, Alexandra's Six Day War made clear what was at stake, focussing everyone's minds on what might happen everywhere should the NECC's deadline pass unanswered.

As the NECC's 1 April deadline drew nearer there were the first signs that the government was willing to cede to at least some of the NECC's demands, trading acceptance of a loss of control in return for some kind of return of order in society. Having been in place for 229 days, the state of emergency was lifted from 7 March 1986, leading to the withdrawal of many soldiers from the townships. In March the government announced that it would release 160 people from detention.[177] And this as Pik Botha, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Chris Heunis, the Minister of Constitutional Reform, were busy engaging the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group (EPG), an attempt to broker a peaceful and negotiated end to apartheid.[178] After the debacle of Botha's Rubicon speech in 1985, here were signs that Botha was prepared to put his faith in his reforms to check the unrest. And these political developments gave Gerrit Viljoen at least some

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173 'No business like school', *City Press*, 16 March 1986.

174 van Kessell, *"Beyond Our Wildest Dreams"*, 198.

175 'Thousands flock back to school', *The Citizen*, 29 January 1986.

176 The violence in Alexandra started after Michael Dirading, the nineteen-year-old member of the Student Representative Council at Alexandra High School was shot dead by a security guard. For more see Mzwanele Mayekiso, *Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa* (New York, N.Y.: Monthly Press, 1996); Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Charles Carter, 'Community and Conflict: The Alexandra Rebellion of 1986', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 115-142; Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 265-299.

177 'Future of black education at stake', *The Star*, 24 March 1986.

178 The Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group followed Margaret Thatcher's decision to block sanctions at a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in the Bahamas in October 1985. Thatcher proposed an attempt to bring the ANC and the NP together in dialogue. The Eminent Persons' Group met with Nelson Mandela three times in prison. The CEPG came to a sudden end on 19 May when P. W. Botha ordered airstrikes on ANC targets on 19 May in Lusaka, Harare and Gabarone.

credibility when he spoke on 26 March and said that the government had 'thoroughly' addressed the NECC's demands (although there was no talk of unbanning COSAS).[179] By emphasising the government's reasonableness, Viljoen sought to condemn the NECC as part of the youthful millenarian spirit People's Power was being built in opposition to. Speaking on the eve of the NECC's second conference, he said, 'Against the background of slogans such as 'make South Africa ungovernable', 'people's education' and 'freedom now, education later', it is abundantly clear that there are political groupings who are abusing education for ulterior political purposes to the detriment of the child who is to be educated.'[180] The NECC's success depended on their ability to keep the meaning of these slogans clearly distinct.

The second conference started badly. A planned opening statement written by Nelson Mandela in Pollsmoor Prison was never delivered, after the government blocked the NECC from talking to Mandela's lawyers.[181] Then, just days before the conference was meant to start, a new venue had to be found after the original venue, Natal University, became mired in political unrest.[182] On the campus of Natal University, the office of Professor Lawrence Schlemmer was set on fire.[183] Schlemmer, a prominent white sociologist, was a friend of Mangosuthu 'Gatsha' Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu and leader of Inkatha,[184] a one-time ally of the ANC who had fallen out with the party-in-exile after the ANC's embrace of the students' millenarianism in 1976. Such politics was anathema to Buthelezi's small-'c' conservatism, a politics he was determined to hold at bay using his control over KwaZulu's schools to force a stifling and ultimately alienating curriculum of ethnic pride and generational authority upon the students.[185]

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179 As quoted in, 'Viljoen: Black demands met', *Cape Times*, 27 March 1986.

180 As quoted in, 'Education is used for political purposes, says Viljoen', *The Citizen*, 27 March 1986.

181 'Mandela to 'address' education congress?', *The Star*, 29 March 1986; 'Mandela message withheld', *Daily News*, 31 March 1986.

182 'University fire forces shift in key education meeting', *The Star*, 27 March 1986.

183 Lawrence Schlemmer (b.11 September 1936-d.26 October 2011) was born in Pretoria and educated Pretoria Boy's High and the University of Pretoria. After working as a social worker, he was employed at the University of Natal in Durban. After the attack on his office Schlemmer left Durban for Johannesburg, where he chaired the Centre for Policy Studies at the University of Witwatersrand.

184 Mangosuthu Buthelezi (27 August 1928-d.9 September 2023) was born in Mahlabathini, KwaZulu, and educated at Adams College and University of Fort Hare. In 1970 he was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the KwaZulu Territorial Authority. In 1975 Buthelezi formed the Inkatha National Cultural Liberation Movement and in 1976 was made chief minister of the KwaZulu Bantustan. In 1979 Buthelezi broke with the ANC. He resisted involving his Inkatha Freedom Party in the 1994 election until the last moment, in which the IFP received 10.54 per cent of the vote.

185 See Praisley Mdluli, 'Ubuntu-Botho: Inkatha's 'People's Education'', *Transformation*, 5 (1987), 60-77.

Those behind the arson were likely young Congress-aligned activists, part of the hardening dividing lines between ANC supporters and Inkatha which later exploded in massive violence across the region in 1987.[186] At late notice the NECC delegates secured the Pioneer Hall in Congella on the outskirts of Durban. But then as the early arrivals registered on Saturday 28 March, many sat around eating their packed lunches, two buses arrived, filled with Inkatha men carrying guns, knives and *asegais*. Two of the attackers were killed and many of the delegates injured, four seriously.[187] In this part of South Africa, People's Power did not just have to contend with treading a path between the government and the boycotters, but with Buthelezi, who made no secret of the fact that he considered any politically interested children to be foot soldiers in the ANC's war against his organisation.[188]

Late that night the battered delegates reconvened in Chatsworth, an Indian-designated township to the south of Durban. Taking turns to stand on guard in case the men from Inkatha returned, around 1,500 people packed into Rajput Hall to debate the NECCs next steps. The main speaker that night was Zwelakhe Sisulu, a boy when his father Walter was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964.[189] Now thirty-five years old, Zwelakhe had become an important figure in his own right, the editor of the Congress-supporting *New Nation*, part of the rich print culture which helped tie the civic movement together, carrying its messages far and wide.[190] Stood before the packed hall Sisulu started his speech by conceding what could not be ignored; that the full list

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186 On the violence in Natal see Kumi Naidoo, 'The Politics of Youth Resistance in the 1980s: The Dilemmas of a Differentiated Durban', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 143-165; Catherine Campbell, 'Learning to Kill? Masculinity, the Family and Violence in Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 614-628; Anthea Jeffery, *The Natal Story: Sixteen Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997); Sarah M. Mathis, 'From Warlords to Freedom Fighters: Political Violence and State Formation in Umbumbulu, South Africa', *African Affairs*, 112 (2013), 421-439; Timothy Gibbs, 'Inkatha's Young Militants: Reconsidering Political Violence in South Africa', *Africa* 87 (2017), 362-386; and Mxolisi Mchunu, *Violence and Solace: The Natal Civil War in Late-Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2020).

187 'Two killed in Inkatha attack', *Daily Tribune*, 30 March 1986; 'Inkatha hired buses', *The Sowetan*, 2 April 1986.

188 'Buthelezi slams motives of NECC', *The Citizen*, 2 April 1986. See also 'Get education, says Buthelezi', *Post*, 18 June 1986.

189 Zwelakhe Sisulu (b.17 December 1950-d.4 October 2012) was educated at St. Christopher's School, Swaziland and Orlando High School. Sisulu worked as a journalist at the *Rand Daily Mail* and the South African Association of Newspapers before attending Harvard as a Nieman fellow in 1984. He later served as Nelson Mandela's press secretary during the negotiated transition and was appointed chief executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1993.

190 For more on *New Nation* see Bryan Trabold, 'Historical Narratives as a Rhetoric of Resistance in Apartheid South Africa: The History Workshop and *The New Nation*', *South African Historical Journal*, 62 (2010), 735-752.

of demands as set out at the December conference had not been met. But rather than calling on people to make good on the threat of total disorder made in Johannesburg, Sisulu used his speech to offer an even more radical conception of what People's Power might mean in the context of the mid-1980s.

> We stand today at a crossroads in our struggle for national liberation. We hold the future in our hands. The decisions we take at this conference will be truly historic, in the sense that they will help determine whether we go forward to progress and peace, or whether the racists push us backwards and reverse some of the gains that we have made, towards barbarism and chaos….

Then, having made clear what was at stake, Sisulu went on to say:

> In effect this means taking over the schools, transforming them from institutions of oppression into zones of progress and people's power. Of course, this is a long-term process, a process of struggle, which can only be secured by total liberation. But we have already begun this process.[191]

Sisulu described how power was not something to be seized in a moment of triumph at the end of a long struggle for liberation, but to be grasped hold of and exercised in the present. He was sober-minded throughout, urging caution and restraint. 'If we overplay the regime's weaknesses and ignore their strengths we shall be fooling ourselves.' But the vision he was outlining was ultimately an aspiration to realise nothing less than Leon Trotsky's famous description of Dual Power, a term that became voguish amongst activists to describe a split sovereignty from which the government would never recover.[192]

Described as a 'state-of-the-struggle' speech, Sisulu's speech in Rajput Hall was one of the great speeches given during the history of apartheid.[193] As the *Weekly Mail* reported, the speech 'was not the product of a temperate moderate so much as a disciplined radical.'[194] Those who listened to Sisulu's words certainly agreed. Of the thirteen resolutions passed that night by far the

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191 Sisulu's speech was reprinted at the time in *The Star*. See 'At the crossroads in the struggle', *The Star*, 31 March 1986. For a more easily accessible transcript of Sisulu's speech, see 'People's Education for People's Power', *Transformation*, 1 (1986), 96-117.

192 Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (Penguin Classics, 2017 [1932]), 149-155. The term Dual Power began to regularly creep into political discourse. See, for example, ''People's schools' go on – despite troops', *Weekly Mail*, 18 August 1987.

193 Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, (London: Abacus, 2003), 444.

194 'Back too school for spirit of defiance', *The Weekly Mail*, 10 April 1986.

most significant was the last. Under the headline 'Return to school', the thirteenth resolution stated, 'All students should return to school when the new term starts'.[195] Going back to school now was not about leveraging concessions out of a morally bankrupted government. It was a way of asserting the radical autonomy of the people, making clear the government's fundamental irrelevance in the lives of the people it claimed to govern.

The schools reopened on Wednesday 2 April. Across South Africa school attendance in the townships was very high.[196] The Department of Education and Training reported that the great majority of schools had attendances higher than 90 per cent, including in Alexandra where a renewed commitment to organising followed the Six Day War. Across the Department's 7,362 schools, only 136 had attendances lower than 80 per cent.[197] These schools were mostly in the Eastern Cape, and in small towns like Mangaung near Bloemfontein, and Vosloorus on the East Rand.[198] And in these places the causes of the boycotts were tied up in local factors. In Vosloorus, for example, students boycotted the schools on the first day back to attend the funeral of a local ANC member, killed the week before.[199] But so long as these boycotts remained bound to local conditions they were able to be accommodated by People's Power. As one student activist from the Transvaal said, 'We see schools boycotts in many parts of the country not as deliberate actions undermining the spirit of the NECC conference, but as continued action against a government who refuses to adequately meet our demands.'[200] People's Power had not completely displaced the slogan 'Liberation now, education later!', but it had pushed it to society's margins.

In Soweto the return to school after the NECC's second conference was marked by a new spirit of assertiveness, and a growing sense of control over the classrooms. Teachers had always ignored those parts of the curriculum that taught apartheid's most self-serving lies, the idea that the first white settlers arrived in an unpopulated land and other such myths.[201] Now politics was

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[195] For a full list of the resolutions, see….

[196] 'Back to school call: State apprehensive', *Sunday Tribune*, 6 April 1986.

[197] Not including schools in the Bantustans.

[198] 'Black schools 80pc full as pupils heed parents' call', *The Star*, 3 April 1986; 'Pupils call on DET to solve grievances', *The Star*, 11 April 1986; 'Classes shutdown at 12 schools', *The Star*, 23 May 1986.

[199] 'Many black pupils return to school', *The Star*, 2 April 1984.

[200] As quoted in 'Trasco calls for joint campaign', *SASPU National*, April/May 1986.

[201] As one student remembered: 'What would happen is the teacher would say, "OK, this is a history class. According to the Boer's textbook, these are the facts. But I'll tell you the other facts which, remember, you must not write in your examination paper.' As quoted in Heidi Holland, *Born in Soweto*, 64. On the history of school curriculums in South Africa, see William F. Pinar (ed.), *Curriculum Studies in South Africa: Intellectual*

given a central place in the schools that it had never had before. Wednesdays and Fridays were given over to political education, and in a new symbolic act the schools were rechristened, their names painted in big letters on their walls. Selekela Secondary became Nelson Mandela High. Keleketso Secondary in Meadowlands was renamed Oliver Tambo High. There was a Joe Slovo High, Soviet High, Libya High and Emma Sathekge: Communist School.[202] The business of taking over the schools was even more advanced in parts of the Eastern Cape. In Port Alfred and East London, the Department of Education and Training's control had evaporated almost entirely, the Port Elizabeth Crisis in Education Committee organising to raise teachers' salaries directly from the community.[203] But in Soweto there were dramatic scenes of what taking over the schools could look like. In early June students from five schools in Diepkloof met at the newly christened Soviet High and built a great bonfire out of their textbooks. 'We want to show the government that DET no longer controls our schools. The people are starting to establish organs of self-rule', one student told a reporter.[204] A bonfire of books fits easily into the most established descriptions of the mid-1980s, a time of unbridled protest and the collapse of social order. But as we have followed the history that led up to that moment we can see a remarkable claim to order in the fire. In the first half of 1986, People's Power had largely delivered on its promise to take the fight off the streets and back into the classrooms.

That this remarkable counterweight to the history of rising violence has largely been forgotten today is because of what happened next. People's Power was as successful as it was short-lived. The National Party had closely watched the rise of People's Power and made no mistake seeing its ostensible moderation for what it really was: a profound challenge to the basic idea that the National Party was in any meaningful sense a government in charge of running a country. After 38 years in power the National Party might have finally accepted defeat in the face of People's Power, taking the opportunity opened by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group

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Histories & Present Circumstances (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also Crain Soudien, '"What to Teach the Natives": A Historiography of the Curriculum Dilemma in South Africa', in William Pinar (ed.), *Curriculum Studies in South Africa: Intellectual Histories and Present Circumstances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 19-49.

202 'When pupils rule…', *Business Day*, 28 May 1986; 'Soweto pupils 'rename' schools', *Business Day*, 30 July 1986; 'Schools in Soweto get new names', *The Citizen*, 31 July 1986; 'What's in a new name?', *Natal Witness*, 31 July 1986; 'Pupils take over high schools', *Business Day*, 1 August 1986.

203 'CEC plans to take over DET schools by June 16', *Eastern Province Herald*, 15 May 1986.

204 'Pupils burn 'bad books'', *City Press*, 8 June 1986. See also 'Pupils burn free books', *Cape Times*, 8 April 1986.

to seek a negotiated settlement to end apartheid. Had Botha done so the history of the end of apartheid might have closely resembled the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, where massive demonstrations and civil disobedience finally convinced the likes of Erich Honecker in East Germany and Wojciech Jaruzelski in Poland that the game was up.[205] In the end Botha showed little of the moral qualms Honecker and Jaruzelski felt when faced with the prospect of firing on their own people. In 1980s Eastern Europe, nationalism triumphed over ideology to end an era of repression. In South Africa, racial supremacy and a blind commitment to staying in power prevailed over shared humanity. People's Power had owed its foundations to the fear of what the security forces had done in 1985. The frightening truth was that the violence in 1985 was only a taste of what was still to come. And what was to follow was darker and much more morally contested. Instead of fearing the security forces, Sowetans would come most to fear one another. Looking back on that fateful year, one Sowetan said, 1986 was 'the year when everybody was immobilised, when we wished we could wake up from this terrible nightmare.'[206]

[205] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, N.Y.: The Penguin Press, 2005), 585-633.
[206] Nomavenda Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines: Truths of Soweto Life* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1990), xi.

- V -

Civil War
1986-1994

> The world, that understandable and lawful world, was slipping away. Once there was this and that; and now – the ship had gone.
>
> - William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* [1]

Among the thirteen resolutions agreed upon in the early hours of 30 March 1986 in Rajput Hall, the National Education Crisis Committee called a three-day nationwide stayaway, 16 to 18 June, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. Three days of carefully coordinated mass civil disobedience across the country would lay bare the great gap between the National Party and the people it claimed to govern, a government marooned amongst the masses. The National Party never allowed People's Power to get that far. In the early hours of 12 June, P. W. Botha ordered the start of a second state of emergency, to smash the 'radicals and anarchists' who dared to think they might be able to govern themselves.[2] This time the full weight of the National Management Security System was thrown into action across the entire country, its scale and intensity far exceeding what had been mobilised in 1985. Thirty-nine-thousand soldiers were deployed, alongside 5,000 *kitskonstabels*, or 'instant constables', fresh recruits drawn from the ranks of the township's burgeoning unemployed, given six weeks training before being thrown into the fight.[3] On the first day more than a thousand people were detained, police arriving at the offices of the civics, church groups and trade unions in pre-targeted raids.[4] During the first six months, 25,000 people were arrested, 17,000 more than had been arrested during the first state of

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1 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 98.

2 Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1994* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), 196.

3 Tom Lodge, 'Resistance and Reform, 1973-1994', in Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Vol. II, *1885-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 470; and Jan-Ad Stemmet, 'Reflections on the Conduct of the South African Police (SAP) and Violent Political Conflict, ca 1984-1989', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 42 (2017), 143-158.

4 'State of emergency imposed throughout South Africa; More than 1,000 rounded up', *New York Times*, 13 June 1986.

emergency.[5] And this time, unlike the first, the National Party had a plan for how to bring the schools back under control.

The so-called Great Security Plan was the brainchild of Jaap Strydom, promoted to Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education and Training.[6] Under the details of Strydom's plan all schools were closed 12 June, the government announcing a delayed reopening after an extended winter vacation, 14 July instead of 1 July. During these first weeks of the state of emergency it was illegal for any student to set foot on school property under the terms of the Public Safety Act (No. 3 of 1953). But to break the solidarity that had emerged between the teachers and students, staff were required to return on 1 July, reminded of their responsibility to 'uphold and maintain the highest level of school organisation, academic standards and managerial competence'.[7] Then ahead of the students return on 14 July, the government announced that all students would now have to carry identity passes, at the cost of R2 each, to be inspected by newly employed security guards stood on guard outside freshly erected fences encircling the schools. Any student found in fees arrears, who declared themselves to have 'passed' the NECC's re-sit examinations in March, or who refused to show a pass was to be refused entry to school.[8] The Great Security Plan was a plan to draw a ring of state sovereignty around the schools, turning the schools into beachheads from which to launch their assault on the townships.

As a plan to bring order back the Great Security plan was destined to fail. As people in the townships knew well by 1986, order in the schools was not something that could be decreed or legislated from on high, but built through trust, hard-earned authority, and dialogue. The rich world of civic life on which the NECC had built their foundations now threatened to be blown away by the state of emergency. But amidst the terrors of those first weeks as the police and soldiers flooded the streets of the townships again, there were brave attempts to defy Botha's state of emergency, to hold back the barbarism and continue with People's Power. On Monday 14 July the United Democratic Front filed an urgent application in the Port Elizabeth Supreme Court,

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[5] Thirty-four per cent of those detained during the first year of the state of emergency were children. See 'Free the children as of this minute', *The Star*, July 1989.

[6] 'Soweto schools to boost skills by computer', *The Star*, 31 August 1982.

[7] As quoted in 'Black school officials must help curb unrest', *The Citizen*, 9 July 1986.

[8] 'Black schools to open late', *The Star*, 26 June 1986; 'DET to implement new plan to combat disruptions', *The Citizen*, 28 June 1986; 'Schools out of bounds', *The Sowetan*, 30 June 1986; 'Full details of Jaap's plan', *City Press*, 13 July 1986; 'Cards are a 'must'', *The Sowetan*, 17 July 1986.

challenging the legal validity of the state of emergency regulations. Civic leaders who escaped the first wave of arrests appealed for calm, urging the students and teachers to hold their discipline.[9] Going to school under conditions like these was a daunting prospect. But on 14 July around 80 per cent of students in the Department of Education and Training returned to school, some 1.7 million schoolchildren in total.[10] And on their return the students made clear their intention to ignore Strydom's new strictures.[11] In Soweto as elsewhere students made a show of burning their ID cards.[12] It soon became clear that the gates to the school were impossible to police in the way Strydom imagined. Bands of students hurried between the schools under the eyes of the white soldiers, their attentions fixed on anyone who dared linger in the streets, the police given licence to shoot at anyone who disobeyed their orders.[13] In the schools students held meetings and sang political songs, reaffirming their commitment to each other and the idea of People's Power.[14] At least to begin with, the dangers were out on the streets, the schools clung onto as sanctuaries.

But just as the National Party could not enforce order on the schools with violence, People's Power could not survive the indiscriminate use of violence by the police and soldiers who acted like an occupying foreign army. On 14 July students returning to Hlengiwe Secondary in White City were shot at by police who circled the school in vans. After the police left, the students packed their bags and abandoned the school.[15] The pattern was repeated time and again, each assault fraying the bonds of People's Power built over the past six months. Riot units were sent into the townships with orders to target well-known ringleaders.[16] In Soweto police drove the streets in an unmarked white Ford Sierra, hunting high-profile youth activists and summarily executing them.[17] The schools might have been relative sanctuaries, but the walk to school was

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9 'NECC 'no' to DET move', *The Sowetan*, 10 July 1986; 'DET security plan comes under attack', *The Sowetan*, 11 July 1986.

10 'Most pupils back at desks', *Business Day*, 16 July 1986; 80 percent of Black pupils back at school – DET', *The Citizen*, 16 July 1986.

11 'Black pupils face new security on return to schools', *Business Day*, 15 July 1986; ''People's schools' go on – despite troops', *Weekly Mail*, 18 August 1986.

12 'Pupils burn ID cards in protest at DET plan', *City Press*, 20 July 1986; 'Pupils burn ID's', *The Sowetan*, 14 August 1986.

13 'Siege mentality; South Africa tightens the vise on black dissent', *New York Times*, 15 June 1986.

14 ''People's schools' go on – despite troops', *Weekly Mail*, 18 August 1986.

15 'Pupils fight it out with council police', *Business Day*, 16 July 1986.

16 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. III (Basingstoke: Macmillan Reference, 1998), 596.

17 Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Boston, M.A.: Beacon Press, 1990), 262.

incredibly dangerous, and with every passing day fewer were prepared to make that journey. And increasingly the police and soldiers were coming onto school grounds to assume responsibility for the schools themselves, forcing loitering students to stay inside their classrooms.[18] In early August soldiers ordered a student at Naledi High to take off his military jacket. In protest, all 1,300 students walked out the school.[19] Two months after the start of the second state of emergency there were just 60,000 students left in Soweto and Alexandra's schools, a school population that should have numbered more than 200,000.[20]

On 13 August these few remaining students attempted a boycott, a desperate attempt to have their voices heard above the violence. On Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, Soweto's schools stood empty, students returning on Mondays and Tuesdays to keep some level of organisation, and to maintain their commitment to 'people's education'. They demanded the immediate withdrawal of the security forces, the end of the ID system, and the release of all those in detention.[21] They were powerless. The boycott was met with a surge in violence, the orders issued down the National Management Security System's chain of command not to engage in any form of negotiations.[22] On 25 August, a Form V pupil at Nghunghunyani Secondary was killed after police opened fire on a crowd of youth throwing stones, wounding at least seven others.[23] Maxwell Nbulelo Gaga was just one of the many victims during these weeks. Two days later police committed a massacre in Soweto. On 27 August police went to forcibly disrupt a meeting in White City amidst rumours the authorities were considering evictions for residents found not paying their rents. As the police were spotted approaching the meeting sang 'we are not fighting'. The police opened fire, killing 27 people.[24] Eight days later a mass funeral for 15 of the victims in White City was planned at the Moroka Jabavu Stadium. The police cordoned off the streets around the

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[18] Victoria Brittain and Abdul S. Minty (eds.), *Children of Resistance: Statements from the Harare Conference on Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa* (London: Kliptown Books, 1988), 34.

[19] 'Pupils quit class after jacket row', *The Star*, 5 August 1986.

[20] 'Soweto pupils out of classes', *The Sowetan*, 21 August 1986.

[21] 'Protest over school security presence grows', *The Star*, 14 August 1986; 'Soweto pupils in three-day boycott', *The Star*, 15 August 1986; 'Soweto pupils out of classes', *The Sowetan*, 21 August 1986; 'Boycott hits some Soweto primaries', *The Star*, 21 August 1986; 'Two-day week in Soweto schools', *The Citizen*, 27 August 1986.

[22] Mark Swilling, 'The Politics of Negotiation', *Work in Progress*, 50 (1987), 18.

[23] 'Soweto pupil dead as police open fire', *The Sowetan*, 26 August 1986.

[24] See Nomavenda Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines: Truths of Soweto Life* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1990), 61; and Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1998), 61. See also, 'Soyco, Sosco speak', *The Sowetan*, 11 September 1986.

stadium with machine guns, three helicopters circling the townships. That day at least 8 people were killed.[25] The extreme violence took place in an almost complete vacuum of accountability. A soldier who shot a schoolchild dead in the back during the first weeks of the state of emergency in Soweto was handed a R2,000 fine three years later.[26]

The student body was too fragmented to sustain any kind of organisation. On 14 September 1986, the government officially closed ten secondary schools in Soweto: Anchor, Bopasenatla, Emadwaleni, George Khoza, Kelokitso, Mapetla, Matseliso, Meadowlands, Sekano Ntoane, and Tladi.[27] Defying desperate pleas to postpone the end-of-year exams until some kind of order was returned, the National Party was resolute. The 1986 end-of-year exams started on schedule under armed guard. Of the 6,500 students officially registered to sit in Soweto, just 1,300 did, many of those who trusted the soldiers' promise to protect them betrayed in the end. Exam halls left unguarded were attacked by groups of angry youth wielding *sjamboks* and knives.[28] Two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand students who started the 1986 academic year did not finish, those who did surrounded by extraordinary scenes of chaos.[29] The promise of a no-school year that the NECC had forestalled for so long had finally been realised.

And this time there was to be no chance of people rallying together in the face of the violence. In August the NECC attempted to launch a legal challenge against Strydom's Great Security Plan in the Rand Supreme Court, its lawyers arguing that the Plan far exceeded the provisions made available in the Public Security Act. The case was dismissed out of hand.[30] Denied recourse to the court, and with its foundations as a mass movement disintegrating beneath its feet, the NECC's leadership was targeted in the detentions. Smangaliso Mkhatshwa gave the keynote

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[25] See Carole Cooper, Jennifer Shindler, Colleen McCaul, Pierre Brouard, Cosmas Mareka, Jon-Marc Seimon, Michael Markovitz, Harry Mashabela, Claire Pickard-Cambridge and Robin Hamilton (eds.), *Race Relations Survey, 1986: Part II* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1988), 526.

[26] 'Soldier fined for fatal shooting of schoolboy', *Business Day*, 30 July 1989.

[27] 'Statement by Dr Braam Fourie, Director-General: Education and Training', 14 September 1986; 'Protesting youths force Soweto pupils to go home', *Eastern Province Herald*, 17 September 1986; 'Pupils stay away after incident', *The Star*, 19 September 1986.

[28] 'Soweto pupils refuse exams', *Business Day*, 17 October 1986; 'Youths storm matric exams', *The Star*, 24 October 1986; 'Police ignored pleas for guards at exams', *The Star*, 25 October 1985; 'Protection pledge to exam writers', *Sunday Times*, 26 October 1986; 'Waiting no game for students', *The Star*, 26 October 1986; 'Police on guard at exam centres', *The Star*, 27 October 1986; 'Poor Soweto turnout for matric exams', *The Citizen*, 28 October 1986; 'Soweto pupils rewrite exam tomorrow', *The Star*, 24 November 1986.

[29] Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey, 1986: Part II*, 459.

[30] 'NECC challenges proclamation on registration', *The Citizen*, 7 August 1986.

address at the SPCC's conference in the University of Witwatersrand's Great Hall.[31] He was seized in a dawn raid on 12 June. During his detention he was forced to stand on one spot for 30 hours as five men took it in turns to interrogate him.[32] Zwelakhe Sisulu was detained in prison without charge. H. H. Dlamlenze, general secretary of African Teachers' Association of South Africa, was detained for six months.[33] Of the NECC's executive, only Eric Molobi[34] managed to stay underground.[35] A third national conference had been planned in December at the University of Witwatersrand. It was forced to be cancelled.[36] From the top of the civics to the bottom, organisational life was gutted. Community activists who tried to put a brave face on things were disingenuous. Attempts to build back what had been destroyed in the winter of 1986 by forming new street committees were swept away by the security services.[37] Anyone with any kind of public profile faced detention.

The second state of emergency ultimately broke the expectation that South Africa was a society on the cusp of revolution. Writing in 1987, one academic described how South Africa had become trapped in a deadlock in which 'the oppressed majority do not possess the organisational capacity, political power or coercive strength to overthrow the state. Nor does the state have the

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31 Smangaliso Mkhatshwa (b.26 June1939-) was born in Barberton in Mpumalanga and educated at Pax College in Pietersburg (now Polokwane). He was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1965 and later obtained a masters degree in philosophy and theology from the University of Leuven in Belgium. On his return to South Africa in the mid-1970s Mkhatshwa became active in politics and was repeatedly detained. He was elected to the parliament in 1994 and was appointed deputy minister of education in 1996. Between 2000 and 2005 Mkhatshwa served as mayor of Tshwane.

32 'A South African Cleric is Reported Tortured', *New York Times*, 24 August 1986; 'Pretoria now sets Soweto toll at 21', *New York Times*, 29 August 1986.

33 Mathiane, *Beyond the Headline*, 50.

34 Eric Molobi (b.5 June 1945-d.5 June 2006) was born in Alexandra and educated in Soweto, before training as an electrician at the Vocational Training College in Dube. Arrested after meeting members of the ANC-in-exile, Molobi spent six years in prison, during which time he completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of South Africa. On his release from Robben Island in 1982 he became a prominent member of the UDF. After the end of apartheid Molobi became a prominent businessman and public figure. In 1994 he was appointed Chairman of the National Housing Forum.

35 Frank Chikane, 'The Political Context of the War against Children', in Victoria Brittain and Abdul S. Minty (eds.), *Children of Resistance: Statements from the Harare Conference on Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa* (London: Kliptown Books, 1988), 33.

36 'A dark and troubled year for SA's black education', *The Star*, 23 December 1986.

37 In the winter of 1986 there was a plan to divide the townships into eight zones; Diepkloof (Diepkloof and Orlando East), Meadowlands (Meadowlands and Dobsonville), Momomoka (Moroka, Molapo, Mofolo and Jabavu), Motlana (Moletsane, Tladi, and Naledi), Orlando West (Dube, Phefeni, Phomolong and Mzimhhlope), Pimville (Klipruit), Sephima-DC (Senoana, Phiri, Mapetla, Dlamini and Chiawelo), Zojazem (Zondi, Jabulani, Zola and Emdeni), Under the plan every street was to form a committee of four adults (two men and two women), and two youth (one student and one working or unemployed). The street committees were to come together to form block committees, which in turn would come together to represent area committees. The idea never really started. See 'Soyco, Sosco speak', *The Sowetan*, 11 September 1986.

ideological and political resources required to re-establish its dominance without coercion.'[38] The scholarly consensus was that this new status quo would last for many years. Writing in the winter 1988 edition of *Political Science Quarterly*, Princeton political scientist Jeffrey Herbst opined: 'The prospect is of continued white rule for the foreseeable future with increasingly violent popular protest that, while not posing a significant threat to the government, will result in repression and suffering.'[39]

At least political deadlock was how things looked from a distance. In the townships the destruction of any form of functional political life marked the start of something far from inert and much more difficult to describe: a tearing apart of the fabric of society which gave rise to almost Hobbesian conditions as people's pursuit of political ideals gave way to something much more basic. For years people in Soweto had been confronted with the challenge of answering a basic question: How to build a kind of life under apartheid? Over the years a great array of social forms had been built in answer to that question, a history of resilience nowhere better testified to than in the schools. But now denied the space to come together to solve their problems, the question of how to build a bigger and better life was replaced with a much more basic question: how to stay alive. In this new mercurial world every social cleavage threatened to become a vector of violence, the streets on which people lived, their sports clubs, businesses, taxi ranks, ethnicities, and schools. A new world of tiny alliances formed and reformed constantly, the dividing lines often running through families. This was the start of something new. During the first state of emergency the majority of those who died had been killed by the security forces. During the second state of emergency the violence reached new levels, and most of those who died were not killed by the security forces, but by each other. June 1986 marked the start of the most intimately fought civil war, fought not between two opposing armies as Botha's securocrats and the leaders of Umkhonto we Sizwe had once imagined, but between neighbours and friends; not for political ideals, but to stay alive.

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[38] Mark Swilling, 'Living in the Interregnum: Crisis, Reform and the Socialist Alternative in South Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 9 (1987), 421.

[39] Jeffrey Herbst, 'Prospects for Revolution in South Africa', *Political Science Quarterly*, 103 (Winter, 1988-1989), 679.

In the townships people called this tearing of social bonds the *udlame*, an isiZulu word to describe 'a brutal savagery that destroys social relations',[40] a type of violence that once it has started 'initiates a spiral of revenge attacks and witchcraft accusations'.[41] The cost in life of the *udlame* was extraordinary. It is estimated that between 1984 and 1994 more than 20,000 people were killed in political violence in South Africa, a figure compiled from the work of monitoring groups such as *Indicator SA* and the Unrest Monitoring Project at the University of Natal.[42] But the task of defining what constitutes political violence under conditions like these is impossible. This widely quoted figure should be treated with scepticism. A more reliable guide to understanding the extent of the violence is the homicide rate, which started to spike sharply after the start of the second state of emergency.[43] Between 1986 and 1994 there were 117,014 officially recorded murders in South Africa, almost twice as many as was recorded in the eight year period before 1986.[44] And even this much higher figure, which did not include the figures from the Bantustans, is likely to be a significant undercount by a police force which had almost entirely abandoned the task of policing, tasked with fighting Botha's dirty war in the townships.[45] Each morning children walked by bodies left where they had fallen after the night's most recent fighting. A psychologist who conducted a study amongst Alexandra's students in the late 1980s found that 67 per cent had witnessed a death first-hand.[46] And this macabre world found its way deep into childhood imaginations.[47] During a

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[40] Timothy Gibbs, 'Inkatha's Young Militants: Reconsidering Political Violence in South Africa', *Africa*, 87 (2017), 364.

[41] Jeff Peires, 'Traditional Leaders in Purgatory: Local Government in Tsolo, Qumbu, and Port St Johns, 1990-2000', *African Studies*, 59 (2000), 99. On *udlame* see also Jill E. Kelly, ''Women Were Not Supposed to Fight': The Gendered Uses of Martial and Moral Zuluness during uDlame, 1990-1994', in Jan Bender Shetler (ed.), *Gendering Ethnicity in African Women's Lives* (Madison, W.I.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 178-205.

[42] On the challenge of establishing accurate estimates see Ruth Tomaselli, 'Reconstructing Political Violence: Difficulties in Data & Definition', in Mark Bennett and Deborah Quin (eds.), *Political Conflict in South Africa: Data Trends, 1985-1988* (Durban: Indicator Project South Africa, 1988), 19-25. One of the best guides to understanding this type of violence is Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Stathis Kalyvas, 'The Landscape of Political Violence', in Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas and Stathis Kalyvas (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11-33.

[43] The SAIRR recorded a 47.7 per cent increase in the number of political fatalities between 1985 and 1986. See Carole Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey, 1986: Part II*, 517.

[44] Anine Kriegler and Mark Shaw, *A Citizen's Guide to Crime Trends in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2016), 184.

[45] *Ibid*., 128-9.

[46] Gill Straker, Michaela Mendelsohn, Fathima Moosa, and Pam Tudin, 'Violent Political Contexts and the Emotional Concerns of Township Youth', *Child Development*, 67 (1996), 53.

[47] On the psychological consequences of the violence, see Gill Straker, *Faces in the Revolution: The Psychological Effects of Violence on Township Youth in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992).

period of fieldwork the anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes found children playing games like 'funeral', 'shack burning' and 'shoot out'.[48] Death was never far away.

Most frightening of all was how the township's schoolchildren were not only the victims of the violence, but its perpetrators. Throughout the long history of apartheid, schools had acted like a bulwark in society, helping to keep in order what apartheid threatened to destroy. Schools were where people's ideas of proprietary and social standing were invested, a crucial link connecting people to their hopes for a better future. People's Power was the last attempt to hold the values of that world intact. Now the old distinctions collapsed. School and gang life became indistinguishable, the line separating political violence from criminal violence hopelessly blurred. The comrades had become the *com-tsotsis*. During the final years of apartheid the most common perpetrators of the violence were those aged between 15 and 24.[49] And of everywhere in South Africa, Soweto had the second highest death-rate.[50] To describe what life had become, one teacher said: 'Soweto is Sodom and Gomorrah. This place must be razed to the ground and rebuilt afresh, and not with the present child. These children are poison.'[51]

It is a statement liable to make readers today recoil. Yet this was how Sowetans spoke during this time, an unsentimental language which all too often has struggled to be heard in the pages of South African history. As the violence spiralled the National Party tried washing its hands of responsibility. In a richly Orwellian language white politicians described what was happening as 'black-on-black' violence, the rising tide of violence the product of something deep and timeless, an expression of a latent tribalism at odds with white civilizational values the police and army were tasked with protecting.[52] The ANC-in-exile faced its own questions of responsibility that made talking honestly about what was happening in the townships intensely difficult. Having asked the youth to fight a People's War, the party could not find the conscience to condemn the youth now, even as most now recognised the tragic futility of what was unfolding. The ANC's propaganda

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48 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'Who's the Killer? Popular Justice and Human Rights in a South African Squatter Camp', *Social Justice*, 22 (1995), 149.

49 Colin Bundy, 'Introduction', in David Everatt and Elinor Sisulu (eds.), *Black Youth in Crisis: Facing the Future* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1992), 5.

50 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 156.

51 As quoted in Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 51.

52 On how the violence was represented see Deborah Posel, 'Symbolizing Violence: State and Media Discourse in Television Coverage of Township Protest, 1985-7', in N. Chabani Manganyi and André du Toit (eds.), *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 154-171.

machine continued to celebrate the sacrifice of the Young Lions. But in private, other things were happening. Long sceptical of the wisdom of People's War, Thabo Mbeki won Oliver Tambo's permission to begin talking with representatives from the National Party, in top-secret talks hidden faraway in the English countryside.[53] Haunted by a recurring dream since 1976 that no one would be left to welcome him home,[54] in prison Nelson Mandela reached his own conclusion that the time for negotiations had come, conducting secret back-channel talks with the National Intelligence Service, a rare part of government prepared to question whether Botha's war could ever be won. When Botha suffered a stroke in 1989 the biggest barrier to the doubts that many senior politicians harboured privately was suddenly removed. Under a young new president, F. W. de Klerk,[55] the hidden talks were brought out into the open, defying all those that said South Africa was trapped in deadlock from which there was no escape. The effect on people was spellbinding. Politicians separated by years of enmity, some not seen in public for decades, sat down and learnt to trust each other under the full gaze of the world's media. The story this remarkable cast told the world was that they carried the historic responsibility of pulling a country back from the brink of a civil war. It was only ever half true. The negotiations did not avert a civil war. But the election brokered in 1994 did bring the violence to an end, a devastating period in South Africa's history that sits awkwardly amidst the encomia of apartheid's demise. This final chapter hopes to provide some insight into what that period looked like from one of its most fiercely fought spots, and the legacies it has left people with today.

I

There had been warning signs of what might happen if South Africa's oppressed were pushed too far before 1986, the growing unruliness in the classrooms, the criminality, and increasingly bitter

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53 On the Mells Park talks, see Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 541-546.

54 Imran Coovadia, *Revolution and Non-Violence in Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Mandela* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 148.

55 Frederik Willem de Klerk (b.18 March 1936-d.11 November 2021) was born in Johannesburg and educated at the Hoërskool Monument in Krugersdorp before studying law at Potchefstroom University. He was elected to parliament in 1972. In 1975 he narrowly missed out to Andries Treurnicht on promotion to Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education. In 1978 he was appointed Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions and Minister of National Education in 1984, a post he held until succeeding Botha as president in 1989. He was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize with Nelson Mandela in 1993.

inter-organisational factional fighting, especially in Natal where Inkatha and the UDF seemed poised on the threshold of all out war.[56] In Soweto though, the first real signs of what lay ahead emerged three months before the second state of emergency when activists in the Azanian Students' Movement (AZASM) and the Soweto Students' Congress (SOSCO) started attacking each other on the streets of Orlando East and Diepkloof. It was a fight that served no political logics at all, and which in just a few weeks claimed dozens of lives. It is our starting point here as we try to understand how young students with great dreams of the future could come to regard see other as their most dangerous foes at a time when the old shape of society was still recognisable.

What started the fighting was nothing more than a traffic accident. On Saturday 15 March, two weeks before the NECC's second conference in Durban, a twenty-year-old man, Steve Ramoshaba from Orlando East, was driving when he collided with a pupil on the streets in Diepkloof. Ramoshaba stopped the car but was soon surrounded by a crowd of angry students who started throwing stones. He hurried back to his car and fled, driving to a local police station to report what happened before returning home to talk with his comrades.[57]

The way in which a crowd suddenly formed at the scene ready to dispense summary justice was itself a measure of people's rising propensity to turn to violent solutions amidst the social upheavals after 1976. The first time an attack by a group of students like this was recorded was 24 October 1983, when students from Tsonga High in Diepkloof killed two youths in retribution after one of their classmates had been killed in a *shebeen*, one of the estimated 4,000 unlicenced taverns which would become such regular flashpoints in the years ahead.[58] Since then over a dozen attacks of these attacks by students had been recorded in Soweto, a trend local social workers attributed to the upturning of the old hierarchies in 1976.[59] One month before the road accident in Diepkloof pupils at Morris Isaacson viciously attacked a delivery van driver after he hit a teacher from the school riding a bike in a head-on collision.[60] As the NECC and UDF desperately sought

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[56] On the eve of the second state of emergency there was terrible intracommunal fighting in Crossroads, an informal settlement in the Western Cape. See Josette Cole, *Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976-1986* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

[57] 'Toll rises… as youths burnt, stoned to death', *The Sowetan*, 21 March 1986.

[58] 'Speak-easies flourishing in Soweto', *New York Times*, 24 January 1982.

[59] 'The school executioners', *Sunday Mirror*, 24 March 1985; 'Executioners in school uniforms', *The Sowetan*, 7 August 1985; 'Violent chain of revenge burnings', *The Sowetan*, 7 August 1985.

[60] 'Soweto pupils go on rampage', *The Citizen*, 28 February 1986.

to keep people together, it was clear that people's trust in one another had been stretched to its limits.

And so given this context we can perhaps understand why Ramoshaba's mother decided to turn to a local gang with a fearsome reputation for protection, the Makabasas.[61] It was a decision soon justified. Three days after the accident, Tuesday 18 March, a crowd of around 3,000 people, mostly made up of students from Diepkloof, marched on the house the Ramoshabas were being sheltered inside. Some arrived carrying petrol bombs. As those inside tried to flee the burning house, two of the gang members were caught, doused in petrol and set alight. Later that night the Makabasas killed three men in retaliation, torching a teacher's home.[62]

The night of 18 March left a deep legacy that threatened to disrupt the NECC's call for a return to school in this corner of Soweto. After Sisulu's great speech in Rajput Hall students from Diepkloof reported that they were being intimidated on their walks to school in Orlando East, just as students from Orlando East were threatened by members of SOSCO in Diepkloof. In mid-May the Orlando East branch of AZASM called for a community meeting at St Mary's Church in Orlando East, to discuss how the tensions could be abated. Widely rumoured to have formed an alliance with the Makabasas, what AZASM proposed at the meeting amounted to little more than a power grab: a partitioning line separating Orlando East as AZASM territory from Diepkloof, Congress territory. For all the lively political disagreements that had animated student politics in the past, a dividing line like this had never existed in Soweto.[63] The ideological differences separating those who took the Freedom Charter as the bedrock of their politics from AZASM, with its idiosyncratic blend of Black Marxism and claim to uphold the legacy of the Black Consciousness movement, has assumed a much greater prominence in the accounts of historians

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61 Describing the Makabasas' reputation, Susan Shabangu said: 'There were these gangsters in Orlando East called the Makabasa. They harassed people and raped young girls while, at the same time, they conflicted with the young activists in the township. They'd do all terrible things but you'd never see the police. You'd ask yourself where did they get their guns from and why were they not being arrested?'. See As quoted in Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 127.

62 'Five dead as pupils and Kabasas fight', *The Star*, 20 March 1986; 'Toll rises… as youths burnt, stoned to death', *The Sowetan*, 21 March 1986.

63 In January 1985 Edward Kennedy, senator for Massachusetts, visited South Africa on the invitation of Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, two leading figures in the UDF. AZAPO activists denounced the visit, brandishing Kennedy a capitalist and an imperialist. On the night Kennedy was supposed to speak before four-thousand people in Regina Mundi, two-hundred AZAPO and AZASM activists noisily disrupted proceedings, forcing an angry crowd home. See 'Kennedy tour shows blacks divided on outsiders' role in S. Africa', *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 January 1985.

than they ever did at the time.[64] Students rarely allowed such abstract differences get in the way of the day-to-day business of organising and the sense of fraternity forged in the heat of the struggle. The 800 students at the St Mary's meeting made clear that they rejected AZASM's proposal in no uncertain terms. They 'called for unity', arguing that 'division would delay the struggle for liberation'.[65] This, after all, was the height of People's Power, when the ideal of common cause reigned.

But no matter people's wishes, the turf war continued, fluid and abstract ideological lines beginning to harden in the face of the violence. A month after the St Mary's meeting, Ishmael Mkhabela, the head of the Azanian People's Organisation announced that 4 members of his organisation had been killed in the fighting and 33 homes burnt down. Mkhabela pointed the finger. 'Under the cloak of a general civil uprising the UDF has shown its hand in pursuance of its grand hegemonic ambitions of the liberation struggle'.[66] The violence was not one-sided though. Nor was it creditable to claim that the UDF was pulling strings. Leading figures in the Congress movement also denounced the violence, a fight which neither side bore responsibility for starting, and which neither stood to gain anything from. On the other side, a 'stop the killings interim committee' was formed, led by some of Soweto's most respected community leaders, Nthatho Motlana and Albertina Sisulu among them. But not only did their interventions fail to bring an end to the violence, it made them targets. After Frank Chikane spoke out, his home was set on fire.[67] Rather than revealing anything like the UDF's hegemony, the fighting amongst the youth in Orlando East and Diepkloof showed where the limits of the UDF's powers lay.

Behind the recriminations, the strange truth was that it was not politics in any conventional sense driving the violence, but something more elemental: an ever-rising fear of what one group might do to another. Most tried to push that fear out of their minds. The great majority of students in Orlando East and Diepkloof continued to go to school, heeding the NECC's national call. But

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64 For an excellent essay on the ideological fluidity of student politics in the 1980s see Anne Heffernan, 'Blurred Lines and Ideological Divisions in South African Youth Politics', *African Affairs*, 115 (2016), 664-687. The ideological fluidity of these times is richly evident in the biographies of leading community figures. On how individuals were able to maintain many ideological and political commitments, see Jon Soske, 'The Life and Death of Dr Abu Baker 'Hurley' Asvat, 23 February 1943 to 27 January 1989', *African Studies*, 70 (2011), 337-358.

65 'Azasm wants peace pact with Sosco', *The Sowetan*, 18 April 1986.

66 As quoted in Harry Mashabela, *A People on the Boil: Reflections on Soweto* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2006), 177

67 Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, 176.

in a sign of the way the logics of violence ensnares the best intentioned, many students started carrying weapons in self-defence. At the schools rumours that armed groups were approaching could spark chaos, sending students vaulting over the school fences in panic.[68] Sometimes the attackers came. On Tuesday 20 May two cars pulled up outside Orlando High, the attackers running through the school, flashing at the students with knives.[69] The violence had developed its own momentum beyond anyone's control to stop. On 25 May, a young AZAPO member, Sipho Mngomezulu, was seized from his house and killed. The next day a man was shot dead outside his home in Diepkloof after a group of masked men knocked on his door looking for his son. And in another sign of the way the logic of violence tends to suck people in, on 29 May a thousand students and parents from five high schools in Diepkloof came together and vowed to form a self-defence committees.[70] What a thousand-strong self-defence committee looked like was very different to those watching on the other side.

Having been mocked at the St Mary's meeting, the idea of a partitioning line was being brought into reality. During the month of May entire households started to resettle across the line depending on where their loyalties in the fighting was suspected to lie.[71] At night hundreds slept together in safehouses guarded by armed comrades. When Mnogmezulu's funeral was held, it was attacked by a group of Charterists, who seized the casket and set it alight.[72] In the account of one young AZASM activist caught up in the fighting, the attack was what led AZASM to start retaliatory attacks. So it went on. At the end of July the house of a prominent AZASM member was burnt down. The next day six students were kidnapped and tortured. Transported in the boots of two cars, they were driven out to Chiawelo in 'deep Soweto' where they were taken above a ravine and shot. Remarkably two of the boys survived. [73]

The nature of the violence appalled those who experienced the first state of emergency together when the threat to life had been the white men in uniforms. Deploring the senselessness,

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68 'Pupils arm in fear of gang attacks', *The Star*, 1 May 1986.

69 '3 stabbed in school attack', *The Star*, 20 May 1986.

70 'Diepkloof pupils stay away after attack on mourners', *The Star*, 29 April 1986; 'Diepkloof unites in defence', *The Star*, 30 April 1986.

71 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 127.

72 'War at the weekend,' *The Sowetan*, 26 May 1986.

73 Pitso Joseph Hlasa, testimony to Amnesty Hearing, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 8 June 1998. The four boys killed were Edwin Vuyani Nkomo, Mbulelo Esau Mabena, Msilane Ronel Sishange, and Oscar Amos Mhlangeni. The two survivors were Simon Morris and Sekano Avonly Kgasi

a mother in Diepkloof said, 'It is one thing for my child to die in unrest, but it is something else for her to die in a fight with the Ma-Kabasa'.[74] Then on 12 June Botha announced the start of the second state of emergency and the ferocity of the fighting suddenly seemed to have been brought to a halt. Amongst that massive first wave of detentions, many of those who had been fighting each other now found themselves sat alongside each other in the cells of Johannesburg Prison.[75] Amidst the devastation of those weeks, it offered some a ray of hope. Saths Cooper was a prominent AZAPO activist who had played a leading role in SASO.[76] In August 1986, Cooper said, 'In [a] perverse sense, the Emergency has been a blessing. It has forced common ground between different factions.'[77] It proved a tragically misplaced optimism. Rather than creating unity, the second state of emergency threatened to destroy Sowetans' common ground entirely, opening vast chasms between people filled with mutual suspicion, fear and hostility. And without the watching eyes of all those organisations that helped hold people to account, the type of violence witnessed on the eve of the second state of emergency in Orlando East and Diepkloof recognised few limits.

Someone quick to see what lay ahead was Murphy Morobe. Released from Robben Island in 1982, Morobe had now long put his youthful politics behind him. Throwing himself into the civics' fold, he was appointed the UDF's national publicity secretary, one of the most eloquent spokespersons of the ideas of nonviolent struggle and grassroots organising. Speaking from a place of hiding after the start of the second state of emergency, he said, 'Removing responsible leaders of the people has effectively paved the way for a blood bath in the country.'[78] He was right. And in that blood bath that followed it was not only the likes of Morobe who saw their dreams destroyed. Those who clung to the idea that the fight could be won with violence soon found that their fight was not with the men in uniforms, but with each other.

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74 'Soweto pupils told to fight gangs', *The Star*, 5 May 1986.

75 Shaun Johnson, ''The Soldiers of Luthuli': Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa', in Shaun Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 1989), 133.

76 Sathasivian Cooper (b.11 June 1950-) was born near Durban and educated at Sastri College. In 1972 he was elected secretary of the Black People's Convention. He was one of the 'SASO 9' and sentenced to prison on Robben Island, where he completed his degree in psychology at the university of South Africa. On his release he was appointed vice-president of AZAPO. Cooper later completed a doctorate at Boston University on a Fulbright fellowship. In 2003 he was appointed vice-principal of the University of Durban-Westville.

77 As quoted in Johnson, 'The Soldiers of Luthuli', 133.

78 As quoted in 'State of emergency imposed throughout South Africa; More than 1,000 rounded up', *New York Times*, 13 June 1986.

The history of what happened next is much harder to make sense of. Without the old organisations, the shape of things becomes much harder to see. Political t-shirts were a ubiquitous sight on the streets of the townships in the 1980s, proudly worn by people as a sign of their organisational commitments. Now they were thrown away, much too dangerous to wear.[79] The second state of emergency created a shadowy world in which people guessed at each other's intentions and loyalties. There was one woman though for whom the intense scrutiny that fell upon her decisions has left behind an unparalleled historical record, shining a light into a world that destroyed the types of materials from which historians work from.[80] And it is through the history of Winnie Mandela's attempt to forge an alliance with the youth of Soweto that we are offered perhaps the most extraordinary insight into how the struggle for national liberation became a struggle to stay alive, and the costs with which that came.

II

In 1977, nine months after her arrest at the height of the Soweto uprising, police arrived at Winnie Mandela's home on Vilakazi Street and issued her with a banning order. They loaded her belongings onto the back of a truck then drove her 250 miles south to Brandfort, a conservative white farming town in the Free State. Here in an impoverished township she was kept under close surveillance, given a two-bedroom house that had no electricity or plumbing, her home bugged by the police. Under the terms of her banning order nobody was allowed into her home, she was not allowed to speak to more than one person at any time, and for twelve hours a day she was not allowed outside.[81] Isolated, she fell back on her training as a social worker in the 1950s. She helped establish a day-care centre, a soup kitchen for the most indigent, and a sewing club, stitching new school uniforms for the children.[82]

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79 Adam Ashforth, 'State Power, Violence, Everyday Life: Soweto', Working Paper No. 210 (1995), Center for Studies of Social Change, New School for Social Research, New York, N.Y., 16.

80 See especially, 'Special Investigation into the Mandela United Football Club', in *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. II (Basingstoke: Macmillan Reference, 1998), 555-582. For an account of the hearing, see Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 243-260.

81 Saleem Badat, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment Under Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012), 209-215.

82 Peter Storey, *I Beg To Differ: Ministry Amid the Teargas* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2018), 348.

Unlike Morobe though, time did nothing to quell Winnie Mandela's commitment to insurrection, a violent confrontation her experience of torture had convinced her was necessary so long as the National Party remained in power. To the many journalists who travelled to her door she gave defiant interviews, turning Brandfort into a stage to stand upon as a model of undying resistance. In private she sought to recruit members for Umkhonto we Sizwe, helping the youth who made their own pilgrimages to Brandfort prepare for the journey across the border into nearby Lesotho, a hazardous journey as the police watched her every move. She even tried setting up her own militant front, Maluti, which while never quite establishing itself, made it difficult for the UDF to build a presence in the region.[83] In the backwater of Brandfort two parts of Winnie Mandela's life were starkly illustrated; her deep instinctive care for the young and most vulnerable in society, and her unwavering commitment to violent insurrection. Back amidst the chaos of the second state of emergency in Soweto they became hopelessly blurred togeter.

It was the start of the first state of emergency in July 1985 that created the opportunity for Winnie Mandela to return to Soweto. As the police and army flooded the streets and Oliver Tambo called upon the oppressed to fight a People's War, Winnie Mandela defiantly broke her banning order, returning to her home on Vilakazi Street. But the front lines in the insurrections had long moved on since 1976. The month after she returned home, the Soweto Parents' Committee held its meeting at St Margaret's Church in Diepkloof where it was rechristened the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee, handed a mandate to negotiate with the government to find an alternative to the ANC's talk of ungovernability. Up close the politics in the townships were much more complicated than the ANC's propaganda suggested, or that Winnie Mandela was prepared to admit.

The complexity of politics in the townships around Johannesburg was laid bare on 4 December 1985, the day a massive funeral held at a soccer stadium in Mamelodi near Pretoria, intended to lay to rest some of the 19 victims of a police massacre in Mamelodi on 21 November.[84] Like Soweto, Mamelodi was a '1976' township. Like Soweto, Mamelodi had been badly scarred by the police's reprisals in 1976, going on to develop an active civic culture, in marked contrast to

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83 On Maluti, see Seekings, *UDF*, 41-42.

84 Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, The, *The War Against Children: South Africa's Youngest Victims*, (New York, N.Y.: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986), 47; 'The day Pretoria's buses stopped: thousands stay away for massive Mamelodi funeral,' *Weekly Mail*, December 23, 1985.

Pretoria's other major township, Atteridgeville, relatively unscathed in 1976, its own insurrectionary moment waiting until February 1984.[85] The march the police had fired upon in Mamelodi had been peaceful, nothing like the scenes of protest in the Vaal Triangle and Atteridgeville where the youth fought the police with home-made petrol bombs. The funeral was sombre and sober. Amongst those who addressed the mourners was Curtis Nkondo. Back in 1984 Nkondo endorsed the Release Mandela Committee's call for a general strike following the start of the Vaal uprising, having grown frustrated with what he regarded as the UDF's excessive moderateness. Now, having watched the state's atrocities mount since the start of the first state of emergency Nkondo urged restraint, calling on the students to return to school 'because pupils need education for our liberation'.[86] Then, as the crowds started to head home, Winnie Mandela arrived. Addressing around 2,000 stragglers she said, 'In the same way as you have had to bury our children today, so shall the blood of these heroes we buried today be avenged.'[87] It was the first time she had spoken before a crowd since the Soweto uprising. For everything that had happened since, it was as if nothing had changed.

A few weeks later the SPCC held its conference at the University of Witwatersrand to discuss the growing crisis in the schools. Winnie Mandela was notably absent from the meeting that won her party's blessing for a new course in the struggle. Indeed, as old friends tried to bend the struggle towards People's Power, her speeches in the townships around Johannesburg became even more militant. To the youth who felt betrayed by the call to take the struggle back into the schools, Winnie Mandela was an uncompromising hero, a thorn in the side of the UDF, whose politics she openly derided. She claimed the UDF had been taken over by an 'Indian cabal', an incendiary charge in a political movement whose commitment to nonracialism was sacrosanct. In the circles that moved around Winnie Mandela some derided Morobe as 'Murphy Patel'.[88] Well before her scandal on the world stage, Winnie Mandela had become a hugely divisive figure in the townships, and for the ANC-in-exile an increasingly difficult figure to manage as it sought to pivot

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[85] For a first-hand account of the violence in Mamelodi in 1976 see Mosiuoa Sekese, *Twenty-Twenty Hindsight: Memoirs of the Old and New South Africa* (Bloomington I.N.D.: AuthorHouse, 2013), 84-89.

[86] As quoted in 'Mandela group calls for end to school boycott', *The Star*, 23 December 1985. See also 'Nkondo spoke for himself', *The Star*, 30 December 1985.

[87] As quoted in 'Winnie Mandela, defying Pretoria, vows vengeance', *New York Times*, 4 December 1985.

[88] Seekings, *UDF*, 219.

towards People's Power. Indeed, it was the effects of her divisive words that made the authorities happy for her to stay active in Soweto.

Two weeks after Sisulu spoke in Durban, Winnie Mandela gave an impromptu speech in Munsieville, a township a few miles north of Soweto. It was the first time she publicly spoke about necklacing, a horrifying new act of killing first pioneered in March 1985 in Uitenhage, the act of placing a tyre filled with petrol over someone's neck and setting alight.[89] When Winnie Mandela spoke, hundreds had already been killed that way. One section of her speech was picked up by a group of watching foreign journalists. 'Together, hand in hand with our sticks of matches, with our necklaces, we shall liberate this country'.[90] For many in the townships necklacing was the ultimate symbol of a revolution that had become unmoored, the most extreme horror the leaders of the NECC were determined to protect the youth from. Winnie Mandela was clear that she was determined to carry the torch forward. Her dreams of leading an insurrectionary war ended less than three years later in scandal, the death of James 'Stompie' Seipei, a young boy from Tumahole who had learnt the Freedom Charter by heart before his childhood was upturned by the start of the insurrection in July 1985. Ten years old, he quickly earnt a reputation for himself on the barricades of Tumahole, the Little General, the leader of a band of fearless boys known as the 'Under Fourteens'.[91] Repeatedly detained by police, he eventually made his way to Soweto, joining the ranks of the youth whose fates were now subject to the feuds and fears of their neighbours, their ability to pick the right group of people at the right time.

One line through the violence that led to Seipei's death is to start in May 1986, the month Masabata Loate, a twenty-nine-year-old former student activist from the Soweto uprising, was released from prison, having served five-year sentence for treason. Loate returned home at just the moment the fighting raged between AZASM and SOCO activists in Orlando East and Diepkloof, confronting this young idealistic activist with how much had changed in just the short time she had been away. Fatefully Loate chose to speak out, condemning those in the community

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[89] For the small literature on necklacing see Joanna Ball, 'The Ritual of the Necklace', Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, March 1994; Riedwaan Moosage, 'The Impasse of Violence: Writing Necklacing into a History of the Liberation Struggle in South Africa', (M.A. diss. University of the Western Cape, 2010); Nyasha Karimakwenda, 'Safe to Violate: The Role of Gender in the Necklacing of Women during the South African People's War (1985-1990)', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45 (2019), 559-574.

[90] 'Winnie Mandela asserts Black liberation is near', *Washington Post*, 14 April 1986.

[91] 'Fall of Winnie Mandela began nearly 2 years ago', *Washington Post*, 18 February 1989.

prepared to mete violence out on one another, a betrayal of the values of the struggle. But to shine a light in a place where fragile truces and barely buried enmities depended upon carefully kept silences was a most dangerous thing to do. On 17 October 1986 Loate was killed on the streets of Orlando West by around twenty men armed with sticks, knives and an axe. She died not far from the safety of her grandmother's home.[92]

The brutal public murder of a well-regarded young woman was deeply shocking, stark illustration of how little past political reputations mattered now. Loate's brother pledged revenge, threatening to open a new line between the youth who had previously been united in their war against the Makabasas, cracks opening everywhere. New suspicions of where people's ultimate loyalties to one another began to rise. One of Loate's killers tried returning to life back behind a school desk. But the safety of that world was gone. Not long after he was shot in the head with a Makaroff submachine gun.[93] And it was amidst this disarray as young friends started turning on each other that Winnie Mandela made her first major intervention on her return home. She invited the warring factions to a meeting in her home, and offered up the backrooms of 8115 Orlando West as a place to stay, a sanctuary from the violence. For those who accepted her offer of care she had a set of special yellow tracksuits made, 'Mandela United F.C.' stitched on their backs in black and green thread, the famous colours of the ANC. If this was to be the start of Winnie Mandela's attempt to build an army amongst the youth, it started as a joke. 'South Africa must be the only country whose liberation could be fought by a football team', seasoned Sowetans laughed.[94]

But whether people were thinking seriously about how to fight back against the security forces, or whether they were thinking of how to defend themselves, what was happening at the Mandela home was being repeated all across Soweto, the search for new allies to fill the void left by the destruction of the old organisations. Indeed, Winnie Mandela would have been left dangerously isolated had she not formed something like the Football Club, her persecution by the police denying her the close connections to neighbours that others fell back on. The process was

92 'Woman activist slashed to death on Soweto street', *Associated Press*, 19 October 1986; 'Ex-student activist killed', *New York Times*, 20 October 1986; 'Youth gang slays black woman who urged non-violent protest', *The Toronto Star*, 20 October 1986.

93 Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 132-33.

94 As quoted in Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 131.

cruelly double-edged, though. Any group that came together in self-defence could not avoid being seen as a threat to the self-defence of others. Soon enough the boys who had taken shelter at the Mandela home started to clash with their neighbours, part of fighting erupting all over Soweto as people attempted to carve out the limits of their new territories. Parents in Orlando West started to report that their children were coming to them, telling them they were being forced to join the Football Club, that if they refused they would be labelled as 'sell-outs'.[95] In one notorious case two young brothers were kidnapped by the Football Club in May 1987 and tortured at the Mandela home. The letter 'M' was cut into a torso, 'Viva ANC' cut into the boys' thighs, their wounds were filled with battery acid. One brother was dunked in a bucket of water with a plastic bag placed over his head. It was a method of torture the youth had learned from the police.[96]

As the nature of Winnie Mandela's Faustian alliance with the youth in Orlando became clearer, some of Winnie's oldest political friends implored her to step back.[97] But without the power of their old organisations behind them, their private appeals carried little weight. In truth, nothing could stop what was unfolding. Everywhere small bands of students were forming, each a law unto themselves. Teachers' authority had evaporated almost entirely in the schools, schools' traditional function grossly distorted. As much as the youth drifted into the schools in the mornings it was not to study but to be with their friends, allies in the fighting. And to keep control of this space, they were prepared to fight. In 1994 the journalist Heidi Holland published *Born in Soweto*. Here she recounted one teacher's story from Phefeni Junior in Orlando West, nor far from the Mandela home.

> A student, known to be a no-hoper in class, came to me while we were marking papers. He apologised for bothering me, saying he was on his way to town and had just popped in to find out how things were going. As he spoke, he produced a lethal-looking hand gun and fiddled with it casually. I got the message. He was telling me that I either made sure he passed or I would suffer the consequences.[98]

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[95] Dudu Chili, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, special hearing on the Mandela United Football Club, Day 7, Second Session, 24 November to 4 December 1997, Day 7, Second Session.

[96] 'Special Investigation into the Mandela United Football Club', in *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. II (Basingstoke: Macmillan Reference, 1998), 560.

[97] Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime*, (London: Abacus, 2003), 504.

[98] Heidi Holland, *Born in Soweto: Inside the Heart of South Africa*, (London: Penguin, 1994), 58.

If not with guns, students had other means. Women teachers were made to stand under cold taps and drenched if they stepped out of line.[99] Teachers found exam scripts with threats written in them, 'FAIL ME AND YOU GET THE TREATMENT'.[100] In the face of the violence many teachers shied from their duties. In late 1986 a group of Sowetan teachers told their employers, 'We cannot risk our lives or those of our families. It is the department's duty to sort those children and not the teachers. We live with these children and cannot take the risk.'[101] Some slept in their cars during school hours, others staying away completely.[102] But other teachers chose to fight back. Long campaigned against, corporal punishment was widely practiced by teachers despite official prohibition.[103] Indeed, Departmental oversight had evaporated almost entirely, school inspectors too frightened to venture onto school grounds.[104] Parents pulled their attentions back too, according to the old rule, 'the less one knows, the better.'[105]

But come the exams, the collapse of education in the schools could not stay hidden. In 1987, 62.2 per cent of the 4,508 students who sat the matriculation exams in Soweto failed. Across the Department of Education and Training there were just 25,000 candidates, only 5 of whom gained an 'A' aggregate. In Soweto only one candidate secured a 'B' aggregate across their subjects.[106] In 1988 there were just 66 senior students at Lamula High in Meadowlands, only 12 of whom graduated.[107] Even then, desperate students tried bending the system to their will. In January

99 'Tragedy of the blackboard jungle', *Sunday Star*, 1 July 1990.

100 'The teachers in fear of their pupils', *Weekly Mail*, 27 March 1986.

101 As quoted in 'It's D-Day for the black matriculants', *Sunday Times*, 19 October 1986.

102 Marks, *Young Warriors*, 94.

103 'Pupils receive 'up to 30 strokes'', *Natal Witness*, 14 May 1989; ''Sexual harassment of women students prevalent', *The Citizen*, 10 June 1989. Corporal punishment was not officially banned in South Africa until 1996. See Robert Morrell, 'Corporal Punishment in South African Schools: A Neglected Explanation for its Existence', *South African Journal of Education*, 21 (2001), 292-299. See also Clive Glaser, 'Nostalgia for a Beating: Discipline, Generational Authority and Corporal Punishment at a Soweto High School, c.1960-2000', *History of Education*, 48 (2019), 395-409.

104 'Need for inspection at Soweto schools', *The Sowetan*, 22 August 1988; 'DET cannot check school gangs', *The Sowetan*, 25 October 1990.

105 Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 50.

106 Ken Hartshorne, 'Morbid Symptoms: African Matric Results, 1987-88', *Indicator SA*, 6 (1989), 80. See also Steve Mokwena, 'Living on the Wrong Side of the Law: Marginalisation, Youth and Violence', in David Everatt and Elinor Sisulu (eds.), *Black Youth in Crisis: Facing the Future* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1992), 33.

107 'Soweto students recall '76 uprising', *New York Times*, 16 June 1989.

1989 crowds of angry students went on a rampage, setting fire to teachers' cars after their efforts to have their exams remarked had gone unmet. At Bopa Senatla a teacher was stabbed.[108]

But for the most part a concern with the exams occupied a future that seemed all too distant. Students who drifted into the schools were back out on the streets by lunchtime, living by their wits in a place where around 70 per cent of those under the age of thirty-five were unemployed.[109] Young students started regularly stealing cars at gunpoint in broad daylight, telling their drivers that their vehicle was being requisitioned for 'the struggle'.[110] As night fell groups of children knocked on people's doors demanding money for funerals, forcing those children who stayed inside to join their ranks. Households which heard the knocks and tried to hide their children knew they risked being labelled 'sell-outs', their homes liable to be set on fire. Households which failed to keep their children inside knew they risked losing them forever.[111] Too often the bonds of the gangs proved stronger than the bonds of family.

In its small corner of this fractured world, the Mandela house assumed a frightening aspect. 'Winnie's boys', as they came to be called, followed the woman they called Mommy, her own armed guard. Everywhere guns were openly flaunted on the streets, powerful automatic weapons that flooded the townships from Mozambique.[112] As to what the bands of youth were responsible for behind doors, rumours swirled. It was said that each morning at Mandela home the blood of the latest victims was scrubbed from the walls, the dead dumped on the open veld.[113] In the absence of community meetings rumour was rife, the paranoid talk fuelling the violence. In early 1988 it was said that undertakers were driving around in a car with the letter H painted on its side, hunting for children. Not long after five Soweto undertakers were murdered in their homes.[114] What foundation these rumours possessed is in most cases now impossible to say. What they do help to reveal is how dangerous the streets had become for young people to navigate.

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108 'Confrontation looms on refusal to let failures return', *City Press*, 22 January 1989.

109 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 137.

110 'Attack them', *The Sowetan*, 29 April 1986.

111 Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 10-11.

112 Phyllis Johnson and David Martin, 'Mozambique: Victims of Apartheid', in Phyllis Johnson and David Martin (eds.), *Frontline Southern Africa: Destructive Engagement* (New York, N.Y.: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1988), 1-57.

113 Emma Gilbey, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (London: Vintage, 1994), 155.

114 'Shock and anger', *The Sowetan*, 7 March 1988.

Little was quite as it seemed. It was one of the most pernicious consequences of the state of emergency that the police drove the paranoia. Mass detentions and torture of detainees created a climate thick with suspicion, as well as opening up opportunities for those brave enough to try and play both sides. Indeed, for all the justifying talk of rooting out the informers, everyone knew how many people talked to the police, including many of those who had taken residence in the Mandela home, among them the man Winnie Mandela appointed as her lieutenant, Jerry Richardson, a local school drop-out.[115] Helping describe how easily people could fall into the police's arms, one student in Diepkloof said: 'In 1987 and 1988, the army and the police were coming in our schools. They were threatening and harassing the children, putting them in the cars and taking them to Protea interrogation room. They used to make students to point out other comrades or say they will go to jail.'[116] False confessions abounded. Emmanuel Hlatswayo was a student at Dr B. W. Vilakazi High in Emdeni. He was asleep one night when a Hippo pulled up outside his home, tipped off that Hlatswayo had stolen a handgun. They made no attempt to investigate. Hlatswayo was brutally beaten before his body was carried into the Hippo and driven to the edge of Meadowlands where he was left for dead.[117] With free licence the police acted little differently to the gangs, some units acquiring their own street names, 'Iron Fist' or 'A-Team'.[118] Black recruits in the police, some ex-comrades seeking greater security, started to live behind barbed-wire close to the police stations.[119] Rarely could they feel safe. Relatives of policemen who worked as teachers were told to stop coming into school. Throughout these years there were regular reports of hand-grenades being hurled into the homes of local black policemen.[120]

Eventually it was this world that destroyed the Mandela home. A mile from the house on Vilakazi Street was Daliwonga Secondary, a school whose students had become entangled in a rivalry with Mandela's boys ever since the Football Club forced the students to abandon a football match at gunpoint, claiming the field as theirs.[121] The rivalry had escalated terribly since. Students

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115 Jerry Richardson (b.May 1949-d.April 2009) born in Soweto. His father died when he was six and left school at twelve. In 1990 he was convicted of the murder of Seipei. He was given a death sentence which was later commuted. He died in prison.

116 As quoted in Marks, *Young Warriors*, 29.

117 'Std 8 pupil (20) says police left him for dead in field', *The Star*, 6 July 1989.

118 Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 154.

119 John D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 304-5.

120 'Soweto Journal; To be Black and a police officer: Perils and pride', *New York Times*, 1 January 1990.

121 Gilbey, *The Lady*, 173.

from Daliwonga captured and raped a girl who hung around the Football Club, part of the frightening escalation in the use of sexual violence during these years, gang-rape a marker of each gang's relative powers over each other, a means of binding groups of young boys and men together.[122] In revenge members of the Football Club kidnapped the rapists from Daliwonga, badly beating them and raping a student from Daliwonga in turn. And it was in revenge for that that on the morning of Thursday 28 July 1988 a large crowd of students was seen running towards the Mandela home, a highly unusual sight now where any sort of mass gathering had become a thing of the past. When no word came out of the house, the students from Daliwonga climbed the walls and torched the house.[123] It was telling of how far Winnie Mandela's reputation had fallen amongst her neighbours that amongst the crowd which watched the house burn no one stepped forward to help. As one resident looked back, 'Let her also feel what less powerful people felt when their homes were destroyed. She is the one after all who spoke of the matches'.[124]

The cindered remains of the Mandela family home might have been the moment when the outside world paused to consider what South Africa's struggle for freedom had become. It was not that people could claim they did not know it had happened. The attack was reported in the international press, including page six of the *New York Times*. But news of the Mandelas was dominated by the success of the Free Mandela concert held at Wembley Stadium a few weeks earlier, watched by an estimated worldwide audience of 600 million people.[125] For all those who saw the fight against apartheid as the great moral struggle of their times there was simply no space to understand the internecine world of warring schoolchildren, trapped fighting each other to save their lives. So much easier to think that the security forces must have had a hidden hand in things.[126] As to what a burning home meant inside Soweto, the streets were filled with the cindered remains of old matchbox houses and no end to the violence. The Football Club would show that only the

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[122] See Emily Bridger, 'Apartheid's 'Rape Crisis': Understanding and Addressing Sexual Violence in South Africa, 1970s-1990s', *Women's History Review* (2023), 1-20. See also Redi Tlhabi, *Endings & Beginnings: A Story of Healing* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013). For more on gang-rape, or jackrolling as it was called, see Binaifer Nowrojee, and Bronwen Manby, *Violence against Women in South Africa: The State Response* (New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch, 1995).

[123] 'Mandela home is gutted by fire', *New York Times*, 29 July 1988.

[124] As quoted in Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 96

[125] Robin Denselow, *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), 276-282.

[126] On the British Anti-Apartheid Movement's much sanitised depiction of what was happening to the youth in the townships see Emily Bridger, 'Functions and Failures of Transnational Activism: Discourses of Children's Resistance and Repression in Global Anti-Apartheid Networks', *Journal of World History*, 26 (2015), 865-887.

most extraordinary events were able to puncture the silence that had fallen over the struggle. And even then people only heard what they wanted, a story that in all its complexity was reduced to the actions or otherwise of one famous woman.

In December 1987 a young white Methodist minister named Paul Verryn was posted by his church to Orlando.[127] An outsider, Verryn arrived ignorant of all the unwritten rules and rivalries that made people know when to look the other way, what not to say. Verryn announced his arrival by throwing open the doors of his two-roomed manse, inviting anyone to take refuge in his home so long as they renounced violence. Perhaps as many as 20 people shared the tiny house at one point, Verryn even giving up space in his own bed to look after as many people as possible. It was as generous as it was terribly naïve. Just as Masabatha Loate had found in 1986, Verryn's insistence that people raise themselves above the violence stirred trouble, raising the threat of accountability. Rumours soon started to go around that Verryn sodomised the young boys in his home. And it was these allegations that Winnie Mandela later used as her justification for sending Jerry Richardson to the manse on 29 December 1988.[128] Richardson returned with three young men, each accused of allowing Verryn to have sex with them, Kenneth Kgase, twenty-nine years old, Pelo Mekgwe, nineteen years old, and Thabiso Mono, eighteen years old. Before leaving the Football Club took James 'Stompie' Seipei too, the Little General from Tumahole finding his way in Soweto, his time in detention casting suspicion that he was an informer.[129]

Back at the Mandela home the four were badly beaten, the boys in the Football Club singing the freedom songs to cover the sounds. Eventually Kgase, Mekgwe and Mono yielded under the blows, falsely confessing to what Winnie Mandela demanded from them.[130] Left to recover from their grievous wounds they were slowly incorporated into the workings of the house, given their own set of tracksuits and a place in the Club's hierarchy. But Seipei refused to admit the charge against him. As much of an archetype of a new generation of brutalised youth as might

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[127] Paul Verryn (b.26 February 1952-) was born in Pretoria and educated at St Stithian's College before syuding theology at Rhodes University. Ordained in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in 1978, he became increasingly involved in anti-apartheid politics and liberation theology. In 1997 he was made Bishop of the Central District of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

[128] See Rachel Holmes, 'Queer Comrades: Winnie Mandela and the Moffies', *Social Text*, 52 (1997), 161-189. An investigation by the Methodist Church found no basis for these rumours. See Storey, *I Beg To Differ*, 353.

[129] Sisonke Msimang, *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela: A Biography of Survival* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2018), 147.

[130] Storey, *I Beg to Differ*, 361-3.

be imagined, the four-and-a-half-feet tall boy stubbornly stood his ground. The beatings continued until New Year's Day 1989 when Richardson finally put an end to things. Seipei's almost lifeless body was taken to a stretch of land near New Canada where Richardson cut his throat. Seipei's body was abandoned not far from the spot where Winnie Mandela joined the crowds that marched on Johannesburg on 4 August 1976.[131]

It was the type of attack that had become frighteningly normal in Soweto, and might have passed without little more than a ripple, but for one crucial difference. However far removed, the Football Club had attacked an institution, the type of which had been almost completely swept away in Soweto. On the night of 7 January 1989, Kgase jumped his post on guard duty outside the Mandela home and fled to Johannesburg, knocking on the door of the Central Methodist Church. Now an institution safely away from the threat of violence in Soweto started asking difficult questions, demanding the whereabouts and wellbeing of the missing Seipei. A very different impression of what Winnie Mandela might be doing started to emerge, not young boys taken into her care, but boys being held against their will. Up until now Winnie Mandela's fame had helped to protect her. Now the possible story of a revered revolutionary turned into a murderer ignited an unprecedented media storm. The putative 'mother of the nation' started to play a very different role in people's imaginations, a Lady Macbeth figure, the details of the unfolding story striking at the special horror societies reserve for the women who kill the children in their care.[132] And with the outside world finally taking an interest, people in Soweto felt confident that they could speak out without consequence. On 16 January, a community meeting was held in Dobsonville, the most worked-up agitating that they deal with Winnie Mandela that night.[133]

In this storm the decisive intervention was made by Murphy Morobe. Back in 1987 the police finally caught Morobe, arresting him in Port Elizabeth, after Morobe arrived in the city desperately attempting to revive organised politics.[134] A year later he managed to escape, seeking

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131 Jerry Richardson, testimony to Amnesty Hearing, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 29 November 1999. This account of the Mandela United F.C. is based upon Jonny Steinberg's *Portrait of a Marriage* (New York, N.Y.: Knopf, 2022) and Emma Gilbey's *The Lady*.

132 See Emily Bridger, 'From 'Mother of the Nation' to 'Lady Macbeth': Winnie Mandela and Perceptions of Female Violence in South Africa, 1985-91', *Gender & History*, 27 (2015), 446-464. See also Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge, 1963), 147-208.

133 'Soweto anger at Winnie Team', *Weekly* Mail, 27 January 1989.

134 '2 anti-apartheid leaders are arrested', *New York Times*, 23 July 1987.

refuge in the American consulate in downtown Johannesburg, attracting much media attention.[135] But by the time Kgase knocked on the door of the Central Methodist Church, Morobe was back out on the streets, the National Party confident that without the powers of the UDF Morobe posed more of a threat holed up inside the consulate as a symbol of resistance than amongst the masses. It was a brutal illustration of how devastating the second state of emergency had been. By 1989 what was left of the mass movement that once rallied under the UDF could best be described as a spirit of resistance, a movement without membership, meetings, or a sense of strategic direction. People called what was left the Mass Democratic Movement. And it was on behalf of that movement, speaking as much for a memory of something as anything else, that Morobe addressed a specially arranged press conference in the Central Methodist Mission on 16 February, two days after Seipei's body was finally identified in a morgue. Flanked by three old comrades,[136] Morobe read a carefully worded statement:

> We have now reached the state where we have no option but to speak publicly on what is a very sensitive and painful matter…. We are of the view that Mrs Mandela has abused the trust and confidence which she has enjoyed over the years. She has not been a member of any of the democratic structures of the UDF and COSATU, and she has often acted without consulting the democratic movement…. The Democratic Movement has uncompromisingly fought against violations of human rights from whatever quarters. We are not prepared to remain silent where those who are violating human rights claim to be doing so in the name of the struggle against apartheid.[137]

When Morobe finished, a journalist asked what this meant for Nelson Mandela. 'Comrade Nelson, in consultation with all the parties, will have to make a decision', Morobe replied.[138] Crucially for Winnie Mandela's legacy, the ANC's leadership in Lusaka decided not to excise her from their fold, issuing their own statement days later which pointed the finger at the security services.[139] The storm surrounding Seipei's death was the hardest test of the ANC's resolve not to condemn the

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135 '3 Pretoria foes take refuge at U.S. site in Johannesburg', *New York Times*, 14 September 1988.

136 The aforementioned Azhar Cachalia and Archie Gumede, as well as Elijah Barayi, a founding member of the National Union of Mineworkers and president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

137 Statement by Mass Democratic Movement on Winnie Mandela, 16 February 1989, available at https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files2/sta19890216.043.027.pdf, retrieved 24 October 2023.

138 As quoted in 'Black groups ostracize Mrs. Mandela', *Washington Post*, 17 February 1989.

139 'Winnie Mandela agrees to shed guards', *New York Times*, 19 February 1989.

violence its propaganda machine had once worked tirelessly to promote, but which most now recognised would not end in the collapse of the government. The refusal to condemn was the price the ANC paid to maintain its credibility amongst the masses, a tacit acknowledgement of what the party had once asked of people, and what they were now being forced to live through.

For everyone else, Winnie Mandela's alliance with the youth of Soweto has split opinion ever since. To many she has always remained the great revolutionary icon of her times, her uncompromising vision of total victory betrayed by those in her own party who spoke the language of revolution publicly while seeking a negotiated end privately. To others Winnie Mandela's downfall was the great lesson in how South Africa's revolution betrayed itself.[140] The debate is well-worn and familiar. It is also a distraction. Lost in the focus on one woman's life is the bigger truth that there was little that marked Winnie Mandela out as exceptional by the late 1980s, whether as a hero or a villain. Attempts to condemn or condone her by defining the line separating criminal from political violence are hopeless. And the effort to try hides an inconvenient truth. In the end it was only when Winnie Mandela's behaviour started to be talked about outside Soweto that the murderous history of the Football Club was forced to end, the youth who gathered under her roof unable to withstand the scrutiny and threat of accountability, now cut adrift from their matriarch, left to find new allies in the fighting. That level of attention was not afforded to anyone else. And for everyone else who slipped from view the calculation was simple. To survive the Hobbesian world created by Botha's second state of emergency people had to join groups prepared to mete out extreme violence on one another. Winnie Mandela was just one among countless men and women, young and old, who paid that price, their names and stories largely lost to history now. But if most of the history of Soweto's *udlame* appears only in tiny shards, a step back shows the scale of devastation clearly enough. By mid-1988 more than half of Soweto's high schools stood empty. There were just five schools with attendances over 80 per cent.[141] And without the care these schools once received from their communities, the physical condition of these schools was appalling. Take this description of Thulare High School in White City for example:

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[140] For two recent very different sides in that debate see Msimang, *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela* and Fred Bridgland, *Truth, Lies and Alibis: A Winnie Mandela Story* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2018). On how that divide first emerged in the 1990s see Shireen Hassim, 'Not Just Nelson's Wife: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Violence and Radicalism in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44 (2018), 895-912.
[141] Hartshorne, 'Morbid Symptoms', 83.

> Broken desks lie all over the place. An attempt is made to sweep the floors, but the whole place is grey from lack of polish. The walls compete for inscriptions of rival political groups. The ceiling is marked by ball prints creating a muddy tapestry of what once was a white ceiling. The toilets are no longer used because they are not cleaned.[142]

A journalist who visited Morris Isaacson in 1992 found a shell of a school. Almost everything that had not been fixed with cement was missing. Window frames had been taken out and doors lifted from their hinges, even the ceiling panels were missing.[143] All across Soweto the iron sheets from the schools' roofs had been stripped to build the thousands of shacks now sprouting up on any spot of vacant ground, many on the schools' own grounds.[144] Back in 1981 Tladi Technical High had the distinction of being the first technical comprehensive to open in South Africa, a modern two-storey building built with R340,000 of funding from South African Breweries.[145] Now passers-by stepped through the gaping holes in the classroom's walls to empty their bowels.[146]

Amidst the ruins some held onto education's promise that a better future might be possible. In abandoned schools sometimes a group of concerned parents was able to form something like a parent-teacher association, keeping a close eye on what was happening amongst the youth.[147] In Jabulani, a community group took over the running of Pace College after the American Chamber of Commerce withdrew its support in November 1986, part of the flight of private and public funding from the township's schools in the late 1980s.[148] The government had once hoped that a massive expansion of secondary education might provide for a new stability. Now they recognised the futility of that hope. Capital expenditure on primary and secondary education fell from R192 in 1988 to R170 million in 1989, the day-to-day business of government

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142 Mathiane, *Beyond the Headlines*, 56.

143 'Emergency: A reason for hope at 'school of despair'', *South*, 21 February 1991. Newspaper reports from this time were full of descriptions of the state of disrepair Soweto's schools had fallen into. A report of Tladi Technical High School described 'A few miserable looking chairs, battered tables and desks are still its only furniture. There are gaping holes still in the window panes'. See 'Det playing trivial pursuit with pupils', *The Sowetan*, 2 April 1992.

144 'Anger over shacks in schoolyards', *The Sowetan*, 27 April 1990. By 1989, one estimate, with suspicious accuracy, stated that there were 42,374 shacks in Soweto. See Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 134.

145 'SAB to fund Tladi school', *The Star*, 18 April 1981.

146 'Tladi tech – a symbol of the decay in education', *The Sowetan*, 6 February 1992.

147 'Shining star in the midst', *The Star*, 13 October 1992.

148 See 'Future of Pace College hangs in the balance', *The Star*, 9 October 1986; 'Bad basics threaten sponsored education', *Business Day*, 24 November 1986; 'Pace all set for new year', *The Star*, 13 January 1987; 'No funds, but Pace will reopen today', *The Star*, 14 January 1987; 'Blacks take control of elite Soweto college', *Sunday Times*, 1 February 1987; 'Pace College now a community school, *The Star*, 13 August 1987.

increasingly run through the National Management Security System.[149] Remarkably, against all the odds, something resembling a normal school day was able to be rebuilt at Pace, described by one local as 'an island in this whole madness of Soweto'.[150] But most with hopes for their children's education were searching beyond Soweto, in Lenasia's Indian-segregated schools to the south,[151] at rural boarding schools run by principals wary of admitting anyone from the troubled townships,[152] or at a growing number of so-called 'street colleges' in downtown Johannesburg, many simple rackets, preying on parents' desperation to get their children out of Soweto.[153] A tiny number won bursaries to Johannesburg's elite private schools, picked up from their homes in private minivans and driven to Johannesburg's northern suburbs. But whether pushed out onto the streets or in classrooms faraway, the end result was clear: public education in Soweto had been destroyed. Reflecting on what had become of the schools in June 1989, Thamsanqa Kambule, the old principal of Orlando High said, 'The whole thing has broken down'.[154] His comment might well have been about the country. Corruption was endemic in government,[155] parts of the security

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149 'Vast budget cutbacks – a schoolyard explosion looms', *Weekly Mail*, 28 April 1989.

150 Joe Thloloe, 'The Child Masters', in Thami Mazwai, Arthur Konigkramer, Connie Molusi, Kaizer Nyatsumba, Dawn Lindberg, Lionel Abrahams, Nomavenda Mathiane, Joe Thloloe, and John Kane-Berman (eds.), *Mau-Mauing the Media: New Censorship for the New South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1991), 53.

151 At the start of 1987 300 students in Soweto applied for school in Lenasia, where schooling had largely carried on as normal. The Minister of Indian Education in the House of Delegates, however, blocked the students' admission, provoking enormous outrage in the Transvaal Indian Congress. In March 1987, the Department announced that Topaz High School in Lenasia would now admit four African children. It was a paltry concession, but as a point of principle its breach was a significant sign in the breakdown of the apartheid state. By 1991, it was estimated that 3,000 black children were being educated in Lenasia. See Anthony Lemon, 'Desegregation and Privatisation in White South African Schools: 1990-1992', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 12 (1994), 202.

152 Growing up in Katlehong, the future historian Jacob Dlamini was amongst those sent to a rural boarding school, in KaNgwane. He remembers the principal viewing the new arrivals as carrying 'the virus of revolution', soon sent back to the townships. See Jacob Dlamini, 'A Change of Address', in Megan Jones and Jacob Dlamini (eds.), *Categories of Persons: Rethinking Ourselves and Others* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2013), 31.

153 One of the first street colleges was the 'Freedom School', established in 1986 in a disused warehouse in Roodeport. By the end of 1987, the regional director of the Johannesburg Department of Education and Training, said that his department knew of at least ten schools operating illegally, although people claimed there were was many as fifty, many with over a thousand students. See 'For these kids, freedom means the right to learn', *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1986; 'DET to get tough', *The Sowetan*, 7 December 1987; ''Street colleges' often rip off young blacks', *the Star*, 14 March 1990; ''Street college' closed down', *The Star*, 14 March 1990; 'Gambling with street colleges', *The Star*, 31 March 1990.

154 As quoted in 'Soweto students recall '76 uprising', *New York Times*, 16 June 1989.

155 Following a regular stream of stories in the press, in 1988 P. W. Botha appointed a state commission headed by Justice Leonara van den Heeven to investigate corruption in the Department of Education and Training. The commission found evidence of widespread corruption. See Constanze Bauer, 'Administrative Corruption in South Africa', *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, 24 (1999), 76-97. For just some of the reports regarding corruption in the Department of Education and Training, see 'The cats who got the cream', *Financial Mail*, 10 June 1988; 'Comrades in the veld', *Financial Mail*, 10 June 1988; 'More cream for more cats',

forces were functioning effectively as death squads.[156] The prisons were struggling to cope. Hundreds of millions of dollars was owed to the government after people in the townships stopped paying their rents and service charges.[157] In Soweto piles of uncollected rubbish lined the streets, two metres high in places.[158] Botha's decision to rule South Africa with violence might have succeeded in destroying political opposition, but with it, Botha had destroyed any vestige of social order. Great swathes of the country were now ungovernable.

III

On 18 January 1989 Botha was admitted to hospital after suffering a stroke, marking the start of a succession race that eventually saw F. W. de Klerk appointed acting state president on 15 August and full president on 20 September. There was little at first to suggest that a new president would change the status quo. The new president was a conservative who shared many similarities in outlook with his predecessor. Like Botha, de Klerk was fundamentally a party loyalist. His father had been a cabinet minister and he counted J. G. Strijdom as an uncle. And like Botha de Klerk saw the future in terms of the creation of a consociational order full of checks and balances and clever constitutional designs, a highly devolved federalised system in which minority right would be staunchly protected and executive power severely restricted. It was a type of political system in which the democratic powers of the majority would be made meaningless.[159] And with political opposition all but destroyed inside South Africa there was little reason to think that change in this direction would happen on anything but the National Party's terms. In the corridors of power people talked about a new consociational order taking decades to complete.

But there was one key difference between the two men. Before entering politics de Klerk had studied law at Potchefstroom University, an experience that instilled in him a deep

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Financial Mail, 17 June 1988; 'Govt man's son got contracts 'when firm was failing'', *The Citizen*, 23 February 1989; 'How DET fought the 'school war'', *Business Day*, 16 February 1989; 'My son lied to me, says DET man', *The Star*, 22 June 1989; 'My son lied to me, says DET man', *The Star*, 22 June 1989; 'Govt accepts commission's report', *The Star*, 7 December 1989; 'Forgery fraud in the DET', *The Sowetan*, 7 December 1989.

156 See Nicky Rousseau, 'Counter-Revolutionary Warfare: The Soweto Intelligence Unit and Southern Itineraries', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40 (2014), 1343-1361.

157 'Blacks pressing a rent boycott in South Africa', *New York Times*, 22 February 1988.

158 David Bristow and Stan Motjuwadi, *Soweto: Portrait of a City* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 1990), 38.

159 For a fuller description of what de Klerk had in mind, see Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution* (Johannesburg: Struik, 1994), 125-7.

commitment to the rule of law. While Botha and the securocrats in the State Security Council had become seduced by the logics of counterinsurgency, the deliberate blurring of civic and military governance, de Klerk harboured deep worries about what consequences might follow if these lines were to be blurred much longer. Should the massive violence unleashed in the townships be left unchecked too long, de Klerk's fear was that the government's violent methods would end up corrupting the sanctity of white South Africa itself.[160] Not long after becoming president de Klerk provided extraordinary insight into his thinking in a speech at the Police College in Pretoria. Before a room of men handed the task of fighting Botha's war, de Klerk said:

> A mighty battle is unfolding in which the country could be propelled in two quite different directions: it could become either a racist struggle, in which black and white people get locked in a battle determined in a bloody manner, or it will be a battle over civilised values and norms…. A battle between the forces of destruction and the forces of peace…. The time has come for a normal process of open politics. This entails removing from the police the burden of preventing people from assembling and gathering support for their views.[161]

De Klerk's place in world history rested upon his ability to see what his predecessor was never able to see: that in the end it was not revolution which threatened white South Africans, but anarchy. It was not the revolutionary march of the people that made de Klerk do what he did next, but his fear of anomie.

In his mission to restore peace, de Klerk sought to move quickly and decisively. On 13 September 1989 a peace march was planned in Cape Town, an early test of the new president's resolve to uphold the state of emergency's strict regulations. De Klerk ordered the police to stand down, allowing around 20,000 people to fill the streets.[162] With this first crack in the three-year state of emergency, a wave of peace marches followed across the country. Two days later 20,000 people marched in Johannesburg.[163] Eighty thousand marched in Uitenhage, 50,000 in Port Elizabeth, 40,000 in East London, and 20,000 in Durban.[164] In October the National Party announced the release of eight of the most high-profile political prisoners in the country, including

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160 Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Charlottesville, V.A.: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 290-291.

161 As quoted in Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 304

162 'Thousands of marchers conduct multiracial protest in Cape Town', *New York Times*, 14 September 1989.

163 '20,000 apartheid foes allowed to march through Johannesburg', *New York Times*, 16 September 1989.

164 Seekings, *UDF*, 254.

five of the Rivonia defendants who had stood trial alongside Nelson Mandela.[165] Then in November de Klerk set about dismantling the National Security Management System, seeking to re-establish the cabinet's authority back at the heart of government.

Not even these actions prepared people for what de Klerk did next. On 2 February 1990 de Klerk addressed the opening of parliament in Cape Town. Preparation was a closely guarded secret. A draft was prepared by a small group of trusted advisors, de Klerk only telling his full cabinet what he planned to say two days before.[166] Reading from the rostrum, its content was dazzling, Andries Treurnicht's attempt to keep a straight face before the cameras betrayed by a twitch around his mouth and eyes.[167] Outside parliament crowds celebrated in the streets. Outlawed since 1960, the exiled ANC, SACP and Pan-Africanist Congress were to be unbanned, political prisoners released, and the state of emergency's restrictions effectively banning all forms of organisational life in the townships lifted. The full lifting of the state of emergency would wait but de Klerk made a commitment to 'terminate the state of emergency as soon as circumstances justify it'. 'The season of violence is over', he declared, words printed on the frontpage of *The Star* and fixed on road-signs across the country.[168] With that speech de Klerk finally led the National Party across the Rubicon. But like any number of reformers, de Klerk would soon find out that a process he started was beyond his control.[169] Botha at least had known that.

In the townships de Klerk's decision to give some space back to the people meant that for the first time since 1986 there was room to come together and talk about their problems. And what became clear in these first meetings amongst those able to take a step back from the bloodshed was how far revolution was from people's minds. How urgent instead their demands for peace. In December 1989, Zeph Mothopeng, the old Pan-Africanist Congress leader who shared his passion for choral singing with the students at Orlando High, said: 'There is now only one thing to do, and that is to organise our community to bring this quagmire to an immediate end. But as this cannot be done overnight, we are just going to have to bring teachers, students

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165 The others were Ahmed Kathrada, Jeff Masemola, Raymond Mhlaba, Wilton Mkwayi, Andrew Mlangeni, Elias Motsoaledi, and Oscar Mpetha.

166 F. W. de Klerk, *The Last Trek – A New Beginning: The Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 163.

167 Willem de Klerk, *F. W. de Klerk: The Man in His Time* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1991), 31.

168 As quoted in 'South Africa's new era; In the streets, praise and joy, and also more blood', *New York Times*, 3 February 1990.

169 The great lesson at the time was being provided in the Soviet Union. See Vladislav Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2021).

and parents together to end the rot at each institution. Students must return to their classrooms.'[170] The call for a return to school was repeated time and time again. In January 1990 the old SASO activist Muntu Myeza said, 'Success means staying at school and studying.'[171]

In Soweto hopes of putting the past behind them came together on Sunday 7 January 1990 at a meeting in the Funda Adult Education Centre, attended by more than 1,500 people. The six-hour meeting was an honest appraisal of the crisis in the schools.[172] One parent told the meeting how, 'The whole fibre of the teacher's authority in the classroom has been eroded. Teachers are carrying out their duty in a situation where there is complete lawlessness and anarchy'.[173] No one was allowed to escape blame. Parents were blamed for not disciplining their children enough, and teachers blamed for shying from their own responsibilities. Hollow talk of revolution was dismissed out of hand. To rounds of applause, one woman told the meeting, 'In as much as learning is a right, students must be reminded that rights go with responsibility. Those who go to school, but don't learn, must know that they are counter-revolutionaries'.[174]

But the clock could not be turned back. Though legally allowed, meetings like these were few and far between, unable to draw the crowds they once had. What emerged in 1990 after four years of state of emergency was a far shallower civic culture than the mid-1980s, those organisations that did rebuild fixing their priority on protecting their members' narrow interests in a dangerous world. Appeals to the children to return to their desks fell on deaf ears, children who now seemed to stand outside all authority structures completely. And to make the work of these meetings much harder, many in the ANC's leadership were wary of bringing the violence to an end too soon. Some in the ANC's senior ranks still saw the possibility of a revolution being forged out of the anarchy, while others, more cynically, were wary of giving the government space to breathe.[175] On the eve of the negotiations, the ANC-in-exile was a weak and divided party, hostage

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[170] As quoted in 'Black education down but not out', *Sunday Times*, 31 December 1989.

[171] As quoted in 'Lost generation', *Financial Mail*, 5 January 1990.

[172] 'Classroom shortage as Black schools open', *The Citizen*, 11 January 1990.

[173] As quoted in 'Education department blamed, but teachers, parents and pupils also come under fire as Soweto counts high number of failures', *The Indicator*, 12-25 January 1990.

[174] As quoted in 'Schools: Now for solutions', *The Sowetan*, 10 January 1990.

[175] In April 1989, the South African Communist Party met in Cuba where a new policy document was agreed: 'The prospects of achieving a revolutionary break-through in South Africa are greater today than ever before in our history… The crisis of racial tyranny cannot be resolved, except by the revolutionary transformation of our country'. See 'The Path to Power: Programme of the South African Communist Party Adopted at the 7th Congress', Havana April 1989 (abridged), in Gail M. Gerhart and Clive Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge: A*

to events it had almost no control over, the civic movement that once rallied under the UDF's flag all but destroyed.[176] Indeed, it was a fundamental part of de Klerk's thinking that by acting so boldly he might be able to drive a wedge through the ANC's coalition of revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries, young and old, Africanists and non-racialists, creditably pitching the National Party as the party of law and order. And as he looked towards the start of the negotiations, he thought that time was on his side. Dragged long into the future the course of the negotiations would force the ANC to answer the questions it had been able to shy from in exile. No longer could the ANC represent different things to different people. During the coming years de Klerk would repeatedly say that it was the ANC that bore responsibility for destroying education in South Africa, and the National Party that had ended apartheid.[177]

The great challenge of holding the ANC together fell on Nelson Mandela, the man who nine days after de Klerk's speech in parliament walked free from the gates of Victor Verster prison in Cape Town, hand-in-hand with his wife, a show of unity before the world that betrayed the deep political and personal differences between them. The next day Nelson Mandela flew to Johannesburg, hundreds of thousands spilling out onto the streets of Soweto in celebration that the cycle of violence might have been broken. It is extraordinary to consider what all those who danced late into the night had experienced since Mandela was imprisoned in 1962, back in the days when principals chased gangs from the gates and the township's students fiercely competed in choral competitions, sporting contests and success in the end-of-year exams. The next day, 13 February, almost 160,000 people filled Soweto's Soccer City to hear Mandela's homecoming speech. Stood amongst the crowd crying when Mandela's helicopter landed was Sylvia Dlomo, her son's short life tragic witness to how distant the world Mandela had left behind in 1962 now was. In 1986, Sicelo Dlomo had been a student at Pace College, caught up in SOSCO's war against the Makabasas and AZASM activists. At the start of the second state of emergency, he was amongst the many youth activists swiftly arrested in the first wave, detained for five months and tortured, his time in detention leaving a cloud of suspicion over his head. In early 1988, Sicelo was found

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Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, Vol. VI*, Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990* (Bloomington, I.N.D.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 679-683.

176 On the state of the civics after 1990 see Jeremy Seekings, 'After Apartheid: Civic Organizations in the 'New' South Africa', in Glenn Adler and Jonny Steinberg (eds.), *From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 205-224.

177 David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009), 542.

shot dead in long grass on the outskirts of Soweto. Sylvia's suspicions turned towards the police, the Mandela United Football Club, and the old AZASM activists who had not forgotten their grudges. Only years later would Sylvia learn anything like the full story—Sicelo had likely been killed by two of his close school friends, under the orders of John Dube, a former member of Umkhonto we Sizwe turned *askari*, based at Vlakplaas farm, the notorious headquarters of a police death squad run by Eugene de Kock[178] near Pretoria.[179] The stadium was filled with stories of loss and unanswered questions like these. Unlike his wife's politics, forged in the heat of the struggle, Nelson Mandela believed that nothing good could come from violence like this. The violence threatened to destroy the meaning of liberation before it even arrived. Now back home, he faced the task of how to bring it to an end. 'Today, my return to Soweto fills my heart with joy', Mandela told the crowd. 'At the same time I also return with a deep sense of sadness….

> As proud as I am to be part of the Soweto community, I have been greatly disturbed by the statistics of crime, what I have read in the newspapers. Although I understand the deprivations our people suffer, I must make it clear that the level of crime in our township is unhealthy and must be eliminated as a matter of urgency….

Then he turned to the schools:

> The crisis in education that exists in South Africa demands special attention… I want to add my voice therefore to the call made at the beginning of the year: that all students must return to school and learn…. We must continue our struggle for people's education within the school system and utilize its resources to achieve our goals. I call on the Government to build more schools, to train and employ more teachers, and to abandon its policies of forcing our children out of the school system by use of various measures.[180]

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[178] Eugene de Kock (b.29 January 1949-) joined the SAP in 1968 and was not long after posted to Rhodesia in a counterinsurgency operation. He helped found Koevot in 1979, a counterinsurgency branch of the South West African Police. In 1983 he was transferred to C10, headquartered at Vlakplaas. In 1985 he became commander of C10. After the end of apartheid de Kock applied for amnesty at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, many of his crimes were not pardoned and in 1996 he was sentenced to two life-terms plus 212 years in prison. He was granted parole in 2015. On Eugene de Kock see Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: Forgiving Apartheid's Chief Killer* (London: Portobello, 2006). See also Eugene de Kock, *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Johannesburg: Contra, 1998).

[179] Piers Pigou, 'The Murder of Siceolo Dlomo', in Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson (eds.), *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2002), 97-116. For more on the *askaris*, see Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015).

[180] 'South Africa's new era: Excerpts from the speech by Mandela in Soweto', *New York Times*, 14 February 1990.

In his memoir Mandela remembered the essential message of his speech that day: 'Freedom without civility, freedom without the ability to live in peace, was not true freedom at all'.[181] It was a message he repeated many times during the first weeks of his release. Addressing a crowd of 80,000 people at the University of the North, Mandela said, 'Education is a major factor in the liberation struggle – without education you can forget about liberation'.[182] On a trip to Natal in February, he told a crowd of his supporters, 'Take your guns, your knives and your pangas, and throw them into the sea!'[183]

But words had become very cheap in South Africa. For all the optimism that followed de Klerk's speech, what the first months of 1990 revealed was how detached the talk of politicians was from the concerns of ordinary people in the townships. In Soweto and Alexandra thousands of teachers followed Mandela's call for a return to school at Soccer City by embarking on a four-week long strike, demanding an 80 per cent pay increase. At what might have been a crucial moment, 63 schools were forced to close.[184] The old alliance of pupils, parents and teachers that the NECC had rallied under the idea of People's Power in 1986 was gone. In October 1990 a new trade union was formed, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, its membership of 150,000 regularly going on strike in the years ahead, fighting any attempt by Department officials to exercise oversight.[185] And as the teachers quickly regrouped to protect themselves, the violence showed no signs of abating. Indeed, it was escalating. In August 1990 the first major explosion of the kind of violence that had been tearing Natal apart since 1987 reached the townships around Johannesburg, after Buthelezi began turning his Inkatha movement into a national political party,

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181 Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London: Abacus, 1995), 681.

182 As quoted in ''No education – no liberation'', *The Star*, 26 March 1990.

183 As quoted in 'Mandela urges blacks of Natal to end deadly rivalry', *New York Times*, 26 February 1990.

184 'Govt concerned as pupils continue school boycotts', *Business Day*, 9 March 1990; 'A chance to break the deadlock', *The Star*, 30 March 1990; 'Teachers and pupils flock back', *The Sowetan*, 19 April 1990; 'Countdown for matrics: Only 54 days before exams', *The Sowetan*, 30 August 1990.

185 On the founding of SADTU see Ian Moll, 'The South African Democratic Teachers' Union and the Politics of Teacher Unity in South Africa, 1985-1990' in Elaine Unterhalter, Harold Wolpe, Thozamile Botha, Saleem Badat, Thulisile Dlamini and Benito Khotseng (eds.), *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1991), 185-202. On SADTU's role during the negotiations see Samuel Amoako, 'Teacher Unions in Political Transitions: The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and the Dying Days of Apartheid, 1990-1993', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 49 (2014), 148-163. For a first-hand account of SADTU's intransigence in Soweto by a director of education in the Johannesburg region during these years see Sekese, *Twenty-Twenty Hindsight*, 151-156.

the Inkatha Freedom Party, ready to fight for a seat at the negotiating table.[186] Contrary to de Klerk's expectations, a resumption of politics under these conditions created the space for more violence, new fault lines dividing people. On 15 August, 300 men wearing red headbands and carrying weapons attacked commuters at Inhlazane station.[187] At the end of nine days heavy fighting, 122 people had been killed.[188] September witnessed a terrible spate of violence on the trains between Soweto and Johannesburg. On 13 September teenagers with spears and machetes boarded a train at Jeppe Station bound for Soweto, moving through the packed carriages slaying those in their path. Twenty-six people were killed on the trains that day.[189] The streets around the hostels became dead zones, frightened hostel dwellers flocking to fight under the IFP's banner.[190] Under these conditions schooling ground to a halt. Reflecting on the state of the schools in June 1990, Curtis Nkondo said, 'The crisis has deepened to the point that it has become static.'[191]

The question of how to end the violence dominated the early negotiations. The first breakthrough in the negotiations was made on 4 May at the presidential estate in Cape Town, the National Party and ANC agreeing to 'a common commitment to the resolution of the existing climate of violence and intimidation from whatever quarter'.[192] The so-called Groote Schuur minute paved the way for de Klerk's announcement on 7 June 1990 that he was ending the state of emergency, with the exception of Natal, mired in such unrest that suspending the state of emergency was deemed impossible.[193] And this in turn paved the way for the ANC to sign the Pretoria Minute on 6 August, the ANC's historic agreement to officially suspend its armed struggle.[194] But no more than Mandela and de Klerk's speeches, these formal agreements had little

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186 Up to this point Inkatha hardly had any presence outside KwaZulu-Natal, estimated to be as low as 2 per cent. See Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 147.

187 'Zulu-ANC warfare spreads to Soweto; 6 more killed', *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 1990.

188 Bonner and Segal, 149.

189 '400 shacks burned in a South African township', *New York Times*, 14 September 1990.

190 See Lauren Segal, 'The Human Face of Violence: Hostel Dwellers Speak', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1991), 190-231; Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, 'Political Violence, "Tribalism", and Inkatha', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30 (1992), 485-510; Gary Kynoch, *Township Violence and the End of Apartheid: War on the Reef* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2018); Franziska Rueedi, 'The Hostel Wars in Apartheid South Africa: Rumour, Violence and the Discourse of Victimhood', *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 26 (2020), 756-773.

191 'Nothing less than own control'', *The Sowetan*, 14 June 1990.

192 As quoted in 'Text of statement at South African talks', *New York Times*, 5 May 1990.

193 'South Africa ends emergency decree in 3 of 4 provinces', *New York Times*, 8 June 1990.

194 For more see Thula Simpson, 'Toyi-Toyi-ing to Freedom: The Endgame in the ANC's Armed Struggle, 1989-1990', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35 (2009), 507-521.

impact in the townships.[195] Fearful that they were being left to fend for themselves in a war against Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party, many in the townships started to form Self-Defence Units, small well-armed groups that all too often ended up fighting with each other, an infinitesimally complex world in which what little power people had lay in the hands of petty warlords, accountable only to themselves.[196] Under these conditions, Nelson Mandela reluctantly ceded that people had a right to defend themselves, secretly sanctioning the covert supply of arms to party's supporters in the townships.[197] But he was under no illusions as to the costs of self-defence. In 1991 there were 26,000 officially recorded murders in South Africa.[198]

As the bloodshed continued, two strangely parallel worlds started to run alongside each other. With the question of violence at least formally addressed, talk in the negotiations started to turn towards future constitutional arrangements. In December 1991 the multi-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa opened at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park, Johannesburg, representatives from nineteen parties battling out the details of a new constitution, the makeup of an interim government, the future of the homelands, a future electoral system, and the implementation and time frames of any agreement. Mandela was determined to bring these two worlds together. His call for people to simply lay down their arms had been naive. But Nelson Mandela was quick to change. Rather than carry on asking ordinary people to take responsibility for themselves, he turned his attention on the government. When Mandela was released details of the sinisterly named Civil Cooperation Bureau had already started to emerge in the press, a death squad founded at the start of the second state of emergency that set out to assassinate prominent political activists.[199] It gave Mandela his hook to tell a powerful simple new story. On the day 26 people were left dead on the trains, Mandela spoke at a press conference in which he pointed to a 'hidden hand' for the first time, 'forces' in the government, which do not wish peaceful

195 'Despite Accord South African violence rages on', *New York Times*, 15 October 1991.

196 For an evocative description of these battles see Jonny Steinberg, *One Day in Bethlehem* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2019), 70-80. See also Gary Kynoch, 'Crime, Conflict and Politics in Transition-Era South Africa', *Africa Affairs*, 104 (2005), 493-514.

197 Steinberg, *Winnie and Nelson*, 439.

198 'South Africa: Violence in Transition', *Africa Confidential*, 17 April 1992.

199 See Jacques Pauw, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1991).

negotiations to succeed'.[200] The idea of a secret 'Third Force' quickly took hold.[201] In October 1991, Mandela accused parts of the security state of having turned into a 'killing machine'.[202] The government's talk of 'black-on-black' violence was actually white-on-black. Mandela alleged that Third Force agents duped people into joining fake SDUs, planting evidence to falsely implicate innocent people.[203] The story of a highly orchestrated 'Third Force' appealed to all those who wanted to believe that amidst all the chaos there was still some kind of order, a way the violence might be made to stop. In truth the government was not in control of the great wave of violence it had unleashed. For all they embodied apartheid's worst evils, it was not the likes of Eugene de Kock at Vlakplaas who carried responsibility for the thousands of lost lives, but Botha's decision to send the regular police and army into the townships, a police force woefully ill-equipped to uphold public order now.[204] And unable to control the violence, de Klerk was powerless to stop the narrative of the Third Force taking hold, a constant drip of reportage confirming people's worst suspicions. Rather than rising above the violence as he hoped, de Klerk's reputation was dragged through the mud.

That Mandela's moral authority might rise as fast as de Klerk's fell was just one of the many quandaries the negotiations threw up at de Klerk. But it is with the massive confidence that de Klerk started the negotiations that we can understand his decision to start the process of desegregating white education in 1990. Under the plans, three different school models were put forward for parents to consider that would allow them to start accepting black students. Model A,

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200 As quoted in 'Mandela says de Klerk concedes 'hidden hand' in recent killings', *New York Times*, 15 September 1990.

201 Older scholarship was quick to embrace the idea of the Third Force. See for example, Stephen Ellis, 'The Historical Significance of South Africa's Third Force', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (1998), 261-299; and David Everatt, 'Analysing Political Violence on the Reef, 1990-1994', in Ran Greenstein (ed.), *The Role of Political Violence in South Africa's Democratisation* (Johannesburg: Community Agency for Social Enquiry, 2004), 95-142. Recent scholarship has moved more towards the complexity and chaos of the violence. See for example Gary Kynoch, 'Reassessing Transition Violence: Voices from South Africa's Township Wars, 1990-1994', *African Affairs*, 112 (2013), 283-303. A recent exception arguing for the Third Force thesis is Daniel L. Douek, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020).

202 As quoted in 'De Klerk assails Mandela's police assertions', *New York Times*, 20 October 1991.

203 Carole Cooper, Robin Hamilton, Harry Mashabela, Shaun Mackay, Joe Kelly, Elizabeth Sidiropolous, Claire Gordon-Brown, John Gary Moonsamy (eds.), *Race Relations Survey: 1991/1992* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Rave Relations, 1992), xxxviii.

204 On the distinction between public and social order policing see Didier Fassin, *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013). See also Jonny Steinberg, 'Policing During and After Apartheid: A New Perspective on Continuity and Change', in Jan Beek, Mirco Göpfert, Olly Owen and Jonny Steinberg (eds.), *Police in Africa: The Street-Level View* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 61-78.

in which the school would become private, though eligible for 45 per cent state subsidy.[205] Model B, in which the financial status of the school would remain the same, but with parents put in charge of admission policy. And Model C, in which the state would continue paying teacher and administrative staff salaries, but not the cost of school maintenance, a deficit to be met with the introduction of fees. No school would be forced to change status, and the conditions for those who wanted change were stringent. In order for a school to adopt a new model, a 72 per cent threshold of all eligible voters was required on an 80 per cent turnout. Of the 747 schools that opted for change in the 2,130 strong school system, nearly all opted for Model B, mostly in places far away from the troubled townships.[206] In January 1991 just 6,059 black students were admitted to Model B schools.[207] It was the most conservative first step towards the creation of non-racial public education in South Africa by a government that believed it controlled the pace of change, representing a constituency deeply wary of change. A 1991 survey found that 59 per cent of white South Africans wanted to keep education racially segregated.[208]

But as it became clear de Klerk would not emerge from the negotiations he had started with his power enhanced, the National Party changed tack, focusing on what parts of the old order it could salvage in the time it had left in office. In February 1992, the government announced that from August 1992 all white public schools would be automatically transformed into Model C schools unless two-thirds of parents disagreed (barring 4 per cent this is what happened). Now wherever they were white South Africans suddenly faced the costs of maintaining the schools, a shortfall estimated at 17 per cent of their own budget.[209] It was a rude shock to families long used to the National Party's largesse. To begin with most schools set their fees between R400 and R800 per month. But white families quickly saw how the fees soon put to good use. From 1992 to 1993

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[205] Following passage of the Private Schools Act (No. 104 of 1986), in February 1987, private schools started to receive their first government subsidies. The government had initially sought to restrict but. The 'racial clauses' were now dropped. For the first time, the National Party was indirectly subsidising interracial education. By February 1989, government subsidies rose from R29 million to R34 million, covering 45 per cent of their costs. See 'Private schools to get Govt aid in February', *The Star*, 13 November 1986; 'A dark and troubled year for SA's black education', *The Star*, 23 December 1986; 'Private schools get Govt subsidy', *The Star*, 12 March 1987; 'Durr warns private schools on funding', *The Citizen*, 23 February 1989.

[206] 'New schools solution rejected', *The Star*, 3 July 1990; 'South Africa to tackle race gap in education', *New York Times*, 26 February 1991.

[207] Lemon, 'Desegregation and Privatisation in White South African Schools', 215.

[208] Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 412.

[209] See Linda Chisholm and Ben Fine, 'Context and Contest in South African Education Policy: Comment on Curtin', *African Affairs*, 93 (1994), 239; and Pam Christie, 'Transition Tricks? Policy Models for School Desegregation in South Africa, 1990-1994', *Journal of Education Policy*, 10 (1995), 45-55

fees at most Model C schools more than doubled, the new income spent on hiring extra teachers and new infrastructure, the start of a precipitous rise as white parents sought to maintain their differences from the township's schools.[210] And crucially the Model Cs were given significant freedoms to conduct their own admission policies, a powerful tool in the hands of parents determined to keep the 'character' of their school intact, coded white.[211] By taking education out of the hands of the politicians and turning the schools into businesses ready to compete on an open market, the National Party ensured that integration was something that would happen on white people's terms.

The ANC fiercely protested against the Model Cs. At the time a party spokesperson condemned the 'racist white minority government's unilateral restructuring which will have far-reaching consequences.'[212] They were right to fear the consequences. Up until the creation of the Model Cs people had very few ways of escaping the township's schools. Now suddenly hundreds of thousands had been handed a realistic hope of finding a good quality education elsewhere.[213] And those who did everything they could to get their children into the new Model Cs were exactly those who had been in the vanguard of the struggle for education during the history of apartheid, the most well-educated, well-heeled and ambitious in society. Those who argued that the rush to access the Model Cs amounted to a 'crumb mentality', and that attentions should instead be focused on upgrading the township's schools were swept aside.[214] The rewards were simply too great. In the 1992 end-of-year exams the matriculation pass rate in the Model Cs was 98 per cent, compared with 44 per cent in the Department of Education and Training.[215] Through a place in the Model Cs people could see a gateway to university, professional employment, membership of the English-speaking middle classes and a place in the suburbs.

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[210] Carole Cooper, Robin Hamilton, Harry Mashabela, Shaun Mackay, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Claire Gordon-Brown, Stuart Murphy, and Julia Frielinghaus (eds.), *Race Relations Survey: 1993/1994* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1994), 696.

[211] Pam Christie, 'Transition Tricks?', 45-55. See also Pam Christie and Carolyn McKinney, 'Decoloniality and 'Model C' Schools: Ethos, Language and the Protests of 2016', *Education as Change*, 21 (2017), 1-21.

[212] As quoted in 'New govt will spurn Model C for schools', *Business Day*, 21 September 1992. See also 'Decision on white schools slammed', *The Sowetan*, 19 February 1992.

[213] By 1993 there were 60,000 black children at Model C schools. See Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey: 1993/1994*, 697.

[214] 'Azapo slams schools occupation campaign', *The Citizen*, 2 July 1991.

[215] Cooper et al, *Race Relations Survey: 1993/1994*, 677.

But for those left behind the exodus of the best and the brightest only made the task of rebuilding some functioning form of education in the townships harder. Wracked by a deeply embedded culture of violence and disrupted by periodic teacher strikes,[216] it was estimated that by June 1993 just 10 to 15 per cent of the curriculum had been covered that year.[217] The youth had once been lauded as the 'Young Lions'. Now people started talking about a 'lost generation', a dangerously disempowering rhetoric that struck at a deep truth.[218] A carefully considered report on the state of education in the townships around Johannesburg in 1996 opened by damningly describing one typical school: '[A]ttendance was sporadic, the principal had given up attending to problems of the school, teachers lost their desire to teach and there were tensions between rival organisations and between all elements of the school community. Vandalism, gangsterism, rape and drug abuse were rampant. The morale of all parties in the school community was low.'[219] The failings only drove people's desperation to reach the Model Cs more, the start of a race to escape the bottom that has been running in South Africa ever since. An anthropologist studying the present state of education in the schools around Durban has described 'a musical chairs-like process, whereby better-off children tend to travel to more prestigious schools and leave empty desks that need to be filled by other learners.'[220] For a small minority the end of apartheid brought scarcely imaginable changes, opening new vistas. Most have been made to watch the great dramas of South Africa's post-apartheid history as spectators, left with schools marked by deep failings, a

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216 On the role of SADTU in post-apartheid South Africa see Brahm Fleisch, 'The Politics of the Governed: South African Democratic Teachers' Union Soweto Strike, June 2009', *Southern African Review of Education with Education and Production*, 16 (2010), 117-132; Moeketsi Letseka, Bongani Bantwini and Ethel King-McKenzie, 'Public-Union Sector Politics and the Crisis of Education in South Africa', *Creative Education*, 3 (2012), 1197-1204; Thulani Zengele, 'The Unionization of the Teaching Profession and its Effects on the South African Education System: Teacher Unionism in South Africa', *Journal of Social Sciences*, 35 (2013), 231-239; amd Logan Govender, 'Teacher Union's Participation in Policy Making: A South African Case Study', *Compare*, 45 (2015), 184-205.

217 *Ibid.,* 693.

218 See Jeremy Seekings, 'Media Representations of 'Youth' and the South African Transition, 1989-1994', *South African Sociological Review*, 7 (1995), 25-42; and Jeremy Seekings, 'The 'Lost Generation': South Africa's 'Youth Problem' in the Early-1990s', *Transformation*, 29 (1996), 103-125.

219 Linda Chisholm and Salim Vally, *The Culture of Learning and Teaching in Gauteng Schools: Report of the Committee on The Culture of Learning and Teaching* (Johannesburg: Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, 1996), 1. Perhaps the best insight into the culture in the schools in the 1990s is *Yizo Yizo*, broadcast in 1998, a thirteen-part drama commissioned by the Department of Education. On *Yizo Yizo* see Litheko Modisane, '*Yizo Yizo*: Sowing Debate, Reaping Controversy', *Social Dynamics*, 36 (2010), 122-134.

220 Mark Hunter, *Race for Education: Gender, White Tone, and Schooling in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 5.

pass rate little better today.[221] South Africa's democratic transition failed to produce a settlement able to live up to the ideals outlined in the Freedom Charter—'Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children'.[222] But if not social democracy, the negotiations at least delivered on people's hopes for peace.

Seventeen months after they started, the talks at Kempton Park collapsed, the National Party's constant attempts to block the ANC's demands for simple majoritarian rule by marshalling a 'federalist front' amongst all those who stood to lose out meeting implacable opposition in the ANC's demand for simple majoritarian rule. 'The inescapable reality is that the regime laid bare its fundamental contempt of democracy and its unmitigated desire to hang on to power', Mandela told the press.[223] Then a month later a massacre in the Vaal Triangle threatened to throw doubt on any settlement completely, raising the prospect of total anarchy. On the night of 17 June around 500 men at the KwaMadala hostel went on a murderous rampage in Boipatong, leaving 39 people dead behind them, many women and children killed in their beds. By one count it was the forty-ninth massacre in two years.[224] But for Mandela, with the talks collapsed, Boipatong was a line. His allegations of Third Force violence had always been balanced by his commitment to de Klerk, a partner in the negotiations. Now he drove his message home that the National Party bore ultimate responsibility for the bloodshed in no uncertain terms. Speaking four days after the massacre, Mandela vented the rage his wife his wife made no attempt to hide, but which he rarely allowed to be seen:

> I am convinced we are no longer dealing with human beings but animals…. We will not forget what Mr de Klerk, the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party have done to our people. I have never seen such cruelty.[225]

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[221] In 2018 the matriculation pass rate in the public school system was 78.2 per cent, but around half of all students who started the last two years of school dropped out before sitting the examinations. When those students are included in the figures, the pass rate dropped to 37.6 per cent, in line with the worst figures during the second state of emergency. See Carien du Plessis and Martin Plaut, *Understanding South Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2019), 155.

[222] "The Freedom Charter." Declaration adopted by the Congress of People, Kliptown, Johannesburg, June 25-26, 1955. in Thomas G. Karis and Gail Gerhart (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990,* Vol. III*, Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 323-326.

[223] 'ANC president warns of mass action from July', *United Press International*, 28 May 1992.

[224] Mark Gevisser, 'Bloody Bisho', *The Nation*, 255 (1992), 348.

[225] As quoted in 'Township pivotal in political war', *The Star*, 22 June 1992. No strong evidence has emerged to suggest the government was responsible for the massacre in Boipatong. For more see James Simpson,

With political authority seemingly rapidly disintegrating, Mandela lost control over the militants in his party who still hoped to force the collapse of the government by mass action, what was being called the Leipzig Option. It was a terrible mistake to think that the tactics used in the German Democratic Republic in 1989 could be repeated under conditions like these. On 7 September 1992, thousands of ANC supporters descended on Bisho, the capital of the Ciskei, an attempt to oust Brigadier Oupa Gqozo as the leader of this ersatz state by sheer weight of numbers.[226] A fence was breached and hundreds rushed through the gap, fired upon by Gqozo's soldiers. Twenty-eight were killed and more than 200 wounded.[227]

But in the end it was the horrors of Boipatong and Bisho which proved decisive in forcing an agreement. The shame the National Party was forced to carry at Boipatong put an end to de Klerk's faith that the longer he pushed the negotiations on, the better the settlement he could hope to reach. Under Mandela's leadership, the ANC's coalition would not fall apart. Any political settlement could not be built around the ANC, but would have to be made with the ANC directly. And without agreement, de Klerk's fear of anarchy loomed. As for the ANC, the Bisho massacre finally put an end to the idea that there existed an alternative way forward to the negotiations. A series of mass demonstrations planned in August was quietly called off. During the winter of 1992 mutual recognition had grown in both parties that elaborate talk of future political settlements was meaningless as long as the violence raged. And that for the violence to end, some form of agreement had to be reached quickly.

Nineteen days after the massacre in Bisho the ANC and National Party signed a Record of Understanding, committing themselves to each other and the negotiations once again. Previously intractable points of differences now began to dissolve as the full scale of the crisis pushed down. In June 1993 a date for South Africa's first ever democratic election was set, 27 April 1994. The following month a first draft of an interim constitution was agreed. Then at a final

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'Boipatong: The Politics of a Massacre and the South African Transition', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38 (2012), 623-647.

[226] Oupa Gqozo (b.10 March 1952-) was born in Kroonstad in the Orange Free State and educated at Phomolong Junior and Bodibeng Senior High. He left school early to work as a prison office and completed his education by correspondence. He joined the SADF and then the Ciskei Defence Force, after its founding in 1981. In 1990 Gqozo staged a coup in Ciskei, taking power from Lennox Sebe. On the history of black soldiers in the SADF see Lennart Bolliger, *Apartheid's Black Soldiers: Un-National Wars and Militaries in Southern Africa* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2021).

[227] As quoted in Mark Gevisser, 'Bloody Bisho', *The Nation*, 255 (1992), 348.

late-night meeting between de Klerk and Mandela in November 1993 the last details of a remarkably basic settlement were agreed. A government of national unity would serve for five years. Each party receiving more than 5 per cent of the vote in the election would be represented in cabinet. Decisions in cabinet would require 50 per cent support (not the 80 per cent the National Party had demanded). Civil servants' employment contracts would be honoured. And it was agreed that there would be a way of providing amnesty for those who committed political crimes. For all his ambitions coming to power de Klerk settled in 1993 in the hope that democracy might bring that most fundamental guarantee of white South Africans' security, peace.

In Soweto the election could not come soon enough. As the date of the election neared, a five-week municipal strike in Soweto left the streets waterlogged,[228] the latest round of teachers' strikes crippling the schools.[229] Most worrying the violence showed no signs of abating. The month before the April election 537 deaths were recorded, including a spate of bombings by white separatists determined to derail the election, targeting busy black transport intersections.[230] And even as the ANC sold its ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme to voters, promising major spending in education, healthcare, and housing, the exodus from the township's schools continued, a scramble to get into the Model Cs being vacated by white families desperate to get their children into new schools far away from the townships. The ANC has spent vast sums on education since 1994, but it has not be enough to lure people back to the township's schools, not least for the fact that fees for the Model Cs have always risen higher, a yawning inequality in a fundamentally two-tier education system that the ANC has found impossible to close.[231] In broadest outline, that has been the history of post-apartheid South Africa: poverty has dramatically reduced under the ANC, even as inequality has grown.

But for all the many disappointments that followed, Soweto's schools were the stage for one final drama in the history of apartheid. Come 27 April 1994, it was to the schools that so many

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228 'De Klerk takes his campaign to terra incognito', *New York Times*, 18 March 1994.

229 Martin J. Murray, *The Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London: Verso, 1994), 208.

230 Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Harry Mashabela, Shaun Mackay, Claire Gordon-Brown, Julia Frielinghaus, Carmel Musiker, Hannelie Swanepoel, Rory Gallocher, and Herma Forgey (eds.), *Race Relations Survey: 1994/95* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1995), 438-9.

231 In Mandela's first budget the ANC allocated 23 per cent of the national budget to education, R29 billion, 7.2 per cent of GDP. See Ken Hartshorne, Ken Hartshorne, *The Making of Education Policy in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 106-7. In 2012 average fees for formerly white schools were R10,000 while fees in the township schools was R200. See Hunter, *Race for Education*, 175

people walked to cast their first ever votes in a democracy, the famous long queues photographed above forming as early as 1 a.m., many dressed in their smartest clothes.[232] These schools had once housed people's dreams to be a doctor, lawyer or a social worker. Now they housed people's aspiration for peace. When South Africans lined up to vote it was, as Thomas Hobbes imagined in *Leviathan*, to submit themselves to a new order.[233] Within weeks the effect of that single act shared by around twenty million people started to make itself clear. A measure of trust in one another had been restored. Almost as quickly as the violence had spiralled in the second half of the 1980s, it started to drop, returning soon to the levels last seen in the 1970s.[234] South Africa entered its democratic era a violent country, but a country that could at least start to live with itself. By the terrible standards set during apartheid's final years we should not be surprised by those polls which find so many older black South Africans nostalgic for a time before the great wave of violence swept over their lives.[235] That so many young South Africans who have grown up on the myths of the past should feel so bitterly short-changed by what they have received in the present should not surprise us either. The way in which apartheid came to an end has come up very great costs indeed.

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232 'Vote on the century opens era of hope', *The Guardian*, 28 April 1994.

233 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017 [1651]).

234 Kriegler and Shaw, *A Citizen's Guide to Crime Trends in South Africa*, 133.

235 On nostalgia see Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009). See also Gary Kynoch, 'Apartheid Nostalgia: Personal Security Concerns in South African Townships', *South African Crime Quarterly*, 5 (2003), 7-10. On white South Africans' very different nostalgia see Pumla Godobo-Madikizela, 'Remembering the Past: Nostalgia, Traumatic Memory and the Legacy of Apartheid', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18 (2012), 252-267.

- CONCLUSION -

How do people make sense of the circumstances of their lives that exist so far outside their control? This great existential question faces everyone in their lives, although in certain times and places, some people's confrontation with that question becomes an acute life-forming consideration. During the history of apartheid, all those classified as 'non-white' counted amongst that class of precarious people, their lives governed by a massive bureaucratic order that sought to legislate their every move, threatening unchecked violence on anyone who dared step out of line. In the face of that order it would have been easy for people to fall into despair and resignation, and for far too many people that is what happened, their lives and the lives they might have lived cruelly taken by a narrow-minded project of white supremacy. And yet, as this dissertation has hoped to have shown, people's capacity to respond to the conditions of their lives by developing new self-empowering narratives is a remarkable fact of life, even in the most oppressive situations.

Faced with an education system that sought to establish apartheid's vision of a balkanized constellation of shackled African nations in perpetuity, we have seen how people at first simply refused to accept the ideas on which Bantu Education was built. They saw the schools as theirs, an institution which was owed to them as citizens in a modern world, no matter how hard the National Party tried to convince them they were subjects. And when on the morning of 16 June 1976 the unthinkable happened, and the schools were ripped from them, not by the power of politics but by the force of violence, people responded with an even bigger story, one in which all the present injustices would be swept away, to be replaced with a new, more perfect world. In the years that followed, townships across South Africa fell under its spell, a story that continues to exert a hold on people today. In recent years a new student politics has emerged in South Africa's universities, the #*RhodesMustFall* and #*FeesMustFall* movements, its core animating idea that a revolution has been betrayed.[1] Students today have embraced the ideas of Frantz Fanon and idolise Winnie Mandela, frequently glorifying in violence. For them the Soweto uprising is not seen as the beginning of the end, but the start of a struggle to be fought for today.[2]

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[1] See Xolela Mangcu, 'Shattering the Myth of a Post-Racial Consensus in South African Higher Education: "Rhodes Must Fall" and the Struggle for Transformation at the University of Cape Town", *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 5 (2017), 243-266.

[2] On Frantz Fanon's prominent place in contemporary South African politics see Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Yet as we have followed the struggle for education after 1976 we have seen how the Soweto uprising provided a very different set of lessons than have been enthusiastically returned to today. As the police set about crushing the Soweto uprising with barely restrained cruelty, few people kept their faith in the revolutionary story. Left to pick up the pieces of their shattered world, most people kept hold of some of the essential lessons of 1976. The schools were not their own, the idea of building autonomy within the state's structures was hopelessly compromised. But how the end would come became a major point of difference to those unbaptised in violence. After 1976, Sowetans rebuilt a measure of control over their lives around a new commitment to the principle of nonviolent civil disobedience, out of which grew a remarkable flowering of new 'civics', taking the mantle of protest back from the students. But following P. W. Botha's announcement of a state of emergency in July 1985 a bigger story was needed. Out of Soweto's schools a new idea was born in South Africa, People's Power for People's Education. It took the dream of a revolutionary future and dared people to imagine what form utopia could take in the present, calling students to take the fight from the streets and back into the schools, a radical reclamation of the schools as theirs. Four days before the tenth anniversary of the shootings on Vilakazi Street, People's Power was destroyed by a government that had run out of ideas how to govern, dependent on the tools of violence. Apartheid would end amid scenes of extraordinary disorder, no place more than in the schools.[3]

The history of education during apartheid was the history of these stories, the stories the National Party told people about what role schools should play in society, and the stories ordinary people told themselves about the role they wanted the schools to play. And it was out of these stories that a deeply contested history was formed, leaving ordinary people with impossible choices. Live too much for the future and risk abandoning the needs of those in the present, live too much in the present and risk abandoning the future. There was no perfect way to make sense of the paradox of Bantu Education, but there were people's best intentions, and in the end they all came to count. Without the forgotten efforts of all those who refused to submit to the state's designs before 1976, the apartheid state might have had a chance of sinking its foundations in society, building the type of society Verwoerd imagined possible. Without the class of 1976 the

[3] On the emphasis that has run throughout this dissertation on storytelling and its relationship to politics see Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2013).

failure of the apartheid state to set its foundations in society might have remained an inconvenient truth for longer than it did, allowing all those who benefitted from apartheid's facade to continue reaping their rewards. And without the tireless organising of all those who called for nonviolent civil disobedience, many more might have died in a fight against a regime that was ultimately destined never to be defeated on the battlefield. It has been a central principle of this dissertation that each of these stories is remarkable, and that each deserves to be understood on its own terms. If no one was right, no one was wrong too. It was a part of apartheid's cruelty to force people to live such compromised lives.

Yet if this dissertation can claim any success, it is a success which has been built out of a fiction, albeit a series of fictions I have come to believe in myself. The stories told here of how people made sense of their schools during the history of apartheid are not in the final analysis theirs, but mine. It is an intensely uncomfortable fact to dwell upon. Faced with the discomfort that comes from being the author of someone else's history, some historians take a step back, limiting their studies to cultural representations or discourses, as if the dignity of the true history beneath can remain undisturbed. Other historians choose to make their authorship a focus itself, inserting themselves into their accounts, self-reflexing. I share the discomfort that drives such methods. The task of fully capturing the lives of others is impossible and the sense of trespass is real. But once the decision has been made to start writing, I find that such methods create distance from the past, distances already difficult enough to cross. That I have followed the historians' tradition of writing in the third person is not because of any commitment to objectivity that such a voice sometimes suggests, but because I think the history can be most intimately and precisely told without inserting myself between the story and the telling. But now that those stories have been told it might reasonably be asked, what is my story?

I can share at least some of the beginnings. My mother was a nurse from south Wales and my father was a white South African doctor, born in Johannesburg's wealthy northern suburbs but sent away to be schooled in England. Together they lived and worked in Bulawayo during the first years of Robert Mugabe's rule. I might well have been born there but because my mother developed diabetes in her pregnancy I was born in London on 8 November 1989. The news then was being dominated by events around 600 miles east of London in Berlin. For weeks massive demonstrations had been gathering in Leipzig. Then on 9 November the leadership of the German

Democratic Republic issued a set of new travel regulations, an attempt to release some of the pressure building inside the country. Amazingly, little attention was paid to the details. That evening a representative from the politburo faced journalists' questions. Gunter Schabowski was asked for a point of clarification, mumbling an answer whose implications were left dizzyingly wide open.[4] The journalists did not wait. Reports were soon being broadcast that the border to West Germany had been opened, attracting people to the wall in curiosity, and then, as their numbers swelled, participants in a world transforming event. By the end of the night a barrier that had been cast in iron in people's imaginations had been pulled down, and a new era in world history begun. The repercussions would spill over in many directions, not least in South Africa where a fevered anti-communism had formed such an important adhesive keeping apartheid together.[5] Three months later F. W. de Klerk made his speech that he was unbanning the major anti-apartheid organisations, including the South African Communist Party. Not long after Nelson Mandela was elected president. One of the twentieth century's last great struggles was over. The idea that this might mean something even bigger, that history itself might have come to an end, was in the air.

By the time Mandela was elected my parents had separated, my father moving to New Zealand, my mother and I moving to a small village near Oxford. I was starting school when Mandela was in office and his celebrity in my childhood was immense, his story of reconciliation and forgiveness the end of history personified. As a young boy I felt proud to feel a connection to this history, a pull that hardly marked me out as unusual, a country whose history has been closely watched by people living on either side of the North Atlantic in search of moral lessons. In the 1980s Adam Hochschild wrote of his visit to South Africa as a young American college student, 'it was as if I had stepped, for a brief few months, into moral territory that previously I had only read about, in accounts of events like the resistance to the Nazis.'[6] Growing up South Africa was

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[4] Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[5] In 1978, for example, P. W. Botha, said, 'The Republic of South Africa is experiencing the full onslaught of Marxism and it must not be doubted that the Republic enjoys a high priority in the onslaught by Moscow.' As quoted in Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996), 265.

[6] Adam Hochschild, *The Mirror at Midnight: A Journey to the Heart of South Africa* (London: Collins, 1991), 9.

a land of certainties, of right and wrong, a place where good triumphed over evil, where the arc of history bent towards justice.

As I grew older that I began to learn how much more complicated South African history was, just how much history was left out of Mandela's bildungsroman. When I was a teenager I was given a copy Steve Biko's essays, *I Write What I Like*, a text which provided an eye-opening critique of the self-confident liberalism that reigned in Britain, and which enlivened me to much more radical traditions in anticolonial politics that strained against the liberal horizon.[7] There was still so much history to be fought for. Biko led me to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney and to the histories of Third World revolution in places like Algeria, Cuba and Ethiopia. The exposure was as exhilarating as it was unsettling. Growing up I had known that my grandfather had been friends with David Pratt, a wealthy businessman who attempted to assassinate Hendrik Verwoerd at the Rand Easter Show on 9 March 1960.[8] I had looked on that connection with a small degree of pride, and while I never kidded myself that my family were part of the struggle, I knew they had prided themselves on their liberal values and opposition to the 'Nats'. The more I read the more I realised how self-serving the language of liberalism can be, dressing up something better described as paternalism. My family's true place in this history soon became clear to me. They were among the few great beneficiaries of apartheid, leaving a legacy that has indelibly shaped my life.

I can see now how learning that history might have prompted me to abandon my interest in a country it was clear that I knew so little about. The effect was the opposite. The stranger South Africa appeared to me from my small corner of rural England, the more I wanted to make sense of a place that challenged the meaning of words like freedom and democracy, words whose definitions could so easily be taken for granted in Britain. Those interests ultimately led me here, starting a project initially interested in the politics of the Bantustans, curious about how people found ways to support these much derided institutions for reasons more complicated than greed

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[7] Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, Aelred Stubbs (ed.), (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004 [1978]). For a wonderful essay comparing the reception of E. P. Thompson with Biko in South Africa, see Isabel Hofmeyr, 'South African Remains: E. P. Thompson, Biko, and the Limits of "The Making of the English Working Class"', *Historical Reflections*, 41 (2015), 99-110

[8] For an obituary of David Pratt see Rajat Neogy, 'Shades of Apartheid: David Pratt is Dead', *Transition*, 75/76 (1997), 270-273. Verwoerd made a recovery and lived until 1966, when he was killed on the floor of the senate in Cape Town. For a biography of Verwoerd's eventual assassin, see Harris Dousemetzis, *The Man Who Killed Apartheid: The Life of Dimitri Tsafendas* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media: 2018).

or narrow self-interest.[9] But because I was worried about access to remote archives and the conditions I might find them in I soon found myself looking for an alternative site to think about how people build productive lives within oppressive institutions.[10] I turned to Soweto's schools, hoping that their storied place in South Africa's history would provide me with the materials to ground my history as closely as possible in the concerns of ordinary people. The risk I thought was that I would merely repeat what others had said. I soon found how much had been left unsaid.

Almost all the research for this dissertation was carried out in the Historical Papers Research Archive in the Cullen Library at the University of Witwatersrand, not far from the Great Hall, where the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee held its conference at the end of 1985. During two stays in Johannesburg, I worked from a number of different collections, as well as making my way to the National Archive in Pretoria.[11] But amongst the various collections I consulted there was one which deserves special mention for understanding the history that has been told here. The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) was founded in 1929, and in 1972 its materials started to be given to Historical Papers, bequeathing an enormous archive today.[12] To provide a sense of scale, there are over a hundred boxes of papers relating to Dr John David Reinallt Jones, the SAIRR'S founder and first director. Within this massive collection are more than 2,000 boxes containing the institution's press clippings, an integral part of the SAIRR's work as it sought to report on and advocate for liberal change in society. The way the material in these boxes was gathered is immediately interesting, and at odds with how so many of the collections at the Cullen

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[9] In thinking about researching the Bantustans I was engaging with an exciting renewed interest in their history. See Sekibakiba Patrick Lekgoathi, "'You Are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation': Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity and Listenership, 1960-1994', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35 (2009), 575-594; Laura Evans, 'South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation': Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands', *South African Historical Journal*, 64 (2012), 117-137; Timothy Gibbs, *Mandela's Kinsmen: Nationalist Elites & Apartheid's First Bantustan* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2014). These are questions are being asked more generally in African history. See especially Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); and Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015).

[10] One warning was Shireen Ally's account of her visit to the archives of KaNgwane on the border of Swaziland. She describes archives of crumbling piles of paper in dilapidated buildings. See, 'Material Remains: Artifice versus Artefact(s) in the Archive of Bantustan Rule', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 5 (2015). 969-989.

[11] The National Archive's holdings were almost impossible to navigate, and in any case some of the most important archival materials destroyed by the National Party in the last days of apartheid. See Verne Harris, ''They Should Have Destroyed More': The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-94', *Transformation*, 42 (2000), 29-56.

[12] On the history of the SAIRR from its founding until the late-1950s, see Paul Rich, 'The South African Institute of Race Relations and the Debate on "Race Relations", 1929-1958', *African Studies*, 40 (1981), 13-22.

Library have been assembled, only after the events when some idea of what was and was not important had already formed. Each morning the offices of SAIRR in Auden House, Johannesburg, received copies of the day's newspapers. Depending on the year in question this included *The Argus*, *The Bantu World*, *Beeld*, *Business Day*, *Cape Herald*, *City Press*, *Eastern Province Herald*, *Financial Mail*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Natal Mercury Rand Daily Mail*, *The Sowetan*, *The Star* and others.[13] The newspapers were then taken to a special room where a team of researchers began trawling their pages, searching for any story which might help the Institute in its future work. The labour-intensive work was carefully organised. A long list of categories was established, Bannings, Business, Detentions, Health, Housing, Land, Police, Transport and plenty more. Any story considered relevant to any of these categories was then cut out and mounted on card to be indexed and stored away, ready for any researcher to return to. One of these categories was Education. Reflecting the politics of the day the Institute categorised its material in four sections; Blacks, Coloured, Indian, and Whites & General.[14] This means that in the basement of the Cullen Library today there are 39 boxes with the label 'Education (Blacks)' stickered on their side covering the years 1948 to 1992, as well as 21 boxes covering the years 1992 and 1994 after the government officially abandoned segregated education and the SAIRR began collecting education together. For the historian, the contents of these boxes are a blessing. The vibrant newspaper life that was able to be maintained during apartheid produced a torrent of information on Soweto's schools, the SAIRR's researchers turning what might have been a deluge of information deposited across dozen of archives into at least a navigable stream.

When I first started opening these boxes their contents nonetheless felt overwhelming, the coverage that both the black and the white press gave Soweto's schools vastly exceeding my expectations.[15] There were the types of report I expected to find, discussions of major legislation,

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[13] Some of these newspapers have been the subjects of historical study themselves. For a study of *The Sowetan*, see Lesley Cowling, 'Building a Nation: The *Sowetan* and the Creation of a Black Public', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, (2014), 325-341. For a study of *The Citizen*, see Adam Jones, 'From Rightist to 'Brightest'? The Strange Tale of South Africa's Citizen', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24 (1998), 325-345. For a survey of the black press published shortly after the Soweto uprising, see Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836-1976* (Boston, M.A.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979).

[14] I am grateful to Terence Corrigan, ex-employee of the SAIRR, for sharing this information with me via email in December 2020.

[15] Note that in 1975 over half the readership if the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Times* were black. See Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, 15.

scrutiny of government budgets, records of politicians' speeches and conference resolutions. But there was also an almost granular coverage of much more quotidian matters. The newspapers covered the hiring of new teachers, interviewed principals, followed the progress of sport and choral competitions, and reported on Sowetans' regular meetings in tiny community halls and churches. When I came across reports of an organisation called the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa I was stunned. Here was an organisation which my readings in South African history had never alerted me to before, and which my search for more information left me almost completely empty-handed. Yet here were reports that the great American civil rights activist Roy Wilkins had accepted an invitation to attend an ASSECA conference, bringing branches together from across the country. Faced with this deluge of information I wondered how might all this material fit together? What significance should be attributed to a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of a new school? What to make of the repeated calls for compulsory education? Each clipping was interesting, but finding their place in a wider world of meaning was hard to judge. Faced with a mass of information, I kept to a simple method, typing each clipping into a rapidly growing chronology on my computer, all the while clinging to my faith that a bigger picture would eventually emerge.[16]

And soon enough those connections did start to emerge. Not only was there such an evident passion for education in the years before 1976, but at times the reasoning behind that passion could be clearly seen. The efforts people put into the schools made sense when it was realised that people saw the schools as theirs. Reading about this history day-by-day I found myself in awe of the powers that ordinary people can wield in everyday life. For all its grand ambitions, the Department of Bantu Education had been laid low by a people and their simple refusal to accommodate the government's demands. Two years after the start of the Soweto uprising, Václav Havel published *The Power of the Powerless*, imploring his fellow Czechs and Slovaks to take responsibility for the conduct of their own lives, to look beyond what was being presented to them by their government, to see the true realities.[17] Black South Africans never needed a Havel-like

[16] Newspapers are a remarkably underutilised source by South African historians. A notable exception is Tom Lodge's seminal *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983). For Lodge's reflection on the methodology behind *Black Politics* and the importance of the press see Tom Lodge, 'Reflections on *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*', *South African Historical Journal*, 64 (2012), 494-506.

[17] Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, trans. Paul Wilson (London: Vintage, 2018 [1978]).

figure to provide that lesson. Nor indeed a Biko. It was a lesson that was never lost sight of, laying low the grand designs of apartheid before it ever got started.

Should I have ended my study of education with the start of the Soweto uprising that might have been the central argument of this dissertation, a lesson in just how far the apartheid state was from the approximating the conditions of totalitarianism with which it has been compared.[18] To live under a totalitarian state is to be forced to live a life in lies.[19] Yet in South Africa it was the ruling party if anything that found itself living in lies, the National Party's proclamations of its ideology a world away from the actually existing state of affairs. The more I read in the newspaper clippings though, the more I realised how precariously balanced this state was. The apartheid state was weak, but the National Party's willingness to rule through violence was enormous, and only grew as apartheid's failings became harder to deny. In Soweto this taste for violence was first revealed on 16 June 1976, a day of truly world-destroying violence. A measure of political life was able to be rebuilt out of the wreckage of 1976. But what had been rebuilt once was destroyed by two successive states of emergency in 1985 and 1986. Two great waves of violence in two years augured a troublingly new final chapter in Soweto's history under apartheid. After the start of the second state of emergency in 1986 there were still those who continued to push towards a revolution and those who tried to hold back the tide of violence. But the idealism that once bound people to those commitments now seemed to give way to something narrower. Was a student who held a gun to a teacher really a comrade? Was a teacher who flogged their students really a pedagogue? By the end of apartheid a collective history of struggle had turned into a fractured private history, fought amongst people for nothing more grand than self-preservation.

For a long time I resisted reaching this conclusion, my deep-seated instincts leading me again and again to finding people's triumph over adversity, the history of progress. Yet each time my search for the winners amidst the ruins left me empty handed. Then one morning while reading a review of a recently published book I came across a quotation from one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's notebooks. 'Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy.'[20] Reading those words helped me to

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[18] See for example Brian Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (London: Penguin Books, 1964).

[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Books, 2017 [1951]).

[20] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Matthew J. Bruccoli (ed.), (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 51.

realise what had been building in my mind almost in spite of myself. I had started with a history that revealed the triumph of the collective spirit over apartheid, and I had ended with a history in which apartheid destroyed the collective spirit. Rather than trying to find another story of triumph, that was the history. In the famous words of Hobbes, life had become 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'[21] To put the big history that runs through this dissertation most simply, apartheid set about creating a new political order and it failed, but when faced with its failure it destroyed politics. There is no telos of progress in that history, no end of history, only mounting destruction and untold grief.

If that is the big lesson Soweto's schools can teach us, what then of all the stories which have not made their way into these pages? The newspaper clippings were remarkable in the level of detail they provided. From their pieces a sense of collective life could be gleaned. But what of the myriad smaller, more personal stories of education that have not been captured here? What happened when a father lost his job while his children were at school? Who would be sent out to earn a wage? What happened when one sibling was singled out for academic success, a household's resources dedicated to their success at the expense of others? Conscious of all the stories I was missing in the archive, I arranged to have tea with a retired Sowetan teacher at her home.

Today Soweto is a radically transformed place. My drive that morning took me past the Nike Football Training Centre in Klipspruit, a state-of-the-art training facility, one of the shiny legacies of the 2010 Football World Cup, whose final Soweto hosted, the centre of the world's attentions again. The roads are tarmacked and on street corners are chic bars filled with smartly dressed people. Poverty abounds, but there is much wealth too, many of the original matchbox houses unrecognisable, supporting extension upon extension, satellite dishes on their roofs and SUVs in their drives.[22] Amidst all this change it felt strange to step inside the retired teacher's home, as if I was stepping back in time. As the door closed the noise of the busy streets receded, what light passed through the lace curtains soaked up by the old teak furniture, a powerful symbol of the values of a social class now slipping away. On the walls were the types of sporting photos found hanging in Cambridge college common rooms, rows of proud young men surrounding their

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[21] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2017 [1651]), 103.

[22] For a conversation between two young Sowetans reflecting on Soweto's post-apartheid changes, see Achille Mbembe, Nsizwa Dlamini and Grace Khunou, 'Soweto Now', in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 239-247.

captain. It became clear that the retired teacher was still an immensely passionate pedagogue in her old age. She recalled the past successes of her students with great pride and the high standards she demanded of them. I was captivated by this woman for whom the struggle for national liberation was a sideshow in her life, but for whom the education of her charges meant everything. It was a priority I thought many people had made and which I thought historians had treated with condescension. To listen to her tell those stories was one of my great experiences.

When the time came for me to leave the old teacher walked me back out onto the busy streets to my taxi. I told her how grateful I was for her time. She took the opportunity to offer a few parting life lessons. She told me how difficult it was to study for a PhD and that I needed to be studying harder. She was very proud to tell me her daughter had recently completed hers. In her memorable choice of words I needed to burn the midnight oil. Taken aback I soon felt touched by this expression of concern, reminded of my own school days when teachers had told me much the same. As I looked out of the taxi's window and onto the streets I allowed myself to indulge the idea I had been made to feel the same as the children in her classrooms had been made to feel. In some essential way the history of the twentieth century is the history of mass education, and we are all part of it.

Before returning to Johannesburg I took the opportunity to visit some of the schools I was reading about in the archive. I went to Morris Isaacson, now part of a national heritage trail tourists follow which includes the Mandela family home, remodelled as if nothing had been touched since Nelson Mandela's imprisonment. I also went to Pace College, funded by the American Chamber of Commerce with the backing of some of America's biggest multinational corporations. Both schools remain essentially the same as when they were built. Morris Isaacson's low-slung buildings look uncomfortably like agricultural outhouses, a haunting reminder of Verwoerd's infamous talk of corralling wayward grazing animals. Pace's entrance hall boasts an ostentatious brass plaque imprinted with a bald eagle, a reminder of the role big business once played in Sowetans' education before turning their backs on the schools in the late 1980s. Walking around these schools it was easy to conjure the ghosts of the past. And as I watched the students laugh with their friends I felt fresh revulsion inside of me that a country's police force could shoot at schoolchildren. The past felt very close that day and I felt an urgent desire to rush around speaking to as many people around me as possible, taking their stories and laying them flat on the

page. That I did not do that was thanks to very encounter with someone's past, an experience that reminded me of the immense responsibilities that come when entering the lives of others and a reminder of how distant even the very recent past can be.

Each morning during my stays in Johannesburg I would knock on the door of the Cullen Library, where I would almost invariably be met by the smiling Gabriele Mohale, without whose deep knowledge of the Cullen's collections this project would be significantly poorer. During the day the visiting researchers sit around a horse-shoe desk as the archivists busy themselves with their work. And it was in this happy space that I struck up conversation with a fellow researcher who had been regularly arriving for a few weeks. We spoke briefly about the what had brought us together, and she told me that she had been at school in Soweto during the 1970s. We agreed that we would have lunch together.

Late one morning we left our research on our desks and headed out to a café on campus. Settled at our table I asked what she might tell me about her time as a student in Soweto before the uprising. I found myself soon listening to a familiar story. As our food was being prepared my lunch companion told me how the National Party had sought to introduce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, a hated language, how the people had risen up in defiance, and how they had proudly marched through the streets. I had the clear sense that I was being told a story by somebody who knew what a young researcher from a university in England wanted to hear. And it was true. I was interested. To hear from someone what life was like on the streets during 1976 sent chills through me. But I knew from the newspaper clippings how much else there was to say. When a sibling was mentioned, I took the moment to interject. I asked what school her sister went to. When she told me I would not have heard of it I asked her to try me anyway. She was surprised that I not only knew the name of the school, but something of its history too. With that sharing of knowledge I sensed a new understanding grow between us. I asked other questions, what her walk to school was like in the mornings, what her school uniform was like, and who her friends were. Our conversation started entering ever less certain territory. The stories she told were about the pain of leaving an old life behind for a life in exile, stymied ambitions, the paths not taken. I noticed that where she had previously spoken about 'we', now it was I. There were silences. These were poorly rehearsed stories, being told in a broken script. Recalling these memories was evidently very painful.

I felt very uneasy. As we walked back to the library I was reminded of Janet Malcolm's famous opening words in *The Journalist and the Murderer*. 'Every journalist who is not too stupid or full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible.'[23] It is an abrasive proposition to be confronted with, and while historians are not journalists I felt the power of these words. Like the journalist, the historian who falls for the idea they merely act as the mouthpiece for other people's stories end up betraying those about whom they write. I had taken information from the archive and I had agitated difficult memories. That is how the betrayal starts. Next I would take her story and start at work, weaving her narrative into a bigger tapestry, her voice just one among many. Her story would be the raw material from which I made mine.

During lunch we had discussed the possibility of future interviews. But I knew an honest conversation was needed before we went any further. And I also knew that I did not want to follow that path. To have followed that course would have produced a very different dissertation to the one that has been written here. That project would have depended on an exploration of people's memories, revealing as much about the present as the past. It would have led into the dark corners of private transcripts, away from the publics or *mentalités* that I was beginning to piece together in the newspaper clippings. For better or worse I decided to limit my conversation with the past to what I was finding in the archive, leaving the enduring pain people carry from the past undisturbed by my enquiries in the present.

It is an imperfect solution though, and something of a false choice. By turning my back on people's present-day pain, I had hardly turned away from the problems that violence poses the writing of history, nor had I ended my intrusions in people's lives. As that conversation made clear, so much of this history is difficult to talk about, and at times impossible. In 1981, Mongane Wally Serote[24] published *To Every Birth Its Blood*, a fictionalised telling of the Soweto uprising. The protagonist, Tsietsi Molope, has become so inured to the conditions of life in the townships on

[23] Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York, N.Y.: Knopf, 1990), 1. For a thoughtful essay on where the historian's rights to tell the other people's stories might end see Françoise N. Hamlin, 'Historians and Ethics: Finding Anne Moody', *The American Historical Review*, 125 (2020), 487-497.

[24] Mongane Wally Serote (b.8 May 1944-) was born in Sophiatown and educated at Morris Isaacson and Sacred Heart Commercial School in Lesotho. He published his first poetry collection, *Yahal'Inkomo* in 1972. In 1974 was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to Columbia University. Graduating with an MFA in 1979, Serote moved to London in the 1980s, where he worked for the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture.

the eve of the uprising that he has been rendered voiceless.[25] Molope is ultimately rescued from a form of social death by participating in the uprising, one man's life journey from desolation to revolutionary hope an allegory for South Africa's political journey. But whether or not Molope was right to find a voice in the struggle (and writers like Serote debated the place of political narratives in their fiction fiercely), it is clear that not everyone found their way.[26]

Let us return to the famous photograph of Hector Pieterson one last time. Of the four people involved in that photograph, Pieterson's fate is most apparent. By the time Mbuyisa Makhubo carried Pieterson to the backseat of the journalists' waiting Volkswagen Beetle, Pieterson was likely already dead, the end of any chance he had of telling his history. What of the others? Sam Nzima, the photographer, was soon hounded by police and forced into internal exile, taking up residence in a small village near Nelspruit. Cut adrift he sunk into depression, angry that the picture that made Soweto famous across the world had left him penniless and uprooted. Mbuyisa Makhubo's life was no less troubled. On the morning of 16 June it happened to be Makhubo's fate to be visiting his grandmother when the shootings started. To escape the tempest Makhubo first sought refuge in Durban. When Durban proved insufficient distance he crept back into Soweto in August, was handed some money from his mother, leaving for Botswana. From Botswana, Makhubo left for Nigeria. And from there, no one knows. In 1996, Mbuyisa's mother pleaded for information about her son as she sat before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Nombulelo had not heard from him since 1978. If her son was dead, she said she at least wanted to know.[27] No hard information followed. Then in 2014 a curious story broke in the *Toronto Star*. It was reported that a man by the name of Victor Vinnetou, held in a Canadian detention centre for ten years, might in fact be Makhubu. The South African government began arranging

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[25] Wally Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1983). Serote's novel is among a number of fictional treatments. See also Mbulelo Mzamane, *The Children of Soweto: A Trilogy* (Harlow: Longman, 1987); Sipho Sepamla, *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (London: Heinemann, 1984). For commentary on these novels see Aubrey Mokadi, *Narrative as Creative History: The 1976 Soweto Uprising as Depicted in Black South African Novels* (Johannesburg: Sedibeng Publishing House, 2003); and Kelwyn Sole, 'Authorship, Authenticity and the Black Community: The Novels of Soweto 1976', in Stephen Clingman (ed.), *Regions and Repertoires: Topics in South African Politics and Culture* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 2017 [1991]), 178-222.

[26] For two important contributions to the debate on politics' relationship to fiction, see Njabulo S. Ndebele, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12 (1986), 143-157; and Albie Sachs, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines', *TDR*, 35 (1991), 187-193.

[27] Nombulelo Elizabeth Makhubo, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Human Rights Violations, Johannesburg, 30 April 1996.

repatriation. But either a DNA test failed to establish the man's true identity, or the man refused to cooperate with the authorities and the story quietly died.[28] Of the four only Hector Pieterson's sister, Antoinette, carried on living in Soweto. Today Antoinette Sithole gives tours at the Hector Pieterson Museum in Orlando West. On a heritage website she is quoted as saying: 'At first I could not talk about it, but I am part and parcel of the story. I now feel honoured and proud to talk about our history.'[29] In one of the shiny new institutions of post-apartheid remembrance, Antoinette found her voice.[30] But finding that voice was not easy, and the fates of the other three are reminders of how easily people were swept away by history. There is one last lesson. Historians are sometimes heard speaking of their desire to recover the lost voices of the past, a noble if often difficult quest. But while historians are sometimes able to recover the lost voices of the past, we are hopelessly lost when the people whose histories we want to tell lost their voice. For far too many people who lived in Soweto during the years of apartheid, that was what happened. It is the point at which we reach our limits as historians. And it is before the great silences that fill the past where we reach our end here.

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[28] 'Could this man in Canadian jail be South Africa's missing anti-apartheid icon?', *Toronto Star*, 12 November 2013. Melissa Levin and Andrea Meeson, 'What happened to Mbuyisa Makhubu?' *Africa is a Country*, 15 November 2013. https://africasacountry.com/2013/11/what-happened-to-mbuyisa-makhubo (14 March 2022). 'Finding Mbuyisa Makhubu, the June 16 1976 hero', *Mail & Guardian*, 12 June 2014.

[29] As quoted in Lucille Davie, 'Hector's sister tells story still', *The Heritage Portal*, 10 June 2020. http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/hectors-sister-tells-story-still (8 March 2022).

[30] On post-apartheid memorialisation, see Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

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