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Hector Pieterson, a twelve-year Sowetan old school boy, became a symbol struggle against apartheid after the South African Police took during the Soweto Student Uprising on June 16, 1976.

On the cool winter morning of June 16, 1976, Antoinette "Tiny" Sithole, née Pieterson, 17 and a student at Thesele Secondary School, prepared to leave like any other morning (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 58). Sithole completed her morning chores, assisted her grandmother, and even stopped to remind her younger brother Hector Pieterson (Simbao 2007, 68)[1], 12 and a Thesele Higher Primary School student, to "wear something warm" over his "favourite khaki pants and..blue skipper" (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 60). Pieterson, a funny boy who was "full of tricks", likely obliged his older sister because, even though Sithole was the oldest sibling and Pieterson the youngest, they were very close (Hopkins and Grange 2001, 94). As the siblings left their grandmother's house[2] in White City, Jabavu in Soweto for school, Sithole heard that "there would be a demonstration against the

[1] Born Zolile Hector Pitso, Hector's father, Vivian Pieterson, changed the family name from "Pitso" to "Pieterson" in order " to sound more "Colored" as the enforced apartheid system of racial classification gave a few more rights to "Colored" people than "Black" people" (Simbao 2007, 68).

[2] They lived at their grandmother's home when school was in session because she lived closer to their school and it was easier to get there than from their parent's home (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 58).

implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction" that day but she did not give it much more of a thought (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 58). After all "there had already been a lot of "stay-at-home" actions" by students who refused to go to school and be forced to learn Afrikaans, none of which Sithole, and certainly not Pieterson, participated in- their "grandmother would never allow such behaviour"(Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 58). But the demonstration that day turned into a march and the streets of Soweto swelled with students from high schools and secondary schools who refused to be taught in Afrikaans. And, unplanned and to the surprise of the student organizers of the protest, primary school students joined the protest- including Hector Pieterson.

At approximately 10:30am on June 16, 1976, South African Police attempted to forcefully suppress the marching students by firing pistols, revolvers, and automatic rifles into a crowd- fatally wounding a young boy who had been lovingly told to put on something warm over his favorite blue skipper, twelve-year-old Hector Pieterson (Nieftagodien 2005, 99).

A photo captured and preserved forever Pieterson's death and Sithole's abject horror at the slaying of her beloved little brother, becoming both an image that defined the uprising of Soweto students against apartheid and a symbol of Hector's martyrdom. The photo, taken by *The World* photojournalist Sam Nzima, shows a young-man, 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubo, carrying Hector's small, limp body in his arms in an attempt to rush him to safety, while Antoinette runs alongside terrified and tormented. The "haunting image" of Hector's death during the 1976 Soweto Student Uprisings became "the single most important photograph to emerge from the struggle against apartheid" (Simbao 2007, 52). To this day, the photo of Pieterson has been literally, artistically, and symbolically reimagined for international and local memoralizations on t-shirts, posters, protest signs, and art installations, such as Kevin Brand's

Pietà (Simbao 2007, 56).[3] Additionally, Nzima's photo of Hector is used to support counter narratives by shifting the narrative of the photo to a "more realistic account that accepts the complex multiplicity of the activities that led up to June 16 as well as the confusing events of the actual day" (Simbao 2007, 63).

Pieterson became an accidental symbol for the uprising, the complicated and often conflicting narratives of the Uprisings, and the loss felt by "other people in Soweto" who "lost a brother, sister, a son, or a daughter that day", whose images and stories are absent (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 62). A larger than life print of the photo marks the entrance to the Hector Pieterson Memorial museum, where Antoinette Sithole is a tour guide. The image is surrounded by architectural elements that represent the students who rose up on June 16, the void of the unknown or unresolved stories, such as that of Mbuyisa Makhubo, and street imagery (Hlongwane 2015, 139). The memorial is not just a meditation on how these symbolic elements relate to Hector Pieterson the boy, but how they relate to what Pieterson has come to represent- an icon of the South African liberation struggle, the Soweto Student Uprising, and the world finally grasping the brutality of *apartheid*. Some scholars argue that Pieterson became a perfect "symbol of a sacrificed childhood that has no life beyond the picture" and "of the unfulfilled potential of youth cut down in their prime" because he was essentially anonymous- there was no other known photo of him besides the Nzima picture until his family found one after 2000 (Baines 2007, 288). Through his anonymity in life, he could be memorialized and remembered in death.

[3] Brand's *Pietà* is a mural reimagining Nzima's iconic photo in the fashion of Michelangelo's *Pietà* (1498-1499), a sculpture of the Madonna cradling the dead body of Jesus Christ. Artists across the world have also reimagined the *Pietà* to memorialize death during war. See *Pietà* (2018) by Tylonn Sawyer, *War Pietà* (2007) by Max Ginsburug, and *Vietnam Pietà* (2016) by Kim Seo Kyung and Kim Eun Sung.

But a photo of a dapper and round-cheeked four-year-old Hector tells a different story- one of a shy boy who practiced karate in the streets, idolized Bruce Lee and his oldest sister, and saved every cent so he could "sit at the bioscope all day on Saturdays" watching kung-fu movies (Sithole 2012). Although Hector, nicknamed "Chopper" by his family, had a shy personality amongst his peers and not many playmates, around Antoinette "he always laughed a lot and told a lot of jokes" while devising plans for them to save money to purchase magwinya[4] fat-cakes (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 59, 62-64). To save money for these Tswana treats, Hector proposed that he and Antoinette should pocket the train-fare money their mother gave them and walk to school instead (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 64). But, when faced with a long walk to school, Hector "ended up suggesting that they should still catch the train" but hid in the bathroom so that they were not caught without tickets by the ticket collector (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 64). When they were caught after the second day Antoinette took the blame because "no one could believe that a nice, little boy could have come up with such a scam" (Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 64). It was this playful and mischievous Hector that, upon hearing of his death, made his grandmother cry out "Chopper o entsend, yena o dirilend hé?" until she understood what happened and, as Antointette remembers, "cried so painfully" and "didn't even know how she was going to tell my mother"(Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse 2006, 59).

[4] Magwinya are a yeasted dough-deep fried, lightly sugared, and sometimes served with jam. Freda Muyambo, a food writer and African cuisine expert, shares her recipe for magwinya.

Related Media:

- Antoinette “Tiny” Sithole
- Dorothy Molefi
- Mbuyisa Makhubo
- Sam Nzima
- Soweto Student Uprising
- Cultural Memory and Apartheid
- School Grades
- Students in a South African Context

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