

Commemoration, Memory and Monuments in the Contested Language of Black Liberation: The South African Experience

by

Ali Khangela Hlongwane
Chief Curator, Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum
Dube, South Africa
AliH@joburg.org.za.

Abstract

In the last thirty years, the June 16, 1976 student uprisings have been commemorated in various ways. The commemorations have taken the form of expression of grief, loss and the will to continue pursuing the liberation project in South Africa. These processes of commemoration have over the years been characterised by tradition, change and continuity. Underpinning the characteristics of tradition, change and continuity is a feature of memory as a site of struggle for liberation and ideological contestation amongst those engaging in the struggle for liberation.

This struggle on the one hand took the form of political mobilisation against apartheid colonialism and on the other hand took the form of competition for ideological hegemony among the former liberation movements. All this was within the context of the pre-1994 political order that was bent on demonising the meaning, significance and legacy of the 1976 uprisings and in some instances even attempted to erase its memory from the popular consciousness and as public history without success.

The 1980s saw the memory of the uprisings being continually contested and at the same time taking new forms of tangible and intangible public re-representations. The new forms of tangible memorialisation and re-representation would later be re-imagined as tourism attractions or destinations. The latter introduced further metamorphosis of commemoration turned into monument(al) re-representation concerned with the post 1994 'national interest' to create jobs and develop local economies using the heritage of the liberation struggle side by side with the public pressures and national and public interests in symbolic reparations and social justice.

Introduction

The memorialisation of the June 16, 1976 Soweto student uprisings remains a burning question in South African public life. On the thirtieth anniversary of this commemoration the Sunday Times -a lead national newspaper- begs an answer to this pertinent question:

So how best do we thank those girls and boys who, armed only with stones, took on a mighty state? Do we put up monuments in their honour? Do we compose heroic poems about their valour? Name public institutions after them and their deeds...?

or

The way to honour them is to realise their dream of creating a just and decent society. (Editor; 2006; 38)

It can be argued that since the advent of the post-1994 political order, South Africa, has been in the grip of a “memory boom” (Liddington and Smith; 2005). These are the “physical markers of past violence and repression” (Hamber and Wilson; 1999) and memories of struggles for liberation. This “arena of societal struggles over memory” (Hamber and Wilson; 1999) has manifested itself in various ways, ranging from the popular annual commemorations of Human Rights Day on March 21, formerly known as Heroes Day or Sharpeville Day; Freedom Day on April 27; Workers Day on May 1; National Youth Day on June 16, previously Soweto Day; Women’s Day on August 9; Heritage Day on September 24 and the Day of Reconciliation on December 16, which in the past was commemorated as Dingaan’s Day by some South Africans and the Day of the Vow by others. Seleti, a heritage specialist and academic assert that:

... the instituting of national holidays that commemorate significant milestones in the struggle for freedom in South Africa helps the nation to appreciate the importance of history, heritage and memory in the crafting of the present and future of this country. It attempts to counteract amnesia as the basis for nation-building. (Seleti; 2006; 6)

Alongside the commemoration of national days has been the emergence of a number of museums, among them the Robben Island Museum a site with multiple layers of history but, known world wide for the incarceration of political prisoners and has been declared a world heritage site; the District Six Museum a site for the memory of forced removals particularly of the people of District Six; the Apartheid Museum; the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum, which commemorates the June 16 1976 Soweto student uprisings; Constitution Hill on the site of former notorious No 4 prison and also home of South Africa's Constitutional Court; the Red Location Museum of Struggle in Port Elizabeth; the Sharpeville Exhibition Centre and Monument on the site of the shooting in 1960 on marchers in the PAC led Positive Action Campaign against the Pass Laws; and Freedom Park a massive memory project responding to one of the Truth And Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls for symbolic reparations.

There have also been a number of community initiatives to erect monuments and memorials, partly as a reaction to being marginalised by state initiatives. Among these is a Pan Africanist Congress of Azania monument in Mamelodi dedicated to more than 60 PAC/Poqo operatives hanged between 1963 and 1965 who to this day lie buried in unmarked graves. Other initiatives include reburials to honour the sacrifices and heroic acts of the liberation struggle, and to initiate processes "of opening for bereavement, addressing trauma and ritualising symbolic closure" (Hamber & Wilson; 1999; 4).

In various parts of the country, streets, buildings and stadiums are being renamed in the face of heated debates and contestation including challenges through public protests, petitions and court cases (Flanagan; 2006). The debates and contestation mirror the political cleavages of the past whilst ushering new tensions. The new state sees the re-imagining of public memory and history as part of the process of transforming the South African society from the old apartheid colonial order to reflect a new democratic society. However, the views of the new state on what constitute the public history of a new society are pitted against those of other former liberation movements who are now part of the opposition. Though they agree in principle that the names of streets, cities and towns including that of the country should be changed, they nonetheless argue that currently, the change of names is used more to harness the hegemony of the ruling party whilst neglecting and undermining the contributions of other former liberation movements who are equally part of the rich tradition of struggle. The latter further argue that the ruling party assumes that it is the state. And therefore the state machinery is used for party political ends (Pheko; Sizani; 1996).

There is also the new state and those who consider themselves to have lost political power with the advent of a democratic South Africa. The most vocal are sections of the Afrikaner community. This section of the Afrikaner community is of the view that, Afrikaans place names are being erased and their language is under threat.

Similar sentiments are also heard from the province of KwaZulu-Natal where the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) the former ruling elite of the then Kwazulu-Natal homeland. Among all former African political formations that collaborated with the Apartheid state, the IFP is the only one that survived and re-invented itself, thus the claims for representation in public history their 'contribution' to the liberation struggle.

This paper intends to investigate and facilitate better understanding of this significant but contested aspect of memory-making. Earlier, this process was referred to as "the arena of societal struggles over memory". It can also be understood as "a conversation that the present has with the past. This conversation with the past includes several voices in the present arguing about exactly what kind of past actually existed" (Seleti; 2006; 6). It can also be understood as a process of asking deeper questions on whether there can be quick fixes in resolving tensions born of conflicts of the past; it gives rise to myriad processes of reflection and public debate on how far should people go in acknowledging complicity and guilt as well as expressing their hurt about the past as well as what medium should be used to re-imagine that past. Indeed Lohman notes that, 'dialogue and spaces to speak are particularly important in countries that have repressed the stories of others...' (Lohman; 2006; 12).

There are also many new projects to address the re-representations of the past in books. For instance the South African History Project from 2001 to 2004 published various books as an educational project to co-inside with the year of freedom as well the various volumes published by the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) a presidential project driven by the assumption that...Indeed, in many respects these history projects are adding new layers to the history of South Africa taking advantage of the availability of hitherto inaccessible archives of the formerly banned liberation movements and their exiled members.

Equally, the history of the Soweto student uprisings and how they flared up in various parts of the country, as well as their role in injecting new life and energy into the exiled liberation movements-the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA). The uprisings have also inspired the production of plays including the Broadway musical- *Sarafina* by Mbongeni Ngema. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) alone marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Soweto uprisings by commissioning some eight documentaries on the subject.

The memory boom and its physical markers are premised on a number of assumptions relating to the significance of public history and the collective memory in a new or emergent society. These assumptions gathered impetus as a result of attempts to legitimise the post-1994 South African political landscape.

This required that the historical imbalances that characterised South Africa's erstwhile colonial heritage landscape, particularly with regard to the representation of the African experiences, be redressed. Indeed, it has been noted in the museum sector that as early "... as 1985, curatorial professionals in South Africa were undertaking a critical re-examination of its museums, those "bastions of ideology", with its monolithic representation of the white population's hegemony over its native and indigenous populations" (Denver; 1994).

The transformation of established museums and the erection of new museums and sites of memory in post-1994 South Africa also involved grappling with possibilities to open up spaces and asserting the right of voices that had not been heard to tell their stories. However, this is neither a linear nor a problem-free process. Rather, it is a process that gives rise to controversies over the very past that is being brought to the centre of the "new" society. There are controversies about how that past is recalled, and how such information is being used. According to (Brundage) "by definition, collective memory involves sharing, discussion, negotiation, and often conflict". This process represents two opposite poles in a given society. On the one hand, there are the dominant classes who want "to construct memory as a unified, static and collective object" (Hamber and Wilson; 1999; 1). On the other hand, there are those sections of society who see memory "as a political practice, or as a struggle over the representation of the past that will continue to be vigorously contested". (Hamber and Wilson: 1999) The actors in these processes are not equals. As a result, "power and authority" (Brundage) comes into play. This power and authority assign "levels of significance" (Brundage) to history and memory, and in some instances, it induces silence.

In the broader societal landscape, museums, historic sites and memorials are seen as a potent force in the creation of a new national consciousness – that is, South Africa's own "imagined" (Benedict) new nation. According to General Masondo, a former commander of the ANC Military Wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, "before 1994 we did not have a nation; it is only after that date that South Africa became a nation" (Quoted in Seleti; 2006; 6). To Masondo the traits of the new "imagined" South African nation is the founding of the "New South Africa" after the first democratic elections in 1994. However, another trait, that of "a commonly shared humanity and freedom is unattainable without reconciliation, which ultimately builds one South African nation." (Serote; 2006; 1) This "new" nation is, on the one hand, rooted in the notion of a society that knows the truth about its painful past and has taken the bold steps necessary to effect reconciliation. According to Hamber and Wilson:

... the idea of dealing with the past through a national truth commission ascribes a collective identity to a nation, and assumes that nations have psyches which experience traumas similar to individuals. (Therefore) ... the pursuit of national unity is a unitary and coherent process, and the national processes of dealing with the past and individual processes are largely concurrent and equivalent. Thus a national process of uncovering and remembering the past is said to allow the country to develop a common and shared memory, and in so doing, creates a sense of unity and reconciliation for its people. (Hamber and Wilson; 1999; 1)

Given the complex nature of any given society, the notion of reconciliation has not been embraced by all sections of South African society. One dissenting view is that reconciliation in the South African context also means the acceptance of the historical injustice of dispossession and the place of the dispossessed with their lot at the bottom of the socio-economic rung because organising and speaking out against the latter state of affairs will offset reconciliation. Yet another view sees reconciliation, particularly as emerging from the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as distorting the history of the liberation struggle. Luvuyo Kulman (...), a former operative of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the military wing of the PAC argued thus: 'The TRC is there to distort our history. The TRC is there to give a deformation of our actions as if we were barbaric.'

On the flip side is what (Marschall; 2006; 147) calls the foundation myth. According to (Assman quoted in Marschall; 2006; 148), a myth "is any past that has been (or is being) fixed and internalised as foundational history." In the South African context, (Marschall; 2006; 148) writes:

...one of the foundation myths of the "new" South Africa is the "Struggle" – the anti-apartheid struggle for liberation and the historical struggle against all forms of colonial oppression and discrimination.

However, the struggle for liberation in South Africa that has given rise to the foundation myth was not homogenous. It was for many years a diverse movement. On many occasions this diversity turned to struggles for political hegemony of this diverse liberation struggle. The struggle for political hegemony later transformed into political intolerance and even conflict. This conflict played itself on one major national day- the day to commemorate the 1976 Soweto uprisings.

While there is talk of reconciliation and triumph of the struggle as the foundation of the “new” society, there has been an absence of any national attempt to address the history of polarisation and political intolerance among the former liberation movements. This, is in spite of the fact that their histories are in many respects linked to the Soweto uprisings through their underground networks, the interactions of the class of 1976 with veterans of the banned liberation movements, and the fact that majority of the class of 1976 later joined the ranks of the banned liberation movements internally and in exile.

This state of affairs continues to have a great impact on how the uprisings are remembered and re-represented as collective memory. The unintended consequences are that the memory and place of the June 16 1976 uprisings in South Africa’s political consciousness is probably the most contested societal arena of memory and a representative platform of memory and history as dialogue about the past and present. Further, because of contestation, the memory of the June 16 1976 Soweto uprisings is also characterised by tradition and change, that is, constant change in its commemoration and multiple topographies of monuments.

Politicians and government officials also see heritage as a potent force for job creation and local economic development. This view is given credibility by the fact that places like Soweto have developed a fair share of bed and breakfast facilities, traders in craft and tour guides as a result of the boom of tourism. However, the political economy of tourism tends to privilege concerns about how to attract foreign visitors in big numbers, and deals less with providing a service to communities who are the subject of the “attraction”. The question of civic engagement, the challenges of symbolic reparations, and dealing with closure or coming to terms with the painful past recede into the background.

Certainly, the history of the Soweto student uprisings and how they spread to various parts of the country, as well as their role in injecting new life and energy to exiled liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Black Consciousness Movement have been widely documented in the past 30 years. Some of this literature is reviewed later in this research proposal. Although this study is yet another contribution to the body of writings on the June 16 1976 Soweto student uprisings, its contribution focuses on how the uprisings have been variously commemorated, remembered and memorialised as public history during the past 30 years. The study investigates the various ways and forms through which the June 16 1976 Soweto student uprisings have been commemorated in the past 30 years and how the commemoration and memorialisation of the Soweto uprisings have provided space for public discourse and dialogue.

Any attempts to unpack and understand the various processes of commemorating and memorialising the June 16, 1976 Soweto uprisings and their inherent feature of contestation and counter-commemoration in the past 30 years requires a critical reflection on the role of political mobilisation and agitation during night vigils, political funerals and commemorations following the outbreak of the uprisings. These processes led to the emergence of the political formations and identities with overt links to the formerly banned liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA). Consequently, the underground and overt re-emergence of these formations defined the very nature of commemoration and memorialisation.

Night Vigils and Political Funerals as a Platform for Mobilising the Unfolding Liberation Struggle

The memorialisation and commemoration of the June 16, 1976 Soweto student uprisings were held annually in the country from 1977, particularly (but not exclusively) at Regina Mundi Church in Soweto. In 1978, the commemoration practice continued under the auspices of the Soweto Action Committee (SAC) and the Soweto Student's League (SSL) (Makobane; 1978). The commemoration of the Soweto uprisings was then characterised by calls from student leaders to sporting bodies, shebeens and showbiz organisers to close operations as part of the mourning process. In 1978, such businesses were asked to close shop from 12 noon to 2 pm on June 16. Workers were also called upon to pledge their solidarity by staying away from work on that day. The Soweto Student's League also went to the extent of appealing to people throughout the country to abstain from any kind of merrymaking (Makobane; 1978). Sam Mhangwane, who was then a producer for the People's Theatre Association, was recorded calling off all engagements of his theatre company, saying:

This is a period of mourning for blacks throughout the country and obviously nobody expects there should be any kind of fanfare. (Makobane; 14 June 1978)

A number of other groups followed suit. *The Post* of June 14 1978 reported that, “the Transvaal Amateur Dance Association, which controls many dance schools and clubs in the Transvaal, also cancelled activities” (Makobane; 1978). This reflected the respect people had towards the day of June 16 and how it was a day for political mobilisation that continued for the whole year and included calls for a Black Christmas by the Soweto Students’ Representative Council (SSRC).

Hector Pieterse, who is believed to have been the first student, or among the first¹ students, to be killed by the police, and whose image was captured in what became the “era’s defining image” (Alfred; 1999) became the symbolic representation of all victims of police killings as a result of the student uprisings. A wreath-laying ceremony was held at his gravesite in 1978 before people congregated at Regina Mundi Church to remember and commemorate the killings (Mokobane; 1978).

The early commemoration initiatives were an all-embracing forum of mourning and remembrance of an experience that was still marked by raw wounds on the part of the majority who attended these services. To many it was a moment to express collective grief and resilience; it was also a very personal experience, as many still had fresh memories of being teargassed and assaulted by the police; of seeing people shot at under cruel circumstances; of losing a brother or a sister, a close friend or a relative; and knowing of people languishing in prison or having left the country to an unknown world of exile. Tseko Tshehlana recalls:

\

I remember vividly well that around two o’clock on the 16th of June was when I knew that something was wrong. And what made me to know these things was the shootings that were taking place; I was ducking some bullets next to Ipelegeng. One important thing about that particular day was when I first saw the human muscles of the hand. There was a boy who was shot next to me, I saw him watching with disbelief his muscles there, and there was nothing I could do but to jump into the yard and take cover and watch things as they were unfolding in front of me. I had known that boy for quite some time, he stayed next to the Salvation Army in White City, but there was nothing I could do because I had to also run to save my own skin. (*Tseko Tshehlana; 2006; interview*)

The imperatives of political mobilisation played a critical role in shaping the way June 16 was remembered. This took place at night vigils for those killed as a result of political activity. One activist, who was only 19 years of age when the uprisings burst onto the South African political landscape, recalls how his political consciousness was shaped and developed as a result of attending night vigils and political funerals:

The night vigils were very significant. You will remember that after June 16 until 1978, virtually every weekend there was a political funeral. And at that time we did not only attend political funerals, we went to night vigils. Night vigils were a place where we met leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement who knew about these particular things. And they would come and give a perspective to us. What is happening and all those things ... the Bible was put aside and people were talking about *Sechaba* (Nation)... *Sechaba seyashwa* (the nation is dying). And they also used to call us Ma Africa. (*Tseko Tshehlana; 2006; interview*)

Afrikaans, which had sparked the uprisings, was not the focus of the various speakers during the night vigils. According to Tshehlana (2006), they spoke mainly about the rate of deaths and about the broader struggle. The leaders who addressed these night vigils did not argue for ideological identity, just as they were themselves not easily categorised into ideological boxes. The people who spoke at some of the night vigils were Ntate Mathews, Aubrey Mokoena, Frank Chikane, Amanda Kwadi and Kenneth Rachidi, among others (Tshehlana; 2006).

Clearly, commemoration side by side with the continuing killings and police harassment meant that the key feature of these early reflections and commemoration processes was characterised by the theme and practice of unity in the struggle. These commemorations were characterised by continuous defiance of an illegitimate political order. Salim Valley and Mandla Seloane (2006) point out: "... for many years we braved the teargas and armed cordons around key commemorations sites like Regina Mundi". Further, people known for their different ideological persuasions and "underground" political linkages assembled to remember the fallen heroes of 1976 and to reaffirm their commitment to the pursuit of the unfolding freedom struggle.

New Topographies of Memorialisation: The Head Stones

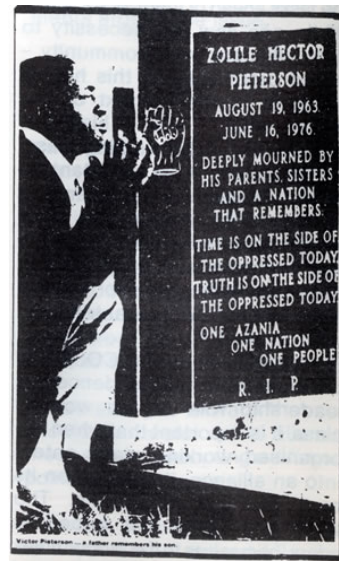
In the 1980s, new forms of commemoration and memorialisation emerged. This involved the construction of a tombstone for Hector Pieterse at Avalon Cemetery. This was carried out by the Azanian National Youth Unity (Azanyu), an internal wing of the then banned PAC. The tombstone was unveiled on December 16, 1981.

According to one Azanyu activist, the tombstone was erected because “the question of commemoration services (was) an issue that had become monotonous, hence we came up with an idea of erecting a tombstone for Hector Pieterse” (Mthimunyane; 1983). The Azanyu activist went on to argue that:

This tombstone is a dedication to the memory of all those who fell on June 16 1976. They will be remembered as heroes and heroines who followed the tradition of our struggle – BRAVERY AND DETERMINATION. This tombstone will also serve as an inspiration to the youth and be a constant reminder that the STRUGGLE CONTINUES. (Mthimunyane; 1983; 6)



Figure 1



The tombstone of Hector Pieterse, as reflected in the two images above, was influenced by the general practice of erecting headstones for loved ones found in graveyards around the country. Although its creation was a political act, as Hector was seen as a symbol of youth sacrifice for the struggle, the gravestone was similar to the headstones in most graveyards, save for the inscription. The inscription was an expression of loss on the part of his family, as well as a collective expression of grief, remembrance and determination to continue the struggle. It may have been this broader collective expression of struggle that led to its vandalism by unknown people shortly after its erection.²

In this era of commemoration, characterised by political mobilisation, the ideological divide was still subtle and unity in the struggle prevailed. Activists who continued to attend night vigils, political funerals and commemorations had respect for leaders like Dr Ntatho Motlana, Dr Naboath Ntshunsha, Zeph Mothopeng, Winnie Mandela, Dr Matlare and Manas Buthelezi, who were speakers on a number of occasions. This unity was further manifest in the fact that people from different schools of political thought attended the funeral of Steve Biko at Ginsberg in 1977, and that of Mangaliso Sobukwe at Graaf Reinet in 1978. The leaders associated with the banned organisations spoke at these funerals and used slogans and to some extent the “symbolic repertoire” (Lodge; 1988) that reflected their party political identities. This continued to be the case with the deaths of Laurence Nzana, Wellington Tshazibane and Dr Naboath Ntshunsha. Their death and subsequent burials were rallying points by people across the political spectrum. This state of affairs, characterised by political tolerance and unity in action, would change at the beginning of 1979 after the founding of the Azanian People’s Organisation (Azapo).

Political Party-Oriented Ideological Re-alignments

One critical development, particularly after the funeral of Sobukwe in 1978, was the founding of the Azanian People’s Organisation (Azapo). In spite of the fact that individuals with leanings towards the Congress or Africanist tradition attended the launch, the latter began to represent Black Consciousness as an ideology and a political formation independent of the Congress Movement and the Africanist tradition. The Congress movement, on the other hand, went on to form the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) in 1979. According to Tsehlana:

... the mandate of the formation of Cosas was to revive the so-called progressive movement aligned to the so-called Charterist Movement. Cosas was to ...set up community-based organisations and rally them around the Freedom Charter. (*Tseko Tsehlana; 2006; interview*)

As a result of these developments, a number of activists began to promote either the Freedom Charter, Black Consciousness ideology or Africanist ideology during commemorations of events like the June 16 1976 uprisings. The Africanists were also working behind the scenes preparing to launch an Africanist youth formation, which was launched as the Azanian National Youth Unity (Azanyu) in 1980.

A number of founding members of Azanyu – most of whom were student activists at the time of the uprisings – are of the view that its formation was a result of a directive from Nyati Pokela, then leader of the external wing of the PAC. In his address at the plenary session of the PAC held in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, Poleka stated that his office had received communication from Joe Mkwanazi, the then administrative secretary of the PAC, making him aware of a PAC document setting out reasons for the establishment of a youth movement. He responded by saying: “I personally recommend forthwith the establishment of the Azanian Youth Movement without delay” (Pokela; 1983). In time, these formations would begin to commemorate and memorialise the uprisings along party political lines.

The ideological contradictions started widening and turning into division and conflict in the 1980s. As it had happened, a number of early 1970s activists were released from Robben Island. Some, like Eric Molobi, Terror Lekota, Frank Chikane and Amos Masondo, had been arrested for Black Consciousness activities, but while on Robben Island had converted to the Congress Movement. Molobi, in particular, played a major role in moving Azaso (Azanian Students Organisation) which was a Black Consciousness student formation, and had been formed in 1979, to adopt the Freedom Charter. Saki Macozoma, who was also with the Black Consciousness Movement and converted to the Congress Movement on Robben Island, writes:

Eric arrived on Robben Island in 1976 and I and a group of 30 students arrived, from kwa-Zakhele High School in January 1977. We had something in common – our political consciousness had been shaped by Black Consciousness. We found ourselves in a microcosmic world of South Africa’s political and ideological traditions, and our BC philosophy and tactical positions on how to uproot apartheid were greatly challenged. We soon learned the importance of intellectual rigour in the defence of one’s philosophical and political views. (*Macozoma; 2006*)

In the process, notes Macozoma:

Soon we came to terms with the fact that BC was not adequate as a philosophical reference point in our struggle to defeat apartheid. (*Macozoma; 2006*)

The Black Consciousness Movement had to be broken and Molobi was to engineer this agenda. Macozoma recalls:

Eric was critical of our strategy to influence as many BC adherents as possible to cross the Rubicon into the realm of congress alliance politics. Eric was so committed to the “conversion” project that he agreed to join the Azanian People’s Organisation on his release from Robben Island in 1980, in order to ensure that the transition from BC to congress politics happened on a large scale. (*Macozoma; 2006*)

Ideological divide also became manifest in cynical remarks that the adherents of the various schools of thought made about each other. For instance, the adherents of the Freedom Charter would ridicule Black Consciousness adherents with statements like “You guys want everything black. Soon you will want a black Coalgate” (Tshehlana; 2006) In turn, adherents of Black Consciousness and Africanists would ridicule the followers of the Freedom Charter saying its armed struggle was aimed at “blowing dustbins, empty toilets and electric poles” (Tshehlana; 2006). These were to lead to tensions resulting in some activists beginning to express reservations in sharing the political platform with those they now considered as their opponents. Subsequently, seating arrangements at Regina Mundi Church began to be along party political lines. Tsehlana recalls:

... you will find the Charterists sitting that other side. You can identify them by [their] songs. We [Charterists] needed Regina Mundi because that’s where the crowds would assemble. (*Tseko Tshehlana; 2006; interview*)

Around 1980, ideological shifts were very clear and began to tamper with the unity that the uprisings had inspired. Around this time the ANC sent a unit of its military wing (including among others Barney Molokwana) to bomb Sasol. The impact of this act was acknowledged even by media that was hostile to the liberation project. In July 1980, *RSA World* wrote:

On the night of Sunday 1, the most spectacular act of sabotage in South Africa occurred when an attack was made on storage tanks and plant at the country's massive oil-from-coal undertaking, Sasol.
(*RSA World, July 1980*)

Tsehlana recounts the impact that this act had on commemorations at Regina Mundi Church:

Sasol was bombed before June 16, I mean before the 16th of June. When we went to Regina Mundi we were armed now. A song was composed especially to go and boast to the BC and the Africanist camp.

*Nans' I Sasolburg ivuth' umlilo
abafana bo Mkhonto bayishaye izolo
Oyaya! Jealous down*

(There is Sasolburg in flames
MK boys have hit it
Jealous down)

When we say jealous down, we look at those other ones and ask, what do you have to offer? And at that time that was the down of toyi toyi-slogan, we called it slogan, which was led by other comrades like Murphy. When we were singing that side, Haw! Haw! PAC and Black Consciousness didn't have anything like that. The impact of mobilisation saw a lot of people coming to join the song and going back to that side (laughs) of those other ones. And the speeches right out there, there was no way a person could miss the impact of armed struggle and begin to associate armed struggle with the ANC. (*Tseko Tshehlana; 2006; interview*)

Organs of the apartheid colonial administration would be watching proceedings from a distance and the political competition in the church meant nothing to them. The commemorations at Regina Mundi would inevitably end in conflict. Police would gather every year in a spot opposite the Regina Mundi church armed with guns and teargas canisters.³ As the commemorations neared the end, tension would build up inside the hall. Church leaders would plead with the mourners to exercise restraint in the midst of provocation by the police presence. They would be asked not to provoke the police in return. The church leaders would also plead with the police, who were obviously not interested in what was being said, but rather to disperse the mourners as quick as they possibly could.

Popular chants that would echo inside the church would be a call: *Niyabesaba Na!* (Are you afraid of them) and the popular response would be: *Hayi asibesabi siyabafuna!* (No we are not afraid of them, we want them!). Using a loud hailer, police would make their infamous demand that the hundreds of people gathered in the church should disperse in a few minutes. They would then immediately act by spraying people with teargas, assaulting people with baton charges and setting their dogs upon them.

State Repression

Indeed, state power was used to suppress commemoration and memorialisation. Poppy Buthelezi, a former student at Sekano Ntoane in Soweto, who participated in the march and student protests and got shot at the age of 16, recalled in an interview with a daily newspaper that:

The day was not recognised by the apartheid government, but we defied it. We would organise commemorative services and the police would disrupt them with their sjamboks and teargas. But we continued to remember our dead with dignity (Mphaki; 2001).

The political establishment of the time tried every method to intimidate people into not commemorating the 1976 uprisings. For instance, the build up to June 16 1985 saw soldiers on horseback stationed around Soweto and neighbouring townships. Journalist Mandla Ndlazi wrote:

Since earlier this week, the soldiers and their horses have been on exercises, moving outside Soweto, Lenasia and Eldorado Park and led by a “guide”. *Sowetan Sunday Mirror* found a herd of horses at the Protea Police Station on Wednesday. Their handlers, soldiers in uniform, were also in the yard of the police station. Brigadier G Murphy, the army commander on the Witwatersrand, said the cavalry was on a “routine training exercise around Soweto” (Ndlazi; 1985).

When police intimidation did not work, the establishment went on to accuse the foreign media of allegedly influencing unrest. The police and pro-establishment newspapers like the *Citizen* and *Die Vaderland* went on to allege that the June 16 of 1981 was peaceful until the foreign media took positions outside Regina Mundi Church (de villiers; 1981.) On 18 June 1981, a newspaper reported the following about Leon Mellet, a lieutenant colonel who was head of the Directorate of Public Relations at police headquarters:

He had approached foreign television teams who had taken up position outside Regina Mundi Church. Col Mellet politely requested them to keep their cameras out of sight as they attracted the blacks (de Villiers; 1981).

Political Party-Oriented Ideological Re-alignments turn into Sectarianism

In spite of the intransigence of the police and the establishment, the spirit of unity did not last that long. With the banned movements having improved the organisation of their underground networks and operating sophisticated networks internally, the struggle for political hegemony of the liberation project became manifest in the commemorations of various incidents in the history of the liberation struggle, like Sharpeville Day and the June 16 uprisings. Indeed, by the late 1980s, commemorations would be along party-political lines. Thabo Leshilo (2006) writes:

... the yearly June 16 commemoration services were held along partisan lines. If you believed in the ANC's Freedom Charter you attended a UDF service; if you swore by the BCM and the Azanian Manifesto you went to an Azapo rally. And, if you were Pan Africanist, as espoused by Robert Sobukwe, you attended services organised by the internal organs of the PAC. Though one could be cynical and argue that people were spoilt for choice, it was sad to see how June 16 had lost its unifying quality of the early 1980s. The services had become platforms for denouncing political rivals.

In addition to remembering the fallen, delivering heated speeches about the continued suffering under the yoke of the apartheid colonial system and calling for the release of political prisoners, the freedom fighters would also turn on each other viciously. Leshilo (2006) further notes:

Azapo would blast the ANC for selling out the country to whites; the ANC would dismiss the BCM as a spent force and gloat over its ascendancy in political fortunes; the PAC would depict itself as the purest liberation movement and the true custodian of pan-Africanism. You could even be attacked for choosing to attend the "wrong" commemoration service amid all the internecine violence of those days.

The rise of political intolerance, which later led to conflict between activists adhering to various schools of political thought, also gave rise to cynicism about the commemoration of the Soweto uprisings. Journalist Sam Mabe wrote:

What will happen at commemoration services to be held across the nation is predictable. We will recall the introduction of Bantu education and events leading to the unrest of 1976. We will condemn the authorities for imposing an unacceptable system of education on us. We'll denounce the police for killing innocent and unarmed children. We'll also denounce our political rivals. (Mabe quoted in Leshilo; 2006)

The political tempo of the late 1980s saw the founding of the United Democratic Front in 1983. With the formation of the UDF Congress-aligned political expression assumed a more hegemonic form. To the left of the UDF was the emergence of a National Forum representing the Africanist and the Black consciousness tendency as well as a number of socialist groupings. Though this formation did not have a mass appeal of the same magnitude as the UDF, it nonetheless played an important role in keeping the banner of Pan Africanism and Black consciousness as part of the popular consciousness.

Various parts of the country were engulfed by uprisings. At the national level there were four decisive highlights of revolt. Firstly, there was the Vaal uprising, which began in September 1984, sparked by a rent increase announced by the Lekoa Town Council. This uprising led to the deaths of some 31 people. Then there was the nationwide schools boycott. This began in Cradock in 1983 when students protested against the dismissal of Mathew Goniwe, who was a headmaster and leader of the UDF. The schools boycott spread to Pretoria in early 1984 and on to the rest of the country.

The student's struggles were led mainly by Cosas, with lower profile attempts at mobilising by AZASM – representing the Black Consciousness tendency, and later the All African Students Organisation representing the Africanist tendency. These student struggles were centred around demands for the “recognition of elected student representatives councils, an end to sexual harassment of female students and corporal punishment, the release of detained students, and upgrading of educational facilities” (Swilling; 1987; 49).

The Advent of Insurrectionism

Then there was the mass November 1984 worker stay-away in what was then known as the Transvaal. This stay-away saw the emergence of close links between community organisations, student movements and trade unions. It has been noted that these:

.. mass actions mobilised unprecedented numbers of people, and displayed new features, which signalled a turning point in ...black protest. They mobilised all sectors of the township population including youth and older residents; they involved co-ordinated action between trade unions and political organisations; they were called in support of demands that challenged the coercive, urban and educational policies of the apartheid state; and they gave rise to ungovernable areas as state authority collapsed in many townships in the wake of the resignation of black local authority councillors. (*Swilling; 1987; 49*)

The year 1985 can be characterised as a period of urban civil warfare. A state of emergency was declared in July 1985. In a number of areas, organs of civil governance had collapsed and others were unable to operate as a result of mass action and violent opposition. The police and the military began to be used in re-establishing civil government. Their presence took on a permanent presence while other townships became ungovernable.

The youth began to mobilise around quasi-military action squads. Urban guerrilla actions directed at the security forces began to emerge and the military wing of the ANC-MK took on a high profile. On the other hand, the military wing of the PAC-APLA, now led largely by the class of 1976, showed signs of replenishing its presence inside the country.

These developments heightened the competition of the various political tendencies. Around this time there had been internecine violence among the various political organisations waging the struggle for freedom in South Africa. These were, for a while, brought under control for the commemoration of June 16 in 1985. The *Financial Mail* of June 14 1985 reported, "in spite of ideological differences and some warring among their members recently, the United Democratic Front and the rival Azanian People's Organisation came together this week to announce a joint programme to mark June 16 – the anniversary of the 1976 Soweto riots" (*Financial Mail; 1985*).

At a press conference organised jointly by the two organisations, their leaders spoke of their decision to hold a joint UDF-Azapo memorial service. Both organisations were to provide speakers to address the commemoration. Sydney Mafumadi, who is now a minister of Local Government, and Saths Cooper, a former leader of Azapo, were recorded saying that the two organisations:

... have resolved to jointly call upon the people to observe Sunday, June 16, as a day of serious reflection on the events that have led to our country being in the sad, divided and volatile situation it is in today. (Financial Mail; 1985)

They further argued that their co-operation was a “testimony to our commitment to respecting our differences in working towards a free and democratic society” (Financial Mail; 1985). The commemoration service of that year involved the Manyano Women of Soweto who led a procession from Moroka Police Station to Regina Mundi Church. June 16 of 1985 was not only about the memory of those who had lost their lives on that day, but was used to try to heal differences within the now warring components of the broader liberation movement. As the 1990s approached, new dynamics would characterise the memorialisation of the June 16 1976 Soweto student uprisings.

The Advent of a Negotiated Settlement and New Typologies of Memorialisation

The 1990s marked a radical change in memory-making, which saw more tangible forms of memorialisation. Indeed, the 1990s were circumstances marked by the legal re-emergence of liberation movements, the release from prison of political prisoners, the return of many who had been in exile for years, the emergence of the negotiations process, and the subsequent preparations for the first democratic elections in South Africa. In 1992, the African National Congress Youth League erected a cenotaph in Orlando West, not far from where the shooting of Hector Pieterse took place, a stone’s throw from Phomolong Clinic (now Sisulu and Mandela Community clinic) where Pieterse was certified dead, as well as a street away from the home of Mbuyisa Makhubu who was photographed by Sam Nzima lifting the lifeless body of Hector Pieterse and running side by side with Hector’s sister, Antoinette Sithole. The cenotaph declared:

“To honour the youth who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and democracy.”

*

“In memory of Hector Pieterse and all other young heroes and heroines of our struggle who laid down their lives for freedom, peace and democracy.”

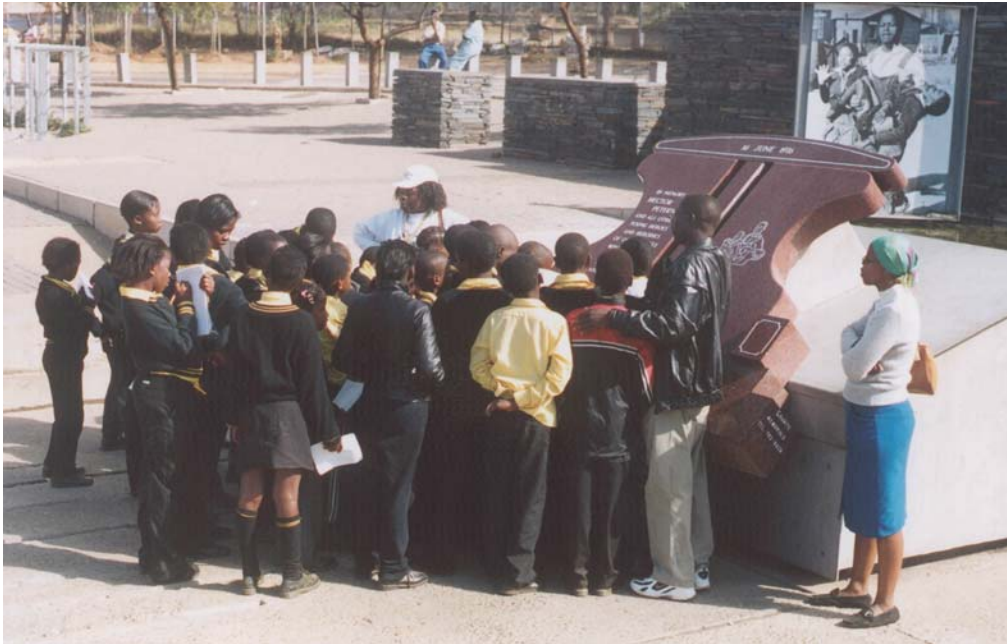


Figure 2

Further, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of June 16, yet another memorial stone was erected at Avalon cemetery, where many who died as a result of the uprisings in Soweto are buried. The message on this stone reads:



EVER NEVER AGAIN
“Dedicated to all those who lost their lives
on this day & there after
20th commemoration
16 June 1976

This memorial stone also feature a poem by Mzwakhe Mbuli paying tribute to contributors across generations.

Youth Uprising – Point of No Return

Further developments of the memorial were in the form of an exhibition of black-and-white photographs to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the uprisings. This exhibition was titled “Youth Uprising – Point of No Return”. It featured the photographs of Peter Magubane, Alf Khumalo, Sam Nzima, Ruth Motau and Bongane Mnguni. It was housed in eleven containers donated by Transnet and curated by Bongsi Dhlomo and Tumi Mosaka under the auspices of the African Institute of Contemporary Art (AICA), which at the time was a project of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council.⁶⁸

It was to be opened for viewing by the public from Sunday June 16 to July 16 1996. The exhibition, like the site itself, proved to be popular with both local and international visitors. In the first two weeks of its inception, it recorded more than 250 visitors per day. At a later stage this number increased to 500 visitors a day. The exhibition, though initially meant as a temporary measure, had to be extended due to public demand. There was also lobbying by the unemployed in the vicinity of the exhibition for the exhibition to be permanent, as it afforded them opportunities to operate small-scale businesses. The visitor's book for the exhibition shows interesting responses by both local and international visitors. The people's responses touched on themes like memory, never again, calls for a permanent memorial, disbelief, and a need to expand on the narrative. (Visitor Book;)

A further development on the site took the form of children's portraits made by artist Marcel Tave of the Reunion Republic. The faces that were depicted on the boards were "rough imaginations of ... artists" (SMLC; 1999). And "at the back of each portrait the artist has written the names of the children and the dates on which they died (SMLC; 1999)." These "billboards" became an integral part of the space where the cenotaph lay and stood prominently facing the east, the direction from which most visitors to the site arrive (SMLC; 1999).

Furthermore, the twenty-fifth anniversary was themed around completing the student march, which had been disrupted by the police in 1976 leading to widespread uprisings. Although students had marched from various schools in 1976, the enactment of the march began at Morris Isaacson High School in Central Western Jabavu. Among the high profile participants was President Thabo Mbeki and former student activists, many now organised as the June 16 Foundation. This marked the commemoration of the uprisings as a public holiday.

National Youth Day as a Public Holiday

On the intangible side of the memory of the uprisings, the proclamation of June 16 as a public holiday looms large. According to Seleti (;7), "June 16 heralds the sacrifices and contributions of the youth to the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. By making the day a national public holiday, the legacy of the June 16 youth rebellion against the apartheid racial policies is popularised and perpetuated". Conversely, a number of contradictions have resulted from this development. It has meant that the memory of 1976 is now a platform for "government speak". In practice, this means the theme and messages used to mark National Youth Day would be an official position of the government.

And all government institutions and government-organised commemorations would have to be held under that uniform theme. All government communication in the form of posters, leaflets and booklets would reflect that theme. Indeed, we have a situation where “the dominant political party [has] put resources into memorialising its particular narrative” (Nieftagodien quoted in Naidoo; 2004) of the uprisings.

Government-organised commemorations would feature a strong line-up of popular music, particularly Kwaito,⁴ leading to debates and accusations that the day has been trivialised and its dignity as a day of service and suffering for liberation lost. The use of Kwaito is mainly a means to fill stadiums. This raises questions on whether the memory of 1976 is fading from popular consciousness, particularly among the youth. However, the real bone of contention is the nature of Kwaito music and its content, which inevitably transforms the day of commemoration into a wild party. Also, there have been reports of drunkenness among youngsters partaking in these commemoration activities (Vally et al; 2006). This behaviour has been interpreted in different ways. To some, it shows disinterest by the youth in issues of the past, and politics in particular.

Others argue that the blame should lie squarely with the government. According to Poppy Buthelezi, “our children no longer understand the real meaning of June 16 ... Instead of the day being commemorated in a dignified and solemn way, it has been turned into a day of celebration” (Mphaki; 2001). The idea of celebration that Buthelezi takes issue with is the use of Kwaito music and the general conduct of youths who, together with Kwaito musicians, turn the day into an occasion of meaningless music and dancing during the largely government-organised commemorations. Buthelezi further argues that the government, which is the principal organiser, is equally responsible for this state of affairs, which in her view is “undermining and insulting our painful history” (Mphaki; 2001). She further argues that “June 16 should remain a day of commemoration ... it should be a solemn day when we recall the courage of the youth and the revolutionary manner in which they pursued the struggle” (Mphaki; 2001).

The call for dignity in remembering and commemorating the uprisings is, in essence, nostalgia for the period when the memory of the uprisings was an integral part of the unfolding liberation project against the system of settler colonialism. Under these circumstances, commemoration was characterised by dignity and symbolism. The dignity and symbolism of the day was manifest in the dress code reflecting a period of mourning and commemoration. Young people would either be in their school uniforms, which identified them with the schools they were attending until the time of the uprising. Others would dress in black and white.

Black in particular was, for a long time, a widely accepted colour of mourning as well as a respectful way to show honour to those who had lost their lives in the course of the struggle. Others would wear armbands (a piece of black cloth that is worn on the arm as a sign of mourning) to symbolise their mourning. Another sign of both respect and political consciousness was reflected in the dress code of Dashikis (a loose, brightly-coloured African garment resembling a long shirt without buttons), with some people not combing their hair. Former journalist and now spokesperson of the Department of Arts and Culture, Sandile Memela, writes:

In the 70s I saw many of today's forty-somethings when they were lured by Black Consciousness politics and the fashion of unkempt hair, colourful Dashiki shirts and ankle-length boots. As teenagers their lives were deeply shaped by the "Black is beautiful" philosophy, which expressed itself in their Jordache and Bang Bang jeans and attending all-night-long "Akulalwa" gigs. (Memela; 1999)

The all-night gigs Memela (1999) writes about were the social occasions patronised by the 1970s generation. This is an important point to note, as it acknowledges that the youth of the 1970s was not one-dimensional. They were not only preoccupied by the freedom struggle, but also took time to party in the midst of death, detention and exile. This point was emphasised by a parent who worked closely with former students in a conversation with current youth who are perceived to be disinterested in contemporary struggles or who prefer to party to Kwaito music on days of commemoration.

Tsehlana illustrates the earlier point on how the activists of the 1970s expressed their new political consciousness through dress, by recalling a former student activist:

... and there was Boy Boy Ramapepe. He was always wearing this Dashiki stuff and so on that was associated with Azania as far as we were concerned. And Azania was nothing else but the land we were aspiring to ... the land of freedom ... And the beads too, the beads that were put here (pointing his neck) and at the feet ... Necklaces, yes. These were symbols of Azania (laughs). (Tseko Tsehlana; 2006; interview)

In addition to the commemoration being a day of speeches, there was also wide use of chants in the oral tradition of call and reply, as well as the singing of freedom songs. Although the 1976 era produced its own unique songs, many were a continuation of the tradition of freedom songs that emerged in the earlier periods of struggle, like the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the Positive Action Campaign against the Pass Laws of 1960. Some of the well-known songs of the generation of 1976 read:

*Amabhunu ayizinja
Amabhunu ayizinja*

*Sono sethu ubumnyama
Sono sethu ubumnyama*

(The boers are dogs
the boers are dogs
Is it our sin to be Black?
Is it a sin to be Black?)

*Thina sizwe esimnyama
Sikhalela umhlaba wethu
Owathathwa ngabamhlophe
Mabawuyeke umhlaba wethu*

*Unzima lomthwalo ufuna sihlangane
Asikhathali noma siyaboshwa
Sifuna Inkululeko*

*Ba bolaile mo Azania
Ba bolaile mo Azania
Ba tswanetsi go bolaiwa*

(They have killed an Azanian
They have killed an Azanian
They deserve to be killed too)

*Thina sululusha
Lalapha e Azania
Asisoze subulawe
Ilamabhunu sisebasha
Sisebasha sisebasha sisebasha*

(We are the youth of Azania
we won't be killed by these boers
We are youth, we are youth, we are youth)
(Hlongwane et al; 2006)

Poetry became another major form of expression on the day of commemoration. There was the poetry of Ingoapele Madingoane who became known as a poet laureate of Soweto, largely because of his epic poem *Africa My Beginning*, which on other occasions was performed in ensemble with the Allah Poets. Another popular poet was Joe Rahube who was known for his poem *When will Nkosi Sikelela us?* (Manaka;....) This particular use of artistic forms of expression had been popularised by the advent of the Black Consciousness movement. Such performance during commemoration services instilled a sense of remembrance that was sombre and dignified, while affirming the will to carry on the fight. Further, the commemoration services also became a laboratory for new talent. Indeed, many looked forward to the emergence of new poets, one notable one being Mzwakhe Mbuli. Mbuli became particularly popular for his poem *Aga sies bayasinyanyisa* (Moloi; 2006). However, the emergence of such poets took place within the ideological contestations or competition discussed earlier, that was slowly emerging as a dominant feature of memorialising the uprisings.

In contrast with the dignity and solemn remembrance during the dark days of settler colonialism are the latest developments, which mark the highest expression of controversy on the commemoration of the uprisings. Over the years, the controversies on how the uprisings should be commemorated have always been expressed as part of the build-up to the annual commemorations. Nonetheless they became more pronounced during the thirtieth anniversary. For instance, one radio station – Metro FM – went to the extent of placing an advert on the issue. It read:

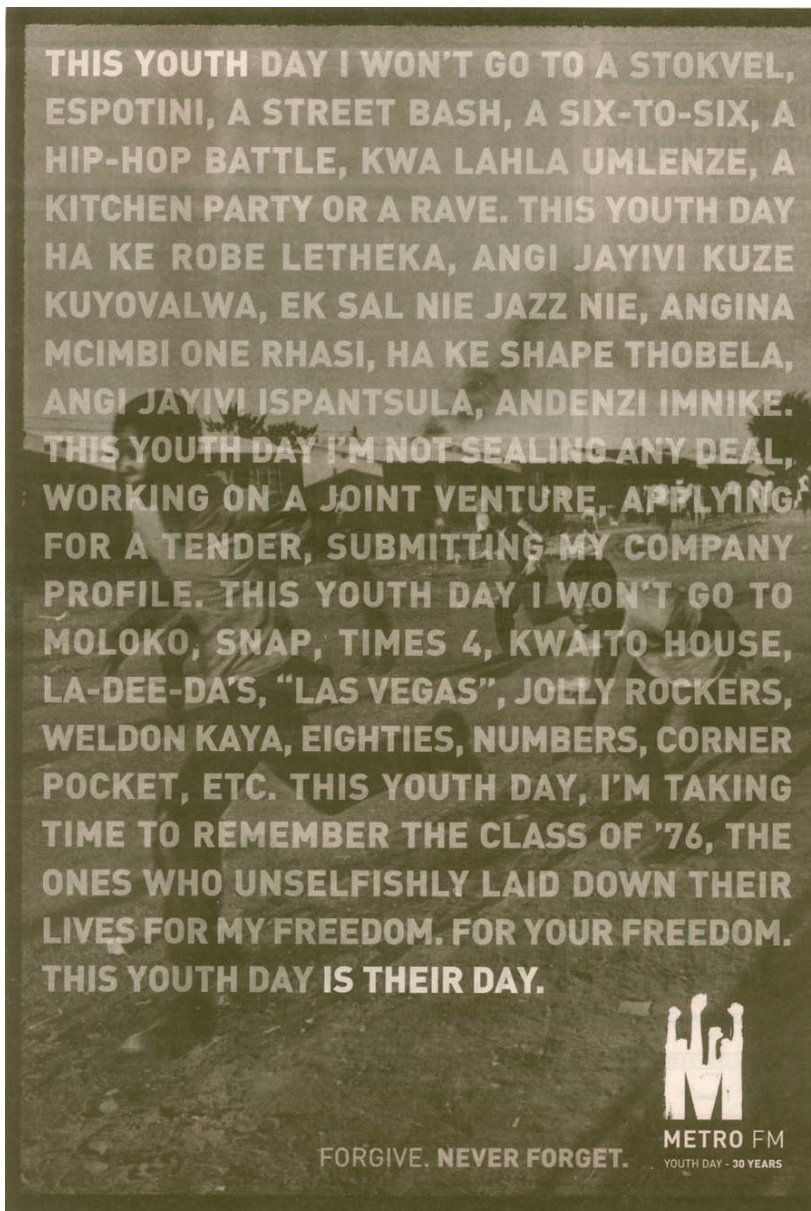


Figure 4

This advertisement reflected the general public sentiment bemoaning how, in recent years, the Soweto uprisings had been commemorated. Another example was the editorial in the *Sowetan* of June 15 2006, in which the editor wrote:

Some among us think (June 16) should be a sombre day marked by a dignified commemoration of that historic milestone. They say we should show our respect for the young people who died for our freedom... Others argue that the best way to show our appreciation to the heroes of June 16 is to celebrate the freedom they bequeathed us

... And a more radical variation of this view suggests that we throw wild parties and drink ourselves silly to the beat of loud music. “Stop being so hung up on the past. Let bygones be bygones. Get down and party,” they say. (Sowetan; 2006)

On the same page, the *Sowetan* featured two images to contrast the extremes of commemorating the uprisings. On one side is a replica of the iconic photograph of June 16 taken by Sam Nzima. On the other side is a similar picture dated 2006, with the caption “He’s Passed Out Again’, showing two revellers, one a woman with a cigarette in her hand, and a fellow smoking a cigarette and carrying the lifeless body of a drunkard.

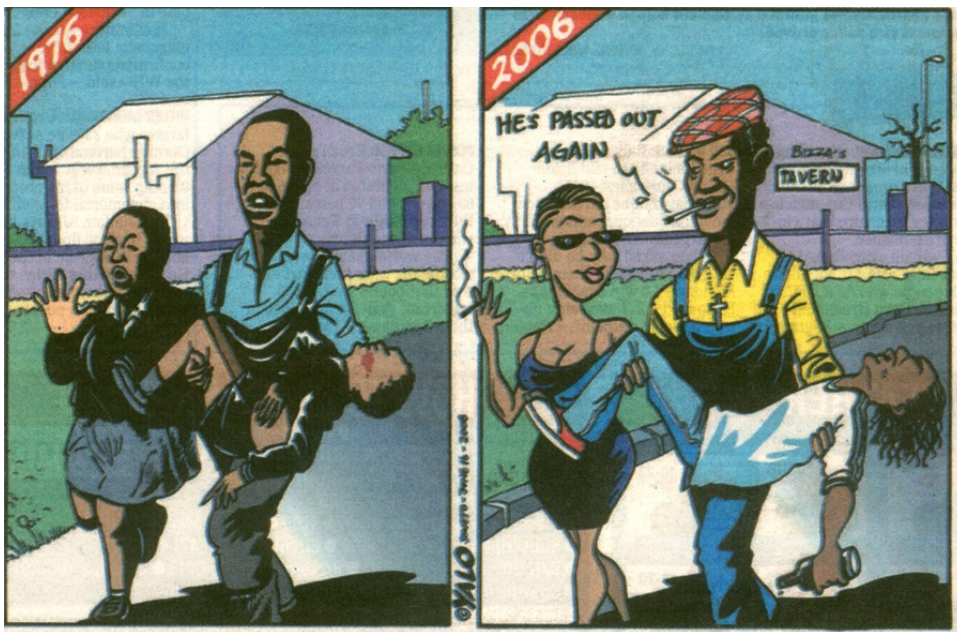


Figure 5

The state of affairs depicted above was rationalised by a reader who wrote to the *Sowetan* on June 19 2006 under the headline, “Cool to party on June 16”.

Family and friends weep and there is deep sadness when someone dies. But it is also true that during and after the mourning period, family and friends also shriek with laughter when remembering the antics of the dearly departed. I therefore do not understand why some people blame the youth for organising bashes and street parties every year on June 16. There are more than enough people who will do the crying. Others will tell stories about how close they were to the deceased. They will inevitably turn the spotlight on themselves and enjoy the sympathy and condolences. But nobody will blame them or shame them by exposing their hypocrisy and crocodile tears ... But we who laugh and celebrate the contributions of the dead of June 16 are frowned upon. Our leaders fought and died so that we could enjoy a free life, so I do not understand why we should be stopped from enjoying that legacy ... (Tsebe; 2006)

However, not all music for days like June 16 can be said to be degrading. In fact it has been widely acknowledged that “singing was part of the struggle” (Klaaste; 2002). Discussing a similar challenge, the late journalist and editor of the Sowetan Aggrey Klaaste wrote:

I remember a passion-filled talk I had with Benjy Francis. As an artist he believed that the very act of singing ... was an important element of the struggle. He quoted history and religion, for instance the children of Israel singing the songs of Zion when they were in Babylon. He quoted various struggle songs that are particularly poignant and very effective politically. He referred to the struggles of the South Americans and the black American slaves ... (Klaaste; 2002)

However, government-organised commemorations choose musicians whose music has no relevance to the memory of the Soweto uprisings or questions of social justice. Music with themes of struggle seldom feature. Eighties band Sakhile (1997), whose members are still part of the music scene, released an album with one song dedicated to the fallen of 1976, entitled *Isililo*. Miriam Makeba (...)also composed a song titled *Benikuphi na ma bedubula abantwana?* and subsequently released another song, *Siyabonga*. Victor Ntoni (...)composed a tune dedicated to the uprisings entitled *Where are the children now?* Yet none of these musicians or their songs have ever featured in commemorations of the uprisings. The argument may be that the commemorations feature “up and coming artists”⁵, but the content of their music is found to be degrading of the sacrifices of the uprisings.

If memory and commemoration are so highly contested among those who share the same experience and those who were adversaries, then it throws up various challenges on how a given experience can be transmitted to new generations. In the South African context, this question is imperative given the complaints about the attitude of South African youths on national days like June 16. The way in which these challenges are dealt with will make new generations either embrace or reject the memories and pain of the generations before them.

There is a view that suggests that for new generations to embrace memories of the past, the memory-making process must “allow for the mutability of collective meaning and memory ... [to retain some kind of] significance to future generations (Netshitenzhe; 2006; 17).” Further, argues Netshitenzhe (2006; 17), head of policy unit in the South African Presidency, writing in his personal capacity, argues differently. He contests the view that sees certain youth activities on days of remembrance in a negative light as reflecting what “a free youth should do. As long as we keep the memory alive. Working with them, we must continue searching for forms of mobilisation that accord with their lifestyles and preoccupations.”

Conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the complex nature and practice of commemoration and memorialisation. We looked at how the June 16, 1976 Soweto uprisings were, particularly after 1976 a unifying rallying point among the oppressed. The grief and pain of the aftermath of the uprising brought together people across the ideological divide together to commemorate and commit to the unfolding liberation project.

However, this was to be a short-term achievement as the imperatives of political and ideological hegemony brought about political intolerance and ideological rivalry and the memory and commemoration of the June 16, 1976 uprisings became a contested societal arena to privilege the various ideological discourses of the diverse liberation movements. The latter state of affairs took centre stage as the ANC began to emerge strongly in exile and internally as the key driver of the liberation project in South Africa. The latter process was contested by both the Africanist and Black Consciousness traditions of struggle, which subsequently led to conflicts.

The apartheid state also contested the memory and commemoration of the uprisings by portraying it as a project inspired by ‘communists’ and agitators at the expense of the supposedly peaceful and happy African majority. The apartheid state went to an extent of singling out the foreign media as the instigator of unrest during commemoration days.

After 1994 the new state also appropriated memory as part of its discourse of reconciliation and nation-building. However, the new state tended to project reconciliation to be largely along the colour divide and excluded any call of reconciliation among former liberation movements. As a result the commemoration of June 16, 1976 and National Youth Day has not been explored for its possibility to be a unifying day among the former liberation movements. Instead, its commemoration has also been a contest of ownership of the day by various liberation movements.

Further, the commemoration of June 16, 1976, like all national days of commemoration in South Africa has failed to bring South African youths and the population in general together across the colour line. Indeed, the commemoration of National Youth Day is seen as an affair for Africans. The opposition parties whose constituency is largely within the white communities have since 1994 been commemorating the 1976 uprisings, merely as part of the political agenda to attract African voters.

Other sectors of society contest that practice for various purposes. These could be for entertainment as demonstrated by some sections of youth, particularly those who patronise government-organised commemoration days. Yet others continue to call for commemoration as a platform to address the unfinished business of the liberation project.

Notes

¹ There is another widely held view that the first student to be killed by the police on June 16 was Hastings Ndlovu who died shortly after being admitted to Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. However, there is no empirical evidence to allow consensus on this issue.

³ The developments of the area around the Regina Mundi Church to establish what is now known as the Regina Mundi Precinct unfortunately failed to map the site where police used to be stationed on commemoration days or during political funerals. The location of Azapo activist Dr Abubaker Asvat's mobile clinic has also not been mapped out. The mobile clinic employed Mrs Albertina Sisulu and is believed to be where young activist "Stompie" may have been treated before he lost his life.

⁴ Kwaito music is a mixture of a number of different genres. The language of Kwaito is Isicamtho, or South African township slang.

⁵ The programme for June 16 Commemoration days begins early in the morning with a Fun Run, and a 1-hour service at the Hector Pieterse Memorial. People are then expected to join the programme at the stadium which progresses from the fun run to a “cultural programme”. At about 12h00 the political programme begins, which will be addressed by the Premier of the Gauteng province, a spokesperson for the National Youth Commission, and other political figures from the ruling party. After the political programme, the impatient youth will get what they essentially came for – Kwaito. On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary, some sections of the youth were not interested in the address by President Mbeki, in solidarity with the deputy president of the ANC, Jacob Zuma.

Reference

(a) *Books, papers etc.*

Alfred, L. “Obscurity the reward for era’s defining image” The Sunday Independent 13 June 1999

Brendan Hamber & Richard Wilson’s “Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-conflict Societies.” Centre for the Study of Violence.
<http://www/csvr.org.za/papers/papbhrw.htm>

De Villiers, P. “Journalists deny they influenced riots.” The Citizen, 18 June 1981

Financial Mail., “The Ides of June.” Financial Mail. 16 June 1978

Financial Mail., “Uniting for June 16”, Financial Mail. 14 June 1985

Hlongwane, K.A, Sifiso Ndlovu, Mothobi Mutloatse., “Soweto 76. Reflections on the liberation struggles. Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16, 1976. Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust. 2006

Klaaste, A.. “Singing was part of the struggle.” Sowetan Sunday World. 7 April 2002

- Liddington, J. and Smith, G. "Crossing cultures: Oral history and public history." (in) Oral History. Spring 2005. Volume 33. No.1
- Liddington, J. "What is Public History? Publics and their Pasts, Meanings and Practices" (in) Oral History. Spring 2002.
- Lipman, A., 'This is not the way to honour heroes of 76', Sunday Independent, January 18 2004
- Leshilo, T., 'The Day That Revolutionised South Africa (in) "Commemorating the 30th anniversary of June 16 1976. Soweto '76 Reflections on the Liberation Struggle." Edited by Khangela Ali Hlongwane, Sifiso Ndlovu & Motlhabi Motloatse.
- Lodge, T. "Is the Spirit of Robert Sobukwe Rising?" Weekly Mail, 5-11 August 1988.
- Madingoane, I., Africa My Beginning, Ravan Press. Johannesburg. 1988
- Makobane, M., "Giant services planned" (in) The Post, 13 June 1978.
- Makobane, M., "Tutu leads city service for June 16." The Post, 14 June 1978.
- Makobane, M., "Wreath for first victim of the riots." The Post, 15 June 1978.
- Manaka, M., 'Theatre of the Dispossessed- An article by Matsemela Manaka based on discussions with James Mthoba and Joe Rahube (in) Beyond the Echoes of Soweto. Five plays by Matsemela Manaka. Edited by Geoffrey V. Davis
- Macozoma, s., "Akakho ofana naye," Mail & Guardian, 9-15 June 2006.
- Mthimunya, D., "Azanian National Youth Unity (AZANYU)" (in) Azania News, July, 1983. Vol.19, No. 7.
- Mphaki, A., "June 16 no longer a day of dignity." Sowetan Sunday World. 10 June 2001.
- Mphaki, A., "June 16 no longer a day of dignity." Sowetan, 10 June 2001.
- Memela, S., "70s protest fades into 90s pop," Sunday World, 20 June 1999.

Ndlazi, M., "As June 16 approaches police announce new measure." Sunday Mirror, 9 June 1985.

Netshitenzhe, J., Lost and found: the June 16 generation, Mail&Guardian June 16 to 22 2006

Marschall, S. "Visualizing Memories: The Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto" (in) *Visual Anthropology*. 2006.

Ndlovu, S.M. *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976*. Ravan Press. 1998.

Ndlovu, S.M. "The Soweto Uprisings." Submission to the Hector Pieterse Memorial Museum Project. 2002.

RSA World; "Sabotage at Sasol," RSA World, July 1980.

Tsebe, T., "Cool to party on June 16" (in) Sowetan, 9 June 2006.

Vally, S. and Seleane, M. "Educate for Justice" (in) Beyond Matric. Mail & Guardian. May 5 to 11 2006/ Vol 22, No 18

Sowetan, "Lest we forget," Sowetan, Thursday 15 June 2006.

Swilling, M. The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt. *Work in Progress*. 49. 1987. Work in Progress

Schonfeldt-Aultman, S., Monument(a)l meaning-making: the Ncome monument & its representation of Zulu identity. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Volume 18, Number 2, December 2006

Seleti, Y. "December 16, Day of Reconciliation" (in) *Cleansing and Healing. Photographic Exhibition*. Freedom Park. Pretoria

Serote, M.W. "Preface" in *Cleansing and Healing. Photographic Exhibition*. Freedom Park

Sizani, K., 'Negation of African images and heroes', PAC Bulletin from Parliament, Volume 1 No 2 March/April 1996

(c) Interviews (for the Hector Pieterse Museum unless stated)

Moloi, Pascal; 6 May 2006; interviewed by Ali K Hlongwane.

Tseko Tshehlana; 2006; interviewed by Ali Khangela Hlongwane