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# Real and imagined readers: censorship, publishing and reading under apartheid

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# REAL AND IMAGINED READERS: CENSORSHIP, PUBLISHING AND READING UNDER APARTHEID

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, October 2011

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis studies the readership of literature that was banned under the various laws that comprised the censorship system, focusing on the apartheid period, from the 1950s until the early 1990s. It investigates the conditions under which banned and subversive literature existed in the underground network despite the ever-looming censorship apparatus. It is based on theories drawn from the history of the book, sociology of literature, South African literary histories, and on data from secondary and primary sources such as archival material and interviews with, and testimonies from, readers. This thesis focuses on the roles of readers in alternative circuits, by examining the modalities of sourcing, distributing, reading and sharing of imported and local banned publications. It seeks to demonstrate that readers did read banned books and books likely to be banned, showing creativity in the various strategies used to get these books into the country and to share them amongst the largest number of readers, using texts in various fashions, and actively participating to the South African literary industry and broader socio-political affairs.

**KEYWORDS:** African literature, alternative literary networks, banned publications, censorship, history of the book, literature, literary history, reader studies, readership, South Africa.

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in other university.

_____

Rachel Matteau

On the 6th day of October, 2011

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Marcel Matteau, and to my soon-to-be-born first child, who gave me the strength and motivation to complete this thesis.

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**ACRONYMS**

| | |
|---|---|
| AMS | Aksie Morele Standaarde |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| APB | Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel |
| AWA | African Writer's Association |
| BBFC | British Board of Film Censors |
| BCM | Black Consciousness Movement |
| BCP | Black Community Programme |
| BLAC | Black Literature and Arts Congress |
| CLAS | Cape Library Assistants Section |
| CNA | Central News Agency |
| COSATU | Congress of South African Trade Unions |
| COSAW | Congress of South African Writers |
| FAK | Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge |
| FOSATU | Federation of South African Trade Unions |
| H&R | Human & Rousseau |
| NP | National Party |
| NPU | Newspaper Press Union |
| NUSAS | National Union of South African Students |
| OUP | Oxford University Press |
| PAB | Publications Appeal Board |
| PAC | Pan Africanist Congress of Azania |
| PEN SA | PEN South Africa |
| SABC | South African Broadcast Corporation |
| SACP | South African Communist Party |
| SAIRR | South African Institute of Race Relations |
| SACC | South African Church Council |
| SALA | South African Librarian Association |
| SANROC | South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee |
| SASO | South African Students Association |
| SPRO-CAS | Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society |

## CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

"It is true that art imitates art, or more precisely that art comes from art,
more precisely from the art to which it is opposed."
(Pierre Bourdieu 1984)

### Background Information

Apartheid censorship in South Africa could be thought of as a cultural and political institution, as a system with its own theoretical, historical and practical implications. As Christopher Merrett points out, by controlling the communication and circulation of ideas and information, censorship had an impact on the ways people published, spoke in public, organised collectively, moved around the country, and gained access to information (1994, 2). This thesis proposes to add that censorship also had a specific impact on readers, in terms of the ways they accessed, read and circulated texts, and of the ways they were perceived by censors, who were also readers, ultimately playing a role in the architecture of the censorship system.

The complex censorship apparatus that was developed by the apartheid government could be seen as finding its roots in the previous British colonial regime, whereby ideas and publications were filtered and controlled through censorship acts such as the Obscene Publications Act No. 31 of 1892 and later, in the context of the Union of South Africa, through the Customs Management Act No. 9 of 1913 and the Entertainments Censorship Act No. 28 of 1931. The apartheid regime, however, institutionalised censorship and built an unprecedented thought and publications control system that would have a lasting impact on public cultural and political spaces. The Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950 is often perceived as a milestone of institutionalised censorship in South Africa, as it empowered the Ministry of Justice to ban individuals and organisations thought to be communists or propagating the communistic doctrine. Adopting a very broad definition of "communism", the Act of 1950 caused the banning of oppositional political parties and political activists from the South African political arena, and of several major writers and intellectuals from the cultural field whose work systematically was declared undesirable and illegal upon banning.

With the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, the censorship apparatus was refined to an extent where literary academics sat on its committees, and marked the introduction of various interpretations and definitions of literature and of readers in the application of censorship. Through the censorship system, a literary discourse was developed within the broader political system, characterised by a combination of implicit and explicit ideological, political, sociological, moral and literary considerations. Given the censors' main areas of interests – namely authorship, the literary works themselves, readers and the social systems in which publications are received – understanding the interpretative protocols followed by censors through the angle of the sociology of literature is enlightening, as it contextualises both the production and reception stages of literary outputs, and a more precise portrait of the literary world created by censors emerges.

Despite the censors' narrow definition of literature, which admittedly informed particular aesthetics and literary canons, some readers defied these conventions and opposed these elitist definitions. For alternative readers, literature became an "activity, the construal of meaning within a system of communication, rather than a canon of texts" (Darnton 2002, 21). By focusing on readers and using the notions of readership formations, literary consumption and reception, and analysing these parallel to the socio-political context in which readers of banned publications operated and interacted with the other agents involved in the literary field, an alternative reading culture comes to the forefront, with its own politics and particularities. By understanding this period of South Africa's literary history through an examination of its sociological aspects, the existence of relatively limited yet significant alternative reading cultures is revealed. In the context of this literary counter-culture, readers actively linked the alternative literary system to other systems in society, collectively playing a socio-political role in society well beyond the literary field.

## Research Questions

This thesis will explore the ways in which readers, in the context of apartheid South Africa, accessed, read, used and responded to undesirable books. It will seek to understand how publications drifted from the literary to the political spaces and vice-versa, as some readers engaged in alternative politics through books, or conversely came across some banned books through their involvement in alternative politics. The ways in which marginalised yet progressive readers read banned literature and created reading groups with particular reading strategies will be studied through a socio-political angle. This thesis will examine whether these readers played a role in South Africa's literary, social and political affairs through their creative uses of banned books. In answering these questions, this thesis will establish the historical and political context in which banned books were produced, published, distributed, sourced and most importantly read, and will determine how these interactions contributed to the formation of an alternative literary industry. It will also seek to assess the extent to which this alternative literary scene provided a space for progressive readers to articulate their responses to texts and to society at large.

## Thesis Statement

In light of the above, this thesis will demonstrate how a heterogeneous alternative literary movement emerged despite the censorship climate prevailing during the apartheid era, engaging progressive writers, publishers and readers in a set of relations and activities that went well beyond the cultural field to create an impact on the broader socio-political field.

Focusing on the ideologies implied in the successive censorship legislations and their respective effects on the literary field, this thesis will seek to understand the mainstream literary field against which the alternative literary activity emerged. The alternative literary manifestations will be linked to the various strands of alternative political resistance, and illustrate the culture of engaged reading that emerged from these

interactions between the literary and the political. It will show how some readers, far from being passive and subjugated to the censorship laws, were actively participating in socio-political dynamics by accessing, processing and further disseminating some allegedly undesirable ideas. It will show how readers and censors intrinsically influenced each other, as readers were a constant preoccupation in the censors' discourse, and censors in turn influenced the ways in which readers negotiated their place in the politically-charged literary space. In short, it will establish how some progressive readers accessed, used, and responded to the books they read in the context of apartheid South Africa.

In doing so, this thesis will inscribe itself in the book history scholarship, which provides a space and the tools to reclaim the importance of a marginalised readership alongside the more traditional focus on so-called serious readers and serious literature. The marginalised readership, often dismissed and dissimulated within the mass readership category, will regain its place in South African literary history, as this readership played a central role in the articulation of the censors discourse, in the evolution of the publishing and literary industry, and in the public space where publications circulated during apartheid.

**Delineations and Limitations**

Whilst some limitations pertaining to the collection and use of primary data and sources will be discussed in more detail in the Methodology section, some limitations inherent in the vast and complex topic of censorship in apartheid South Africa can be identified in this work.

This study will not deal with publications that were banned for reasons other than political. Indeed, censorship in South Africa controlled the circulation of a vast range of publications, ranging from pornography to poetry and political philosophy. This study will limit its scope to literature having a socio-political character, understood in its broad

sense to include novels, poetry, newsletters, magazines, autobiographies, political essays, encyclopaedia, and academic books, amongst others.

This work will focus on readers involved in the politically alternative literary industry and politically progressive circles, as identified through primary and secondary sources (see Methodology). Therefore, the "readers of banned literature" alluded to throughout this thesis do not include the readers of other genres of publications than those mentioned above and banned for political motives and mainly comprise political activists, active on various levels and scopes.

**Definition of Terms**

As mentioned above, "literature" is used in this thesis to include printed publications of socio-political value, including both so-called "popular" and "serious" literature, to borrow the censors' terminology. In the case of the censors' definitions of literature, these will be discussed and exemplified along with the arguments defended in the chapters.

The use of "black", "white", "coloured" and "Indian" to designate people, writers, readers or readerships is aligned to the censors' discourse and to the apartheid terminology in general, and is therefore used in this thesis as a matter of clarity in terms of the broader socio-political context of apartheid, the era being the object of this study.

**Rationale**

By expanding on existing literature on the subject of censorship in South Africa during apartheid, which for the most part focuses on aspects of authorship, literary production and publishing, this thesis will discuss the socio-political significance of censorship from the point of view of readers, thus adopting a "reader-centric" approach to the issue of apartheid censorship.

**Chapter Overview**

After considering questions of literature review and method in chapter two, the thesis, in chapter three, *Censored: Politico-Historical Perspectives of Institutionalised Censorship and Readers in Apartheid South Africa*, addresses the creation of State censorship in South Africa. Following an overview of the main censorship legislations enacted during the apartheid era, namely The Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974 and the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978, the ideas of readers and literature that emerged from each Act will be discussed. Through an examination of the changing definitions of readers elaborated by censors, the intricacies and ideologies of the censorship bureaucracy will be linked to the literary considerations at play in the successive censorship boards, and in doing so, proposes an understanding of censorship in South Africa from a reader-centric perspective.

The fourth chapter, entitled *The Emergence of an Alternative Literary Industry: Censorship versus Publishers, Librarians and Booksellers*, proposes a discussion on the alternative literary industry that developed in reaction to the mainstream literary industry, and the effects of censorship on the various agents active in the book trade. Following a succinct overview of mainstream publishers in South Africa, highlighting the ways in which some publishers were in fact extensions of the censorship system, an account of several selected alternative publishers in relation to the strand of anti-apartheid resistance that emerged will set the context in which alternative readers interacted. The distribution strategies adopted by alternative publishers to counter censorship will be briefly discussed, and in doing so the effects of censorship on book traders and librarians will be touched upon.

The fifth chapter, entitled *The Readers' Roles in the Alternative Literary Circuit*, will provide an insight into the workings of the alternative book industry from the point of view of readers. This chapter will focus on how, when, why and where alternative readers read and exchanged banned books, and in doing so illustrate the alternative literary

networks and the formation of reading communities that occurred despite censorship. It will discuss the ways in which banned literature was an integral part of the overall yet diverse anti-apartheid movements through the reading strategies adopted by readers. The active role of readers in the alternative literary networks will be discussed in light of their involvement in the different poles of the life cycle of books, and examine "the world behind the books" (Darnton 1982, ix).

The sixth and last body chapter, entitled *Reading Through the Censors' Lenses: Readers and Readings in the Censors' Reports*, will exemplify the definitions of readers elaborated on by censors through an analysis of censors' reports, focusing on three case studies based on the censorship boards' archival materials on Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, Dennis Brutus' poetry, and Ravan's *Staffrider* magazine and series. From this close reading of these censors' reports, the fluctuating ideology of censors will be made clearer and highlight how socio-political considerations interacted with literary concepts to create a complex and intricate discourse influenced by the legislations in force, the composition of the successive censorship boards, the broader socio-political environment, and readers themselves.

## CHAPTER 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

### Introduction

The theoretical foundation laid out by the field of the sociology of literature and the history of the book constitutes the building blocks on which the main argument of this thesis will be built. In order to understand how readers received and read texts and participated in the larger literary industry under apartheid censorship, notions pertaining to the relations between literature and society, to issues of readership and readers, to ideology and to the concept of public will be critical. The history of the book and the sociology of literature will be particularly relevant to this thesis as both fields focus on the relations between the social and individual character of literature and of reading, as social phenomenon informed by social, political, historical and individual subjective factors, amongst others.

The review of the main works referred to throughout the thesis is divided into two main categories, namely "African and South African Literary and Book History" and "Censorship in South Africa". The works on literary and book history provide contextualised theories and works from the history of the book focusing on the African, and more particularly on the South African context, providing a general overview of the dynamics in which the readers studied in this thesis will be understood. The category on censorship in South Africa gets a step closer to the heart of the matter. The works included in this category will inform the discussions on the effects of censorship on the various poles of the book trade throughout this thesis, including readers, and provide critical information on the emergence of an alternative book trade in South Africa, created in a context of increased political interference and control over the literary industry.

**Theory Base**

This thesis deals with reading. In order to do that, it focuses on the dimension of scholarship of the history of the book concerned with reading, which draws from international and African scholarship of the broader field of the sociology of literature. By integrating these scholarship traditions, this study seeks to sketch a multidisciplinary theoretical template enabling the presentation of the data within a South African context. By juxtaposing different bodies of scholarship it seeks to develop the existing research to a particular phenomenon at a particular time and place, namely reading banned literature during the apartheid censorship period in South Africa. As this thesis will highlight, books were not always easily available and accessible, and for the readers of banned literature examined in this thesis, reading was an activity performed by readers of various literary levels and social classes. Reading often took on a potentially dangerous character, and readers and the other agents involved in the production and distribution of alternative books functioned in a marginalised politically and culturally repressive environment informed by censorship and political repression.

Essentially drawing from the scholarship of the history of the book, this thesis will explore the complex sets of relations between South African readers (particularly progressive or alternative readers), their environment (apartheid South Africa) and banned literature (local and imported political publications). The contribution of major works from the sociology of literature and its related discipline, the history of the book, constitutes the foundational theoretical base on which the argument will be developed. A comprehensive examination of reading practices in apartheid South Africa will inevitably be multi-disciplinary, for as Andrew Bennett asks, "Is reading determined by the text, by the reader's subjective responses, by social, cultural and economic factors, by conventions of reading, or by a combination of all these?" (1995, 2). This thesis will discuss these combined factors in light of readers and reading in the context of apartheid censorship, and in doing so will make full use of the multidisciplinary character of the book history field of study, and of its primary focus on books as social, material and ideological objects produced and actively read in a specific social milieu.

The sociology of literature emphasises the fact that the literary aesthetical value is not entirely inherent in a text, but is rather something bestowed on a text by the environment in which it is produced and/or received, according to time specific socio-historical criteria. In light of this, it adopts the underlying principle that literariness has a "transitive value" (Robert 1994, 270). Adopting a threefold theoretical approach to literature, it could be suggested that the sociology of literature traditionally focuses on: books and reading, more specifically on issues of readership, book history and publishing history; on the sociological aspects of the literary space, or on understanding the literary space as an autonomous space of cultural production; and on an analysis of the institutional character of literature, in other words on "Literature" as created by juries, school curriculum, literary critiques, and so on (Robert 1994, 270-73).

The sociology of literature further addresses the issues of readership through an analysis of various concepts of "readership" and "reader", for instance target readership, the actual readership, the intended readership, the common readership, the specialised readership, and so on, and examines the extra textual social factors facilitating or hindering access to books, ranging from literacy campaigns to censorship measures (Robert 1994, 269). These three approaches, namely focusing on books and readers, the social milieu, and the institutions, can be combined for the purpose of an examination of the readership of banned literature in apartheid South Africa, as literariness, literature and readers are central concepts in the censors' arguments within the context of institutionalised censorship. Against these definitions assumed by censors, alternative writers, readers and publishers created an alternative literary space where progressive ideas could develop and exist, and where the censors' literary assumptions were often put to test.

Robert Escarpit's seminal work in the field of the sociology of literature proposes an analysis of literature as a social object in its physical, communicative, artistic, cultural, political and ideological aspects. For Escarpit, the act of reading is the essential condition for a work of literature being treated as such, and is at the heart of his definition of literature as a dynamic and social art form. Escarpit emphasises the centrality of readers

in the notion of literature by pointing out that "it is obvious that literature is literature so long as it is read" (1970, 302, translation mine[1]), stressing the activeness of readers.

The ever-changing relations between the text, its readers and their socio-cultural environments are at the heart of any given literary culture. As Robert Darnton explains in reference to Escarpit: "he treated books as agents in a psychological process, the communication of writer and reader, and also as commodities, circulating through a system of production, distribution, and consumption" (1982, 169). The communication aspect of literature is central to Escarpit's argument and in a nutshell, leads to the assumption that literature is a process – characterised by the author's work, a media and language – performed through the reader's reading strategies (1970, 314).

For Escarpit, a book is an object conveying words (1970, 303), and in this sense it could be proposed that a book is a material object conveying ideas and artistic expressions. Escaprit's thoughts on the various modes of dissemination, which are for him different technologies used to convey a message, underpin the discussion on word-of-mouth and oral dissemination that occurred regularly amongst readers of banned literature, and highlight the interconnectedness between oral and written literatures. By emphasising the technological aspect of books, as objects conveying a text, Escarpit reminds us that with the advent of printing, texts became commercial commodities that could be owned, attributed a value, and evaluated (1970, 305). The specific context informing the circulation of texts amongst readers of banned literature in South Africa, where books were not used as commercial commodities but rather as ideological tools, is a reminder that the conceptualisation of books can be understood on various levels and has time-specific and historical value.

An investigation of the motivations for reading so-called subversive publications under censorship will shed light on the type of reading thus performed by readers of banned literature and censors. Following Escarpit's terminology, readings can be "utilitarian" or

[1] This and all further translations have been translated by me.

"literary" (1970, 90). This demarcation between practical and aesthetic readings will be helpful when analysing the motivations behind reading banned literature under censorship conditions in apartheid South Africa and on the censors' reading protocols. This thesis argues that readers of banned literature "utilised" texts to actualise their political identity and bring about social change, amongst other things. Escarpit's arguments around literary communication and reception will therefore be central to a sociological analysis of the literary environment that developed around banned material, for as he points out, reading is an act embedded in social communication (1970, 309).

Reading is probably one of the most elusive stages to grasp in the book trade chain, as it is temporal, transitive, can occur privately and silently, and often does not leave a trace even if it can leave an everlasting impression on readers. As Roger Chartier points out, reading "rarely leaves traces, is scattered into an infinity of singular acts, and purposely frees itself from all the constraints seeking to subdue it" (2002, 47). Stanley Fish (2002), Wolfgang Iser (2002), Michel de Certeau (1984), Chartier (1989a, 1989b, 2002), and Darnton's (1982, 2002) seminal works on readers and reading will set the theoretical basis on which the analysis of readers and reading in South Africa will be carried out.

Stanley Fish, a pioneer in studies on readers and reading, argues that literature exists and has meaning only when it is read. For Fish, the meaning of a text does not exist independently in a coded text; rather "readers' activities are at the centre of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as having 'meaning'" (2002, 350). Reading is an interpretive activity, where "everything depends on the temporal dimension" (2002, 350). Moreover, these interpretive strategies are learned, and "interpretive communities" are in this sense unstable and changing on par with the reader's experience and the moment when the reading occurs. In light of this, different interpretive strategies can be identified amongst censors and alternative readers, where the readers' background and purpose influence the construction of meaning gleaned from the text, and one could add that it also influences the meaning and significance of a text at a specific time and place in society. This preoccupation with the activeness of readers in creating meaning is also shared by Wolfgang Iser, who conceptualises reading as a

communication process (2002, 293). For Iser, texts contain blanks needing to be interpreted and bridged by readers, and "the gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves" (2002, 293).

Michel de Certeau's concept of "reading as poaching" is particularly relevant to understanding the reading strategies of alternative readers and censors at stake in this study (1984). De Certeau's concept of poaching primarily refers to the subversion of meanings operated by readers when confronted with texts, and is yet another way of conceptualising interpretative strategies. Readers and censors literally took from texts what suited their needs, their interpretative expectations and social positions in order to create particular meanings and perceptions of texts. This thesis argues that readers, in the context of apartheid censorship, poached from undesirable or banned texts what suited their situation.

Drawing on de Certeau's conceptualisation of readers as poachers, the active role of readers in South Africa will be articulated through the ways they transformed, re-used, re-appropriated and reinvented texts within the complex nature of the censorship discourse in the case of censors, or in the alternative literary scene in the case of progressive readers. This thesis will also build on de Certeau's idea that readers sometimes use texts as tools for self-empowerment and resistance against a given social order, using readings to consolidate political ideals and convictions. In this regard, the notion of "reading as resistance" will be understood parallel to the reading strategies operated by readers of banned literature, who, as per de Certeau's terminology, took liberties with texts and performed a "liberation of the text and of reading from the 'strong box' of meaning, of authorised reading" (1984, 150). South Africa's reading practices during apartheid were greatly influenced by politics for censors as well as common readers, and one can therefore speak of a politicisation of reading practices, for instance through the ways readers of banned publications used texts to challenge authority and the ways censors promoted reading to befit a political agenda.

In South Africa during apartheid, reading was controlled and legislated through a multitude of laws forming part of the censorship apparatus. The censors developed particular definitions of readers and of reading. For instance, the first board of censors introduced the notion of the "likely reader", a notion vaguely reminiscent of the "intended reader", who is in Fish's words, "the reader whose education, opinions, concerns, linguistic competences, and so on, make him capable of having the experience the authors wished to provide" (2002, 351). This thesis will highlight how the censors' interpretive protocols and ideological inclinations were in fact very sophisticated, even if the end-goal was political control over the population's reading habits and communication of ideas.

This thesis will be underpinned by the assumption that the definition of "readers" is peculiar to time and place and cannot be homogenised, as will be observable from an analysis of the censors changing discourse in terms of the likely reader which fluctuated throughout the apartheid era. Self-censorship sometimes crept into the minds of South African authors, and censors sometimes became the intended readers who unwittingly became the powerful and ultimate "optimal readers" (Fish 2002, 351).

The work of Chartier, one of the key figures of book history (1989a; 1989b; 2002), explores the relations enabled through the act of reading between readers and texts, and highlights the tripartite relation that emerges between the text, the book and the reader (2002, 51). This conceptualisation provides a basis on which the specificities of various readerships can be analysed in relation to the form in which texts reach them, and sheds light on the diversity inherent to the groups of readers as they perform their reading or, in Chartier's terms, actualise texts (2002, 51). According to Chartier, the forms of presentation of texts can change, and these forms have an effect on their status and on the ways they are received. These considerations bring into play the notion of readability, whereby new ways of reading occur, "but also a new horizon of reception" (2002, 51). Chartier emphasises the significance of the text's changing publishing forms, "transforming the text itself and constituting a new public" in its midst (2002, 51). These considerations on the different aspects of books and texts are enlightening in the case of

the banned publications in a context of censorship, as readers were actively involved in altering the forms of books due to prevailing censorship conditions, and in turn were influenced by the forms in which texts reached them.

Chartier describes reading as an "ephemeral" act (2002, 47). Drawing on this, one can understand the increased elusiveness of the act of reading in the case of alternative readers in South Africa, who left few traces of their readings, due to a range of factors including the risks associated with banned literature, not to mention the very nature of the act of reading in general, as Chartier points out. Readers of banned literature had to acquire banned texts from various sources, and the forms in which banned books reached readers sometimes spoke of their general content. If, as Chartier argues, "forms produce meanings" (2002, 48), an analysis of the reception of banned texts in South Africa must consider the forms in which texts reached readers, involving an understanding of the para-textual elements that influenced the production of meanings by readers. As will be discussed in this thesis, readers of banned literature had expectations about a book's content based on their background, but also based on the publications' physicality, its banned status, or through the influence of an opinion-maker, for instance. The importance of putting the act of reading into its socio-historical context, by reconstructing the books' historical dimension "requires us to realize that their meaning depends upon the forms through which they are received and appropriated by their readers (or listeners)" (Chartier 2002, 48). In line with this advice, this thesis approaches books and the act of reading from a socio-historical angle, taking into account the social conditions in which reading and the transmission of ideas occur.

Darnton emphasises the temporality and geography-specific character of reading analysis, thus positing reading in a broader historical set-up, stressing the fact that "reading has a history. It was not always and everywhere the same" (quoted in Bennett 1995, 7). Drawing on this, this thesis will highlight the social and political consequences of reading and disseminating banned literature in the apartheid historical context, positioning books as active and dynamic components of social change. Darnton's research focuses on the physicality of books and on books as forces in history, which are not only central to the

field of the book history, but also to this thesis. As Darnton demonstrates, the book's materiality is ever changing and bears traces of the historical development and social context surrounding books and readers. This research will build on this by focusing on the different forms in which banned texts circulated in the alternative literary circuit in South Africa, as they were physically transformed for various external reasons through different phases in the book's life circuit.

Darnton's "communication circuit" model sheds light on the transitional stages followed by publications in the book trade, and on "the way books come into being and spread through society" (2002, 10). This "life cycle" goes from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. Darnton points out that "book history concerns each phase of this process and the process as a whole, in all its variations over space and time and in all its relations with other systems, economic, social, political, and cultural, in the surrounding environment" (2002, 11). By focusing on the importance of studying the "process as a whole", or the "entire communications process", one can get a more accurate and complete picture of each of its components and the relations between them, which will also prove to be essential to a study of readers and censorship in South Africa:

> But the parts do not take on their full significance unless they are related to the whole, and some holistic view of the book as a means of communication seems necessary if book history is to avoid being fragmented into esoteric specializations cut off from each other by arcane techniques and mutual misunderstanding (Darnton 2002, 11).

The roles conferred on the different agents involved in the communication circuit designed by Darnton will be analysed in terms of the mainstream and alternative literary industries respectively. In doing so, Darnton's model will provide a strong theoretical template from which the alternative communication circuit that developed during censorship will be examined, and the various practices adopted by the agents involved in the mainstream and alternative communication circuits will emerge, reconstructing to a certain extent "the social context of reading" (2002, 21).

In his work *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (1982), Darnton analyses the French alternative literary industry focusing on the production stages. He analyses the activities of publishers, pamphleteers and authors who produced literature parallel to the mainstream French literary industry, taking into account the political censorship that impacted on the literary sphere. He focuses on the literary underground of 18th century France, an epoch "when censorship, the police and a monopolistic guild of booksellers attempted to contain the printed word within limits set by the official orthodoxies" (1982, iv). Darnton also discusses the small-scale pirate modes of literary production adopted by clandestine publishers and booksellers, converging with Adrian Johns' idea that piracy can be seen as a way to defy censorship restrictions (2002, 61). While this thesis does not pretend or aim to compare the French and the South African historical contexts, the ways in which Darnton deals with the issue of underground reading practices provide insights into the ways in which marginalised reading practices can be addressed and examined.

Darnton establishes a clear link between underground literary networks and socio-political changes in his study of the French Revolution of 1789, clearly positioning books as agents of change in history, as conveyers of political and ideological messages. In line with this observation, this thesis posits books as potential agents of change albeit in the context of apartheid South Africa. The ways in which books were actively used in the alternative networks suggests a link between socio-political changes and the circulation and reading of banned or "subversive" ideas in their printed or oral forms, building on Darnton's idea that books are a force in history (2002, 9). This idea was studied in South Africa by Belinda Bozzoli, amongst others, who emphasises what she calls a process of "translation" (2004, 326) performed by readers between legal and illegal, elite and popular, so that ideas could transcend barriers in terms of literacy and access to books and ideas, and be disseminated amongst the largest public, instilling social and political changes in the public space.

The line between elite and common, serious and popular, while being defined by a dominant ideology, is actively contested and blurred in the context of popular resistance to a dominant mainstream ideology. As Darnton suggests, French pamphleteers,

producers and consumers were considered as the "low-lives" of literature, as opposed to the canons that established the French classics. Literary production and consumption were segmented along classifications pertaining to economic, social and political classes, and between "popular" and "serious" literatures. Darnton studies the literature that was left out of French conventional literary history and that was not elevated to posterity. In other words he examines the marginalised or popular literature in 18th century France. This thesis argues that, in the context of apartheid South Africa, readers' profiles did not always conform to the categorisations brought about by institutionalised censorship, but that they conformed to ideological affinities and individual usages of texts that broke down class affiliations, with so-called serious literature being read and understood by popular readers, and vice-versa. This argument highlights the versatile ideological affinity at play in what Chartier terms the "readable space" (1992, 48), or to borrow Bozzoli's terminology, the translatable space (2004, 332). Isabel Hofmeyr points out, in "Popular Literature in Africa: Post-Resistance Perspectives" (2004b), amongst others scholars studying popular culture in Africa, that popular culture is often used by readers or audiences to enter the domain of mainstream politics, and in a post-colonial setting, that "popular culture becomes a terrain of contradictions and ambiguity rather than a site simply of resistance" (2004b, 130). This observation reminds us to be aware of the complexities and inner politics of alternative readerships and popular readerships, prompting an investigation of reading groups beyond the commonalties of its resistant and oppositional character.

In order to further deepen the understanding of readers, readerships, reading communities and reading public discussed in this thesis, a clear understanding of the idea of "public" is necessary, and will extensively borrow from Michael Warner's work on understanding "what is a public?" (2002a, 8). For Warner, "the public" is a "social totality" (2002a, 49), "a public" shares "common visibility" and "common action" (2002a, 50), and the entity "public" comes into being through texts and their circulation (2002a, 50). Moreover, a public is multi-facetted, historical and time-specific, in other words needs to be understood in context. Through the circulation of ideas and discourses amongst people, a public is thus created: "the notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of

texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity" (2002a, 11).

The conditions underlying the existence of a public are, according to Warner, based on the following assumptions: "a public is self-organized" (2002b, 50); "a public is a relation among strangers" (2002b, 55); "the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal" (2002b, 57); "a public is constituted through mere attention" (2002b, 60); "a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (2002b, 62); and "publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation" (2002b, 68). This thesis will relate to these conditions in terms of the readerships represented by the censors, the alternative readers, and the various notions of readership elaborated by censors, as organised spaces of public discourse and counter-discourse.

The idea of "public" and "private" can intersect, as Warner argues, and at times the "personal is political", and the political is personalised (2002a, 34). In terms of the alternative reading public in the context of censorship, the dichotomy between public and private was seemingly blurred, as texts circulated in a personalised, discreet and random manner amongst readers in the alternative book circuit. Readers were linked together through books, through a common anti-apartheid stance and a common ideology of resistance. In this sense, the public character of the texts and ideas circulated in print intersected with a personal interpretation of text. Moreover, as Njabulo Ndebele (1991) and other South African intellectuals argue, in apartheid South Africa private issues were made public and vice-versa as public laws governed private matters, thus blurring the traditional demarcation between "public" and "private". Readers of banned literature interiorised some ideas contained in publications through their public interactions, translating them to suit their personal contexts and expectations, affirming a "private identity through public politics" (Warner 2002a, 26).

The notion of a reading public in a context where reading banned literature is a clandestine activity may seem contradictory in terms. Can we speak of a private or clandestine public? In answering this question, Warner's concept of "counter-public" can

be useful, as it seemingly defines the readers of banned literature, as "some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public" (2002a, 56). As such, even if branded as clandestine, illegal, undesirable, marginalised, underground or alternative, the public that came into being through the circulation of banned texts and ideas is a public, or more precisely a counter-public, as it was created in opposition to the dominant public that came into being against the censors' discourse. Understood as being united through a common goal and common interests, the readers of banned or undesirable publications will be understood as a counter-public, or an alternative readership, with specific characteristics and conventions.

**Context of this Thesis**

Based on the theoretical foundation outlined above, largely borrowing from the international history of the book and sociology of literature scholarship, this thesis will posit itself amongst several works on African and South African literary history, and more specifically amongst works on the issue of South African censorship.

**African and South African Literary and Book History**

As seen above, the scholarship in the field of the history of the book provides foundational templates and theories to work from for an analysis of readership formations, the role of books in readers' lives and the social interactions around books, all issues at stake in this thesis. The international history of the book can at times suit the South African context; however, when applying these theories to African contexts, one must contextualise the historical, political and social characteristics, and acknowledge the diversity inherent to the time and place of the object of study, as was pointed out by scholars of book history in Africa such as Karin Barber (2001; 1997), Stephanie Newell (2000; 2002a; 2002b), Archie Dick (2004a; 2004b; 2006; 2007a; 2007b) and Isabel Hofmeyr (1985; 1993; 1996; 2001; 2004a; 2004b; 2005), amongst others.

In recent years, book history has emerged as a major discipline in post-colonial contexts, notably in India, led by, amongst others Priya Joshi (2004), Abhijit Gupta and Swapan

Chakravorty (2004). This new take on book history stresses the advantages of a transnational history of the book whereas historically marginalised readerships can become the main subject of study, for as Gupta and Chakravorty point out (2004, 1), the history of the book has the advantage of being multi-disciplinary and retrospective in focus. The scholarship of book history can thus provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for an analysis of what was left in the background or periphery of traditional research in the field. Various initiatives have been made on the international level to academically reposition these "peripheral" or "common readers" as a primary subject of study, amongst others through the works of Jonathan Rose (2001), Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa (1992), Mary Thale (1995), and Kate Flint (1993), whose subjects of analysis include so-called common readers and marginalised readers.

A growing body of literature participates in a new understanding of reading in an African context, inscribing itself in the larger scholarship of book history and studies on popular literature in Africa. The pioneering work of Karin Barber (1997; 2001) shows that various modes of textual production are gaining currency in the public space in Africa, informing new dynamics of text production and reception which reconfigure the literary space. Following in Barber's analytical footsteps, Stephanie Newell (2000; 2002a; 2002b) shows that West African readers developed their own reading strategies and conventions somewhere between private and public, elite and popular, written and oral, and so on, in a kind of third space, or "in between" space, to borrow on Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonial theory (1994). The recent African scholarship on reading stresses the importance of acknowledging the process of "creolisation" performed by readers (Newell 2002a, 2002b; Hofmeyr 2004), where new hybrid zones are created, where private meets public and margins meet the centre. This process of "creolisation", or adaptation or translation, sheds light on the intricacies and complexities inherent to the notion "public culture". It allows the adoption of an analytical framework embracing the heterogeneity, creativity and multiplicity of readers, who use various means to actively participate in the literary networks, at times having to create a parallel or alternative industry in order to accommodate their reading patterns. Newell points out, drawing on Barber's findings, that "popular literature on the continent must be regarded from the

onset as more individualistic and heterogeneous than mass-produced titles available in Europe and North America" (2002, 1). An examination of the modes of distribution, dissemination and reading carried out by South African readers will shed light on the multiplicity of South Africa's reading cultures. As Sarah Nuttal points out in her essays "Reading in the Lives and Writing of Black South African Women" (1994) and "Stylising the Self" (2004), amongst others, consumption – of which reading could be seen as a manifestation, as argues Hugh Mackay (1997) – often leads to a sense of political and ideological identity.

In South Africa, social classes and ranks were imposed through a political agenda, embodied in a dominant discourse. As is observable in the censors' discourse, these categorisations were used to elaborate notions of readers, but were often challenged in practice. For example, so-called educated readers read Marx's essays, just as did working-class readers. Some banned books, branded as "popular" or "serious" literature, somehow transcended categorisations and classes, to reach a wide scope of readers, from the ranks of the uneducated and semi-literate to the highly educated and literate, united into an entity known as a readership rallied around common interests.

This thesis will argue that different parameters need to be developed in order to fully grasp the subtleties and intricacies which characterise the South African readership for banned literature. As Archie Dick points out, in a context like apartheid South Africa one must take into account reading regulations, which undeniably impacted on reading practices, in the same way as censorship as a system impacted on the cultural industry in general. Dick's work on librarianship and reading, including essays such as "Building a Nation of Readers?" (2004a), "Book History, Library History and South Africa's Reading Culture" (2007a), and "The Development of South African Libraries in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Cultural and Political Influences" (2007b), provides a historical understanding of librarianship in South Africa, and more particularly on its roles in developing readerships and reading cultures in South Africa. The essay "Book Burning and the Complicity of South African Librarians" (Dick 2004b), for its part, sheds light on a taboo practice that occurred at the height of state censorship in South Africa, namely

the practice of book burning in municipal libraries, where librarians were for the most part, as Dick argues, accomplices to the system.

Ways of reading are multiple, and can be analysed through various angles, of which book history, rendering literature its poetic, social and historical functions, is one. Hofmeyr's study (1993) on oral literature in South Africa is a significant contribution towards a historical approach to literature in general, and to oral literature in particular. In her analysis of oral literature in South Africa, Hofmeyr reminds us of the significance of political and social factors as determinants in African oral literatures (1993, 5). Whilst this thesis mainly deals with written literature, it examines how written texts can enter oral networks of diffusion through the reading performed by readers, thus positing readers as participants in a broader oral culture opened up by texts. This idea of written and oral literary cultures intermingled into one interpretive protocol brings the notions of literacy and historicity into play. This thesis will examine these issues from a readers' perspective. Bozzoli explores the fine line between oral and written cultures in her essay, "The Taming of the Illicit: Bounded Rebellion in South Africa, 1986" (2004). She examines how illegal ideas found in books were translated into an oral format accessible to a wider public, and how so-called sophisticated intellectual ideas and texts were popularised and rendered more popular, creating an intellectual subculture where ideas and publications were used in debating societies, yielding political activism in the larger society.

Michael Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* (2003) discusses various literary trends that emerged throughout South Africa's literary history. Focusing on the issue of literary culture, Chapman reminds us that the concept transcends genres and borders. In the collection of essays *Soweto Poetry* (2007), Chapman presents the Black Consciousness (BC) social movement as a determining factor in the unfolding not only of political affairs in South Africa, but also of its literary history. From the various essays contained in this collection, a clearer picture of the literary trend known as "New Black Poetry", "Black Consciousness Poetry" or "Soweto Poetry" emerges, and the aesthetics, social significance and political impact of this generation of writers' work can be linked to the

broader social context which created and nurtured it. Through the essays of major literary critics, writers and poets such as Peter Abrahams, Mafika Gwala, Christopher Hope, Mandlenkosi Langa, James Matthews, Es'kia Mphahlele, Mbulelo Mzamane, Njabulo Ndebele, Sipho Sepamla, Mongane Serote, Christopher van Wyk, and Mothobi Mutloatse, to name a few, "a non-elitist poetry of ethical power" (Chapman 2007, cover jacket) is discussed and identified, shedding light on the poetry groups that emerged in South Africa in the 1970s.

Also shedding light on the BC Movement, Daniel R. Magaziner's *The Law and the Prophets* (2010), which proposes an intellectual history of black resistance in South Africa during apartheid, provides information on the intellectual works that influenced the emergence and spread of the BC message. At times, it discusses the reading strategies of some key figures in the BC movement, providing examples of how banned literature was used to further socio-political gains and create a popular social movement that gained currency on various levels of South African society.

**Censorship in South Africa**

The scholarship on censorship in apartheid South Africa mainly focuses on authorship, publishing history, and on the censorship apparatus per se. While it inevitably alludes to readers, as they were an integral part of the system, it generally does not focus on issues of readership and reading. However, studies on the censorship apparatus and on the censors' ideology, on issues of authorship and literary production and on the publishing industry provide the basis on which this thesis elaborates its focus on readers and reading.

Christopher Merrett's *A Culture of Censorship* (1994) posits censorship as a political tool designed to control the circulation of information and of people. It considers censorship as a component of the broader apartheid system, and provides a chronological historical account of its development into the elaborate apparatus it became, linking it to political and intellectual repression.

Margreet de Lange, in *The Muzzled Muse* (1997), provides an overview of the conditions in which literature was produced during censorship, examining the differences and commonalties observable in some sectors of literary production created by apartheid, namely literature in English by black authors, English literature by white writers and Afrikaans literature by white writers. She explores how each of these groups of writers were confronted by censorship in different ways, and how in turn they responded to the pressure exercised by the system on their work.

Prominent South African writer J.M. Coetzee's *Giving Offense* (1996), a collection of essays on censorship, discusses the censor's ideology underpinning the censorship system in South Africa. Exploring the notion of censorship and the censors' deeper motives in various contexts from a historical perspective, Coetzee argues that South African censorship was in fact a secular institution underpinned by highly complex political, ideological and moralistic motives. He discusses how censorship crept into the writer's work, at times unwittingly, affecting literary production on various levels.

André du Toit's essay, "The Rationale of Controlling Political Publications" (1983), explores the dynamics of political publications' control, providing a statistical overview of the publications submitted to the various censorship boards throughout censorship in general, with special emphasis on the application of the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974. In another account of the rationale of publications control, but this time from the point of view of a censor, J.C.W. van Rooyen's *Censorship in South Africa* (1987) discusses state control over publications. Van Rooyen, who occupied the position of chairman of the Publications Appeal Board in the 1980s, provides incisive information on the censors' application of notions central to the censorship discourse, such as the likely reader and undesirability.

Renowned novelist and essayist Nadine Gordimer, a strong anti-censorship activist, explores the issue of censorship in, amongst other works, "The Black Interpreters" (1973), "What Happened to Burger's Daughter" (1980) and "Censorship and the Artist" (1988). She mainly focuses on authorship and literary production, exposing how

censorship affects groups of writers differently and on different levels. Also dealing with the issue of authorship, André Brink's "Censorship and Literature" (1983) and Christopher Hope's "Visible Jailers" (1982) provide insights from within the literary industry during apartheid.

Central to publishing studies in South Africa, Nicholas Evans and Monica Seeber's "The Politics of Publishing in South Africa" (2000) comprises a collection of essays focusing on different aspects of book publishing in South Africa. These essays collectively expose the complexities and consequences of the censorship laws on the development of the book publishing industry in South Africa, both mainstream and alternative. Amongst others, Phaswane Mpe and Seeber's essay "The Politics of Publishing in South Africa "(2000), Dick Cloete's "Alternative Publishing in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s" (2000) and Guy Berger's "Publishing for the People: The Alternative Press 1980-1999" (2000), provide insights on the historical and political development of what came to be known as the alternative publishing industry in South Africa, which was created parallel to, and in reaction against, the mainstream industry. In doing so, it discusses the role played by some publishing ventures in curbing the effects of censorship on the circulation of books and ideas in apartheid South Africa.

The personal account of oppositional publisher David Philip, published in the essay "Book Publishing under and after Apartheid" (1990) offers a first-hand account of the activities of one of the leading alternative publishers in South Africa, namely David Philip Publishers. Underpinned by the assumption that the accessibility to books is a human right, Philip's essay offers a brief and personal account of some alternative publishers in South Africa. He discusses how these publishing ventures interacted and were affected at various levels by censorship, providing insights on the interactions and relations that developed in the alternative publishing industry in South Africa.

Caroline Davis, in her essays "The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing" (2005) and "Histories of Publishing under Apartheid" (2011), provides insights on the position of international publishing houses like Oxford University Press (OUP) in the apartheid

publishing dynamics. She emphasises the conundrum facing publishers in terms of ideological and commercial interests, discussing the relation between the economical and cultural capital of commercial publishing in a politically-charged context such as apartheid South Africa. Shedding light on the activities of international publishers in South Africa, her essays emphasise the division between the mainstream and alternative publishing initiatives, which was at times blurred and not as clear as could be expected.

Peter D. McDonald, in his recent but authoritative work on censorship entitled *The Literature Police* (2009a), provides a detailed account of the censorship apparatus, with an analysis of the censors, publishers and writers' roles in, and reactions to, the censorship system. By focusing on the cultural consequences of censorship, McDonald presents previously unreleased information on the detailed workings of the censorship bureaucracy, exposing the intricacies and complexities inherent in the censors and their analytical processes, these becoming the self-proclaimed guardians of the literary, as he points out. He provides an insightful and comprehensive analysis of censorship as a literary institution, and in doing so discusses the practical and ideological context in which books were produced, circulated and received. Emphasising the literary nature of the censors' discourse forming part of an otherwise political apparatus, McDonald's study, which inscribes itself in the history of writing and publishing, provides a wealth of information on which this thesis builds on for its examination of readers in the context of apartheid censorship in South Africa.

**Conclusion: Literature Review**

This literature review has shown the extent to which the sociology of literature and more specifically the history of the book are particularly relevant when studying issues of readership and reading from a sociological point of view. The dynamics informing the formation of readerships in the public space, the specific sets of relations that emerge between readers and texts, the links that bind literature and the broader society together, can help in answering the question of how, why and by whom banned literature was read in South Africa. While several works deal with literary history in South Africa, with

some focusing on the authorship, publishing, and distribution aspects of the book chain, relatively few focus exclusively on the issue of censorship, and even fewer on the repercussions of publications control on readers.

In light of the above, this study will build on the existing scholarship to focus on the issue of reading and readership in the context of censorship in apartheid South Africa. By understanding Darnton's communication circuit in relation to the readers' role in this circuit as a whole, and the readers' relations to the other actors involved in the communication circuit, and by revisiting the censors' interpretive protocol with a focus on their perceptions of readers and reading, this thesis will propose a reader-centric interpretation of the South African literary history between 1948 and 1990, inscribing itself in the South African history of the book scholarship.

**Method: Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether political literature that was banned in South Africa was read, and if so by whom, how and for what reasons. The method used in this thesis was designed to reach this outcome, namely to paint a portrait of the social context in which censors, banned publications and readers interacted.

This section will present an overview of the methods of research used to reach the conclusions related to the research statement detailed in the Introduction chapter. After giving an overview of the research design, the methodology employed to apply the research design will be detailed, and finally the limitations inherent to the method will be discussed.

**Research Design**

In order to test the thesis statement, an amalgamation of research techniques were used, namely: analysis of secondary sources, in-person interviews, case studies and content analysis of archival material. The analysis of secondary sources and historical approaches

enabled the use of data collected by other researchers on the South Africa apartheid era, and contributed to strengthen the background information necessary to this thesis. The use of interviews and testimonies allowed the collection of complementary information from a limited number of individuals who were in South Africa during the apartheid years, providing subjective accounts and insights into the censorship system in the readers' personal capacity. The three case studies on the censors' archival records carried out for this thesis lead to a review of a selection of censors' reports in a structured way, and facilitated a comparative analysis of the censors' discourses in relation to the definitions and conceptualisations of readers examined in the thesis. The purpose of this combined approach is therefore to recreate, to a certain extent, the politico-historical and socio-literary context in which the censorship apparatus was developed during apartheid in South Africa and to position the censors and readers within this context, and discuss the censors' ideological and interpretive protocols in terms of the imagined and real readers of so-called undesirable literature.

A possible strength of such a configuration of research techniques is the corroboration of information contained in primary sources from secondary sources, and vice-versa, which confers a certain degree of validity and reliability to the data collected. The use of archival material from the successive censorship boards, which was only recently made available in the public domain, allows a re-examination of previously accepted assumptions regarding the secretive censorship apparatus and sheds a new light on the censors' role in the literary field in South Africa and on their discourse, as pointed out by McDonald (2009a).

However, some weaknesses can be observed in terms of the use of testimonies and interviews to collect data. As Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa point out in their study of oral histories of reading (1992), the danger inherent to tapping into what they term "oral archives" is that memory is subjective, forgetful and tends to re-order memories, confuse facts and remembrance, and romanticise the past. Despite these potential shortcomings, oral history is often needed to study an elusive activity such as reading. Readers often do not leave written traces of their readings, as discussed in the previous chapter. The

interpretation and analysis of oral narratives can prove to be a complex exercise, as elements of nostalgia and dramatisation, for instance, can alter the accuracy of data collected, not to mention that the assumptions and subjectivity of the interviewer can also bias his or her interpretation of evidence collected. However, as several studies which utilise interviews with readers (Lyons and Taska (1992); Radway (1984)) indicate, this method, while limited in some ways, can produce original and significant findings. In the South African context work by Nuttall (1994, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004), Lucie Charlewood (2000), Thapelo Mashishi (2000), Mmashikwane Myambo (2000), and Sheila Boniface (2000) has utilised a similar approach, and emphasises the social character of reading observable in some South African readers and reading practices.

Another scholar of reading, Janice Radway, drawing on Angela McRobbie, reminds us that representations are themselves interpretations: "They can never be pure mirror images of some objective reality […] but exist always as the result of a 'whole set of selective devices, such as highlighting, editing, cutting, transcribing and inflecting'" (1984, 5). The representation of the alternative reading communities as depicted in this thesis, although carefully drawing from reliable and authoritative primary and secondary sources on the topic, could therefore be tinted by a subjective selection and reading of the facts analysed and communicated by experts and readers. In this regard, Radway further points out "any scholar's account of a social formation as a determining context is additionally an interpretation, itself produced from within an ideological position and a particular historical context" (1984, 6). In addition to the inherent predispositions of the interviewer, who comes from a certain background and carries certain assumptions, the relation between the researcher and the interviewees can at times alter the dynamics of the interview and alter the data obtained. The author of this thesis was at times in a position of a student talking to an expert, and at other times in a position of a "specialist" interviewing a common reader. These "power-relations", so to speak, could have included an element of prejudice in the unfolding of the discussions, or on the interviewee's desire to provide answers that could fulfil assumed expectations of the interviewer.

**Methodology**

In order to apply the research design, some research instruments were used to carry out the interviews and complement the secondary sources and case studies. Three sets of questionnaires were developed and used during the in-person interviews, namely a readers' questionnaire, a publishers' questionnaire, and a librarians' questionnaire. These adapted questionnaires were sent to the respective interviewees prior to the interviews taking place, by e-mail when possible, in order to allow the interviewees to think through the topic, and the majority of questions contained in these questionnaires were open-ended. They were not meant to be completed in writing by the interviewees but rather meant to guide the discussions and hint towards some possible themes to be discussed.

A questionnaire was designed for so-called common readers (see Annex 3), which comprised approximately twenty questions focusing on reading habits and patterns in relation to banned literature. The purpose of the readers' questionnaire was to give a direction for an unstructured interview, proposing some leads towards a conversation on reading and banned literature. The questionnaire was designed without the intention of being followed in a strict manner during the interview, as the interviews were carried out as casual conversations, with an occasional reference to the question schedule to refocus the discussion back to the topic, if necessary. A questionnaire for publishers was developed, focusing on the production and circulation of books in the alternative literary circuit (see Annex 2). This questionnaire, comprising about fifteen open-ended questions, was aimed at being used as a guideline for a semi-structured interview, to collect information on the alternative publishing circuit workings and on reading. The questionnaire for librarians was composed of ten open-ended questions, in order to also guide a semi-structured interview (see Annex 1).

Through the in-person interviews, some information was collected from a subjective and personal point of view. The objective of the interviews with readers was to establish how and which banned literature was read by common readers despite the official censorship climate. These interviews with common readers served to establish some motives for

reading banned publications, some examples of titles read, the ways in which banned books were stored and circulated amongst readers, and opened up the way for further investigation, as the results from these interviews challenged the view that common readers would be more inclined to read authorised literature due to the restricted availability of books. In fact, it emerged that the common readers interviewed were quite resourceful in sourcing banned publications. It also appeared that the readers interviewed had read several banned titles even at the height of censorship. The interviews with publishers and librarians, while touching on similar topics as those outlined above, also served to collect information on the production and distribution of publications in the alternative networks and in libraries.

The open-ended questions had the advantage of putting the interviewees at ease to express themselves in their own words, and allowed the discussions to get into more depth when judged necessary. It also lead to the collection of information that was not necessarily planned in the initial questions schedules, enabling digression from the set format, as the interviewees proposed different angles of approach and complementary themes that added value to the interviews. The unstructured interviews with readers were not recorded but notes were taken during and after the interviews, hence the limited number of direct quotations. The other interviews were recorded and transcribed after the interviews, and a transcript of the interview was sent to the concerned individuals for comments, if necessary (see Annexes 4, 5, 6). At times, interviewees engaged in a correspondence with the interviewer, as more information and details came to mind after the interview had already taken place. These correspondences were also included in the primary data analysed for this thesis.

The sample of readers interviewed was selected from accessible and available people within reach. Interviews were conducted in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg with twenty informants between 2004 and 2007, with the exception of one telephone interview and some written correspondences entered into by e-mail. These interviewees were living in Durban or Johannesburg at the time of the interviews, but were formerly living in urban areas in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the North West

province and the Western Cape when the events being recollected occurred. The age of the interviewees ranged from early 30s to early 80s, offering coverage over most of the apartheid years. Interviewees were selected primarily for their age, so they could realistically impart information on their readings as young adults or adults at any given period between 1950 and 1990. The level of education of the interviewees varied, ranging from mid high-school qualifications to doctorates. It could therefore be said that on average, the sample was composed of literate readers. Most interviewees were black South African, as well as some coloured, Indian and white South Africans, and all were fluent in English although it was not the interviewee's first language in most cases. The gender aspect could have been more carefully planned and could lead to another study, as the sample was invariably composed of males. It could therefore be pointed out that a male, urban, literate bias prevails over the results, and that in light of this the group was relatively homogenous.

The sample does not pretend to be representative of the whole population, but must rather be perceived as a purposive and availability sample. The results thus obtained provide a case study based on a pilot sample that could be probed to a larger scale and scope. As mentioned above, interviewees were chosen knowingly as being able to supply information on the networks where banned literature circulated, which could lead to a certain bias in terms of analysis, as no quantitative survey was conducted to establish, for instance, the proportion of readers who read banned publications against the total number of readers in the country.

The results obtained through this sample are however considered as reliable, as they tend to corroborate secondary sources and testimonies also consulted for this study. Moreover, the interviewees' memories corroborated each other, with some variations dependent on the decade being discussed, in line with the evolution of the censorship apparatus from the 1950s to the 1990s. Information pertaining to what, where, and when banned literature was read, as well as the ways in which this literature was acquired, stored and disseminated amongst readers was collected. Reading strategies were investigated, amongst them public reading, such as poetry readings, reading groups and literary

debates. These interviews opened the way for a deeper investigation on the modalities of production, circulation and consumption of banned literature, which could be substantiated with, and set against, existing literature on the topic. They also provided interesting facts and details on how this literature was perceived, stored, passed on amongst trusted friends, and used for furthering political and ideological credos through reading circles or reading communities. The interviews revealed that books were acquired through various channels, and that the reading communities emerging around these books were usually small in number, and consisted of politically aware individuals whose selection of reading materials were much broader than the anticipated corpus of authorised readings. It also emerged that books were extensively discussed in relation to the political and social situation. Seemingly, several readers were initiated to the ideas contained in banned books through conversations with other readers, which prompted their reading of the said book. This oral network ostensibly played a major role in the dissemination of ideas contained in banned books. Most readers testified having shaped or articulated their political consciousness and awareness through reading some banned texts.

**Limitations**

Reader studies have shown how the collection and analysis of oral evidence poses methodological difficulties (Lyons and Taksa 1992, Radway 1984), and some of these are addressed above. As Lyon and Taksa point out, "the value of oral recollections is always open to debate and continual reassessment" (1992, 8).

In light of the sampling of interviewees created for this thesis, and besides the limitations explained above, it could be suggested that factors linked to forgetfulness, romanticising, false memories and nostalgia might have played a role on the reliability of data collected, as a minimum of fifteen years had lapsed between the memories recounted and the interviews. This could lead to an over-generalisation or simplification of the conclusions obtained. Moreover, the fact of having distributed questionnaires to be discussed in advance, and indeed the wording of questions themselves, could have unwittingly

conveyed some expectations in terms of the information sought through the exercise. The very understanding of the participants' conception of what constitutes literature could also have been probed into further details, as perhaps it led to an avoidance of alluding to popular genres of literature in some interviewees by unintentionally inciting an exclusive focus on socio-political literature. Finally, the questions related to reading banned literature were often linked to socio-political considerations, which were perhaps elicited by virtue of speaking of "banned" literature, or perhaps because of the political awareness common, at varying degrees, to the readers interviewed.

**Ethical Procedures**

The interviews were conducted one-on-one, and interviewees were fully aware of the academic purpose of the interviewing process, and when recording was used the interviewees agreed to it. Most readers, particularly the so-called common readers requested to remain anonymous, the habits of cautiousness cultivated under apartheid still in evidence. Other interviewees requested to be named: political activist and poet Dennis Brutus, who agreed to a series of interviews and correspondences; Jewel Koopman from the Alan Paton Centre, the only woman in the sample, who entered into email correspondence with the author of this thesis; academic and former editor of *Work in Progress* Gerhard Maré; librarian Christopher Merrett; and writer and former editor of *Staffrider* Chris van Wyk.

**Conclusion: Method**

The conclusions gathered from the oral data were initially used as hypothesis, but were at a later stage used as evidence, once corroborated by other sources of information used in this thesis, namely secondary sources and archive documents.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this thesis, which discuss the elaboration of the censorship system and the development of the alternative literary circuit respectively, mainly draw from existing literature on the subject, focusing on the issues of reading and readers.

Chapter 5 discusses the roles of readers in the alternative circuit, and make use of the primary data collected through the interviews, as well as from secondary sources such as testimonies and autobiographies, amongst others. Chapter 6, which presents three case studies, uses data and information collected from the censorship boards' archival documents, which are available from the South African National Archives in Cape Town and Pretoria.

## CHAPTER 3 | CENSORED: POLITICO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF INSTITUTIONALISED CENSORSHIP & READERS IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

"The history of literature is the history of censorship."
(Günter Grass 2001)

These words, from German author Günter Grass, were spoken during a talk at the Swedish Academy of Literature in 2001 but could well resonate in South Africa, where censorship impacted on the socio-political and literary spheres. South African author André Brink, amongst others, stressed the political essence of censorship in South Africa by asserting that "when the state itself imposes censorship, it becomes not a moral but a political act" (1979, 43). Various intellectual figures in South Africa addressed the question of censorship in different ways, in the forms of essays, articles, and studies. An overview of these documents reveals the trends and approaches adopted towards censorship, which stresses the multisectoral nature and broad impact of censorship in South Africa during apartheid, the period at stake in this thesis. By the very nature of South African censorship, most of the in-depth accounts of the censorship apparatus start from the 1980s: before this date archival records were not made public and a general climate of secrecy reigned over the institutionalised system.

Amongst the publications dealing with the subject of censorship, The Institute for Race Relations published a collection in 1983 under the title *Censorship*, which contained five critical essays on censorship by André Brink, Allan Boesak, Ian McDonald, André du Toit and Johan van der Vyver (Coggins 1983). Each essay focuses on a particular angle of censorship, such as public morals, politics, literature and law. In 1984, Louise Silver published an account of political censorship, focusing on the legislations from a legal perspective. This was followed by a particularly detailed account of J.C.W. van Rooyen in 1987, himself a censor, which focuses on the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974 and subsequent amendments, and the system's internal procedures and administrative workings. In his work on censorship published in 1994, academic librarian Christopher Merrett highlights the role of censorship in South African political history, arguing that censorship was intrinsic to colonialism and apartheid, touching in passing on its

consequences in the cultural field, such as media production and academic writing, amongst others.

J.M. Coetzee's seminal piece on censorship, *Giving Offense*, was published in 1996. He approaches the concept of censorship from a multidisciplinary angle, highlighting the fibre of censorship across history and geographical space, illustrating the intricate complexities hidden behind political agendas in the application of censorship in South Africa and abroad. The essays respectively entitled "Apartheid Thinking" and "The Work of the Censors: Censorship in South Africa", shed light on the South African censorship system and the ideology of the censors in particular.

Margreet de Lange, in her 1997 study, focuses on literary production under censorship, and on the relationship inevitably forged between writers and censors. Other works, in the form of shorter essays, articles or chapters, have focused on censorship, such as several pieces published in *Staffrider* (Chapman 2003) or Beverly Naidoo's *Censoring Reality*, which presents a brief survey of the "biased" information disseminated through textbooks and newspapers as a consequence of publication control and manipulation of information.

Several South African anthologies of literature inevitably address the issue of censorship. Michael Chapman's (2003) *Southern African Literatures*, for instance, provides insights into the history of literature in South Africa, and offers a chapter focused on the apartheid era which was invariably punctuated with censorship and political issues. In the chapter, Chapman gives an overview of "resistance" literature and of what he labels the "silent decade" of the 1960s, otherwise known as the "great gap". Chapman's (2007) *Soweto Poetry* provides insight into the surge of Black poetry typical of the 1970s.

An important and recent contribution to understanding the South African censorship workings under apartheid and its effect on the cultural sphere is that of Peter D. McDonald (2009a), *The Literature Police*. McDonald's study focuses on literature in its broad definition, and offers previously unavailable insights into the practical workings of

the censorship apparatus, making use of recently available archival records to explore the complexities of the censors' application of the law and the resulting cultural consequences of apartheid on literary production and circulation. McDonald guides the reader into the ever changing censor's ideology, by the same token offering new ways of envisaging their relationship with writers, publishers and readers. The complexities of the censors' ideology, caught between literary and political considerations, are highlighted, and the secular and intellectual minds of censors are analysed in light of the reports and archival evidence, with the ever looming apartheid political landscape as a backdrop.

In apartheid South Africa, the era being examined in this study, an elaborate censorship system controlled cultural activities and literature in particular, through various informal channels as well as formal institutionalised legislations. The two main forms of silencing in effect during this time were the banning of individual, through the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, and the banning of publications, through the successive publication control legislations. Censorship directly impacted on the literary and cultural landscapes, and indirectly on the political sphere, prompting responses from writers, intellectuals and artists in general. J.M. Coetzee sums it up when observing that "the history of censorship and the history of authorship – even of literature itself, as a set of practices – are thus intimately bound together" (1996, 42).

This chapter, which builds on McDonald's work focusing on literary production in the context of censorship, is underpinned by the assumption that readers and censors were also "intimately bound together", to borrow Coetzee's expression (1996), as censors and readers in fact dialogued in and out of the common cultural space being created through publications control, articulating literariness in unique ways. By focusing on readers, this chapter will focus on the implications of the censorship legislations from the point of view of readers, and examine how censors and readers in fact fed each other through literary control and consumption, respectively. The chapter provides an overview of the changing censorship legislations, an account which sketches out the broader parameters of the legislation whilst highlighting how the censorship apparatus produced changing definitions of the reader. By tracing out these themes, the thesis seeks to add a new

dimension to the broader scholarship on censorship in South Africa.

**Censorship in South Africa Before 1950**

Official attempts to control publications and other forms of cultural productions date as far back as the colonial period in the nineteenth century, namely with the Obscene Publications Act No. 31 of 1892 targeting imported pornographic material; the Customs Management Act No. 9 of 1913 controlling the importation of publications deemed objectionable; and the Entertainments Censorship Act No. 28 of 1931, initially aimed at controlling the circulation of motion pictures and public entertainment in general, eventually extending its power to include control over imported books and periodicals in 1934.

Various incidents of early political interference in the media occurred in what was to become South Africa, such as President Paul Kruger's attempt to ban the circulation of the Transvaal leading newspaper *The Star* in 1897, deeming its content "dangerous to the peace and quiet of the Republic" after it published a cartoon mocking him (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 37). Early accounts of the press running in to trouble with authorities also include the imprisonment of Albert Cartwright, editor of *South African News*, for publishing an article judged seditious and subversive (Heywood 2004, 40). These early references to notions of seditious and subversive material indirectly speak of a readership that could be shocked, offended, or prone to action after reading such articles. However, these publications were most likely thought of as being generally disruptive of the peace and quiet of the Republic, and thus needed to be hidden from the reading public.

Shifting to the mid-twentieth century, in the early days of the apartheid era (1948-1990), when the NP came into power in 1948, it found substantial components of publications control in place that would subsequently be developed over the years into a complex censorship machinery, gaining momentum from the mid-1950s well into the 1980s (Thompson 2000, 193). Yet, it added considerably to this arsenal. One of the pieces of legislation that affected the availability and circulation of publications was the

Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, initially passed to outlaw the South African Communist Party (SACP), and gave the State power to ban anyone or organisation suspected of promoting communism.

**The Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950**

As the building blocks of apartheid gradually emerged under NP Prime Minister Daniel François Malan, the desire to silence opposition through political means grew stronger. On par with censorship being a tool within the broader apartheid project, the Suppression of Communism Act could be labelled as a defining moment in the consolidation of State censorship in South Africa. Enacted in 1950, this legislation empowered the Minister of Justice to ban and list organisations or individuals, detain or deport individuals without trial, seize documents, and prohibit printing, publication, and circulation of publications allegedly promoting "communism" (Merrett 1994, 21). Through this Act, the Minister of Justice exercised censorship by serving bans on alleged communist people and publications, in a bid to counter "communism", "terrorism" and "treason". Whilst officially aimed at countering communism in South Africa, in line with the western communist hunt of the 1950s, the Act targeted individuals, organisations and publications that expressed views opposed to the newly elected NP.

The Suppression of Communism Act's general objective was:

> To declare the Communist Party of South Africa to be an unlawful organization; to make provision for declaring other organizations promoting communistic activities to be unlawful and for prohibiting certain periodical or other publications; to prohibit certain communistic activities; and to make provision for other incidental matters (Act No.44 of 1950).

Section 1 of the Act defined the key terms contained in this broad objective. "Communism" was relatively loosely defined, as "the doctrine of Marxian socialism" promoting "dictatorship of the proletariat", "aiming at bringing about political, industrial or social or economic change within the Union", either through internal or foreign assistance, and encouraging "feelings of hostility between the European and non-

European races of the Union" (Act No. 44 of 1950). A "communist" was, in this light, "a person who professes to be a communist" or more implicitly, "a person […] advocating, advising, defending or encouraging the achievement of any of the object of communism" (Act No. 44 of 1950). The definition was eventually extended to anyone opposing the apartheid regime, or opposing the Nationalist's political agenda, rendering the Minister of Justice the powers of labelling dissident individuals, groups, and institutions as "communists". At times it openly diverged from its pretended goal of countering the "communist threat", and even pornography was written off as a sign of "communist infiltration" (Brink 1979, 43). Nevertheless, a statutory communist was to be silenced, and strategies ranging from house arrest to intimidation, detention without trial, forced exile and in some instances torture, were used. The Minister of Justice had "summary powers over anyone who in his opinion was likely to further any of the aims of communism" (Thompson 2000, 193). In line with this excessive control over information, which neared propaganda, "the discussion of politics was stringently suppressed in textbooks and history was re-written from a nationalist perspective" (Mpe & Seeber 2000, 21).

The Act prevented dissident writers that were banned from publishing and cut the links between alleged communist writers and their equally subversive reading constituencies. Section 6 (a), (b) and (c) of the Act also makes provisions for prohibiting certain publications which propagate the principles or promote "the spread of communism", "is published or disseminated by or under the direction or guidance of an organisation which has been declared an unlawful organization", "serves as a means for expressing views propagated by any such organization", or if it "is calculated to further the achievement of any of the objects of communism" (Act No. 44 of 1950). According to the Act, the Governor-General is allowed to, "without notice to any person concerned, by proclamation in the Gazette, prohibit the printing, publication or dissemination" of the publication. In turn, a publication designates, as per Section 1 (1) of the Act, any book, pamphlet, record, list, placard, poster, drawing, photograph, picture, newspaper, magazine, book, and hand-bill. The foundations for publication control were therefore vaguely laid – or consolidated – through the Suppression of Communism Act, through

the control of, amongst others, “undesirable” writers and publications.

A banned person had to report to the police station on a regular basis, and could not participate in any organisation's activities or publish documents. It is estimated that by 1956, some 4,000 publications were banned under the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act (Merrett 1994, 34), and from 1950 to 1974, a total of 1,240 banning orders were served on people and organisations (Merrett 1994, 52). By silencing so-called communist writers before they could write and stopping the documents already published from being circulated, the potentially dangerous influence of some ideas on the vulnerable and easily influenced reader was contained.

Paradoxically, despite the climate of fear instilled in people by the emerging system, the decade of the 1950s was relatively prolific in terms of literary and cultural production. This contradiction – an environment filled with fear and repression being conducive for progressive literature – could be explained in various ways. Authorities focused on imported ideas and material, in a bid to prevent the invasion of an external communist threat on the South African public and readers. Gordimer presents the situation from another angle, which highlights the officials’ opinion concerning South African writers:

> Before 1963 there were no specific censorship laws in our country. Obvious pornography was spotted at customs offices when it arrived at our ports from overseas. There was no formal internal censorship of books or the visual arts. […] It was thought that South Africans themselves would not be capable of articulating such ideas except in the form of crude pamphlets which could be easily dealt with by seizure by the police and would be useful as evidence of treasonable activity. You didn’t need a censorship board for that (1988, 11).

The emerging apartheid apparatus was denounced by a generation of writers like André Brink, Dennis Brutus, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer, Masizi Kunene, Alex La Guma, Nkosi Lewis, Todd Mashikiza, Don Mattera, Bloke Modisane, Es’kia Mphahlele, Nat Nasaka, Alan Paton, Wally Serote and Can Themba, amongst others, many of whom were sooner or later banned. Despite the repressive political climate, writers from various backgrounds created a body of anti-apartheid literature that would form part of South

African literary heritage. For instance, in 1948, Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a seminal criticism of segregation and police brutality, was published. Periodicals like *Drum*, founded in 1951, created a platform to voice protests, publishing works from writers generally known for their activism and anti-apartheid creed. Merrett points out, alluding to the relative freedom of that period, that "the system was […] easy to circumvent by publishing within South Africa" (1994, 35).

The apartheid system was progressively consolidating its bureaucratic structure and hegemony over public and private spaces. Amongst these apartheid laws were, in 1950 alone: the Group Areas Act; the Immorality Amendment Act; the Population Registration Act; and the Suppression of Communism Act. The years that followed saw the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, Bantu Education Act of 1953, Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1953, and the Public Safety Act of 1953, to name but a few (Thompson 2000, 185-193). The Post Office Act of 1958 (amendment to the Act of 1911) also had implications for literature, as it dissuaded the postage of "offensive" documents to South Africa (Varley 1970, 143). For example, post office officials confiscated a report posted by a Canadian journalist on police brutality in Nyanga, in Cape Town (Merrett 1994, 42).

All of these laws contributed to marginalise the black population in general and progressive writers and readers in particular, from mainstream politics and socio-cultural affairs. Gordimer links these laws with the subjugation of some sections of the population to inferior education and access to public services, resulting in limited literacy levels amongst readers' constituencies:

> Our influence can be ignored by the censors at a time like the present because yet another form of censorship, one that comes from the roots of our society and has been there for generations has always controlled our high potential influence and rendered it negligible. South Africa has a boasted high rate of literacy, but it is school primer or comic book literacy, not book literacy (1988, 15).

Customs agents empowered by the Customs Act, acted as censors although, as Merrett puts it, they "would peruse [books] at 6s. per 50 pages" (1994, 34). The Minister of the

Interior distributed a list of writers – published overseas, South African or not – whose work had to be blocked at the borders. Imported books and periodicals were inspected, and customs agents had discretionary powers to object to the entry of a publication into the country. In fact, they scanned books and publications rather than read them, as Merrett's comment above suggests, and often based their decision on extra textual elements of the book rather than the text itself. The aim was to remove such publications from the public sphere, and make them literally unavailable to South African readers within South Africa. This embargo on South African literature published overseas was however not new, and was part of the consequences of a ban as per the Suppression of Communism Act, as Gordimer explains:

> This censorship cold war began long ago for writers with a wider public, that is abroad and in their own country, whose books are published in England and imported to South Africa as part of the literature of the English-speaking world (quoted in de Lange 1997, 74).

Over the years, however, several books published overseas by banned authors clandestinely entered South Africa, such as Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History*, Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, and several of Dennis Brutus' poems (Thompson 2000, 206). Loopholes were found in the way publications control operated. Disparities between books covering the same topic but some published inside and others outside of South Africa exposed the arbitrariness of the system. For instance, following the events of Sharpeville in 1960, Ambrose Reeves's imported book *Shooting at Sharpeville* was systematically embargoed at customs and banned under the pretext it represented a danger to the apartheid regime (Merrett 1994, 46). Meanwhile, a book on Sharpeville written by South African Bernard Sachs and published in South Africa, *The Road to Sharpeville*, was initially proscribed, but as Merrett observes, "this was found to be invalid as it was a local publication and could therefore only be banned for propagating communism" (1994, 46).

Despite the stringent measures contained in the Suppression of Communism Act, which undoubtedly successfully alienated several writers from their readerships, the government felt it had to tighten publications control in South Africa, to control damages in terms of

international public relations and prevent undesirable ideas from freely circulating amongst South African readers. The relative ineffective control over local publications prompted the government to launch inquiries to ensure better publications control over the printed media and the book trade, which led to the Press Commission in 1950 and the Commission of Inquiry into Undesirable Publications in 1954.

**The Press Commission**

The Press Commission was set up in 1950, following NP Member of Parliament A.J.R. van Rhyn's suggestion in 1948 to control printed media. He called for a probe into the alleged "sensationalism", "misrepresentation", "subversive" and "misleading" nature of reports in South Africa and its effect on the reputation of the country abroad, and on race relations within South Africa (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 52). The newly elected Nationalist government felt a great deal of animosity towards the English press, as it was openly critical of its new policies and contributed in exposing the situation and in generating criticism from the international community.

In an attempt to soften the country's image abroad, the Press Commission was launched and chaired by Jacobus Wilhelmus van Zyl. The main objectives of the Commission included an investigation into: the possibilities of increased state control over internal and external media reporting; monopolistic propensities; and the work of foreign correspondents in South Africa (Merrett 1994, 36; Hachten & Giffard 1984, 54). In McDonald's words, the Press Commission's objective was to "reign in the dominant White-owned liberal English language newspaper" (2009a, 22). The Commission was also tasked with an inquiry into the accuracy, responsibility and patriotism of South African journalism, and of incidences of sensationalism and triviality in the press. The Minister of External Affairs, Eric Louw, voiced the opinion of several parliamentarians when he declared in 1959 that "a great deal of South Africa's international trouble is due to political articles in the English Press" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 37). These new restrictive measures mainly targeted the content of the media, in order to control what both international and South African readers would read and be exposed to, preventing

internal “contamination” and external “bad press”. The aim was to shelter South African readers from some information, as it allegedly stirred “trouble”. This manipulation of information contributed to deepening the gap between the different population groups, as information did not circulate freely.

The Commission did not table a report before the 1960s, although the psychological effects of being consistently under observation and subjected to intimidation for nearly a decade took its toll on the press (Merrett 1994, 37). Between 1950 and 1955, the Press Commission proceeded to undertake a thorough surveillance and recorded the activities of the written media, press releases, posted reports, and clippings were assessed, and dossiers on journalists and editors were compiled (Merrett 1994, 36). This constant surveillance of journalists often led to self-censorship (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 58). Also during this period several foreign correspondents were deported from South Africa, notably British correspondents Basil Davidson, John Hacht and Doris Lessing (Merrett 1994, 37).

As Brian Bunting wrote in *New Age* in 1959, *Post* and *Drum* were amongst the few South African media to truly challenge the apartheid regime from within the country, with highly controversial research topics and reports (quoted in Merrett 1994, 38). Segregation of churches, farm labour conditions, and jail conditions are only some examples of topics tackled by the *Drum* team of journalists and photographers who exposed the consequences of apartheid on the black majority and on social relations. Investigative journalism was a primary target for authorities. Newspaper offices were under security police surveillance, attempts were made to recruit staff as informers, newspapers’ vendors and employees were intimidated, offices were raided, material confiscated, and assaults on journalists carrying out their duties occurred. For instance, Can Temba was assaulted by the police in Johannesburg in 1956 when entering a church to report on church segregation in South Africa for *Drum* (Merrett 1994, 38).

Despite this animosity, the final Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Press was handed in to Parliament in 1964, after a draft report had been presented in 1962. Foreign

reporting on South Africa was declared "extremely undesirable" (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 64), and it recommended setting up a Press Council that would replace the existing Press Board (Newspaper Press Union) which was perceived as lacking disciplinary powers. The Press Council would, according to the report, maintain press freedom in South Africa, encourage accurate reporting and informed and responsible comments, encourage and maintain the dignity of the state and its officials, receive complaints, try these matters and give judgement (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 64). However, the NPU's Press Board of Reference was kept in place, and the Commission's recommendations were shelved only to be implemented through various laws and amendments to existing acts in the decades that followed, especially after John Vorster became Prime Minister in 1966.

After accusing the press of "stabbing South Africa in the back" in 1971, Vorster declared: "I am looking at a legislation now which will contain a clause providing that if a newspaper continues to be guilty of publishing articles inciting racial hatred it will simply not appear on the streets" (quoted in Hachten & Giffard 1984, 68). The NPU amended its constitution in 1973, giving more power to the council by allowing it to fine those contravening the newly established code of conduct. Besides promoting the need to report news and inform the South African public, the amended code warned against reports likely to stir up racial, ethnic, or religious tensions, and demanded "due compliance with agreements entered into between the Newspaper Press Union and any department of the Government of South Africa with a view to public safety or security or the general mood" (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 69).

The Press Commission seemingly had views of readers as weak and easily influenced. The allusion to "inciting racial hatred" indirectly brings a conception of readers into play, needing protection against undesirable and harmful ideas. Moreover, the power of the written word is emphasised as being potentially strong. It was believed that words and images, such as exposés on the situation on the ground and oppositional editorials, for instance, could incite hatred and instil violent ideas in the minds of readers, as it could contribute in their formulating opinions and in knowing what is happening in the country.

These considerations depict a rather homogeneous image of the entity "reader", who is uncritically at the mercy of the information printed in the press. Aware of the potential power of media, the Press Commission tried to manipulate information to depict an image aligned with the nation building project, thus using its strengths to its own advantage.

**The Commission of Inquiry in Regard to Undesirable Publications**

With the control of the press, publications control in general gained momentum, and as McDonald explains, alluding to the Commission of Inquiry into Undesirable Publications which commissioned a policy review, "the main aim […] was to use the powers of the state to seize control of the public sphere at a time when extra-parliamentary protest against the emergent apartheid order was still open and strong" (2009a, 22). The Commission's recommendations eventually led to the seminal Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, which officially institutionalised publications control for the decades that followed and extended powers over imported and locally published publications.

Parallel to the Inquiry into the Press, which primarily targeted the media, the Commission of Inquiry in Regards to Undesirable Publications targeted publications in general. It was led by Geoffrey Cronjé, a professor of sociology and influential apartheid ideologue who wrote several books, with a keen interest in classical literature (Coetzee 1996, 166). The Commission of Inquiry in Regards to Undesirable Publications was launched in 1954. Its aim was to investigate the production, possession and circulation of imported and local publications in South Africa. Findings were published in September 1957 in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Undesirable Publications, after being tabled for the first time in October 1956. Referred to as the Cronjé Commission, the report contained several recommendations that turned out to have a high impact on the development of subsequent censorship laws from the 1960s onwards. In addition, through this Commission the basis of various definitions of readers emerged.

McDonald points out that the aim of the Cronjé Commission was "to make recommendations into the most effective ways of combating […] the evil of indecent, offensive or harmful literature" (2009a, 23). This highly suggestive labelling of literature as being "indecent", "offensive" or "harmful" laid the foundation of the literary rhetoric typical of apartheid censors' discourse. These notions contributed to the concept of undesirability, and informed literary criticism and semantic considerations performed by censors to justify censorship in the subsequent decades. Several notions of readers emerged from these concepts, as the "evil of indecent offensive or harmful literature" could manifest itself in various ways through its readers. For example readers needing protection from "indecent" and "offensive" material included a prudish and puritan reader, an easily shocked and offended reader and an innocent and naïve reader. Opposed to these, readers against whom the general public needed protection as they were thought of as dangerous and harmful could include the easily influenced reader, the subversive reader and the communist reader. These would form the basis of some of the main ideas of reader that would more or less consistently underpin the censors' arguments revolving around issues of readers and readership throughout apartheid.

The Commission advocated the creation of a Publications Control Board, which would compile a database and formally licence all publishers, printers, periodicals and booksellers in South Africa, as well as the creation of a monitoring system controlling both local and imported literature and pre-publication censorship (Merrett 1994, 35; McDonald 2009a, 23). On the one hand, the report proposed the adoption of an official definition of "literature", an idea that would spark debates within literary and intellectual circles on the essence of literariness for the years that followed. On the other hand, undesirable literature, or as per the Commission's terms "spiritual poison", would include material perceived as being "indecent, offensive or harmful to the ordinary, civilised, decent, reasonable and responsible inhabitants of South Africa" (Merrett 1994, 35). This "ordinary, civilised, decent, reasonable and responsible" inhabitant would in fact become the baseline reader against which undesirability would be evaluated. The Commission proposed the suppression of publications found undesirable, with an exception for academic and research purposes as they would be read by a limited number of "educated

readers", and promoted the idea of a "positive programme of uplift" (McDonald 2009a, 26). It recommended the prohibition of possession and importation of alleged communist literature, and the formation of a Publications Appeal Board linked to the government, who would review the decisions against which an appeal would be lodged.

From the Commission's report emerges the concept of an ideal reader, one that is so-called ordinary, civilised, decent, reasonable and responsible. The willingness to make the ideal reader coincide with the ideal citizen embodying nationalist values and beliefs reveals a broader nation building project instilled through reading and literature. As opposed to one of the readers implied in the Suppression of Communism Act (one that is easily enticed and reactionary), the "ordinary" reader has firm Christian values and morals and channels his cultural consumption within those principles. Along these lines, the proposed censors' mission is to prevent any unnecessary harm or offence that might be caused by undesirable literature on law-abiding citizens, which in the context of apartheid South Africa is highly suggestive. However, as we will see below, with the enactment of the Publications and Entertainments Act in 1963, and the creation of a board of literary experts as censors, sophisticated notions of the reader and of the literary emerged, which became intertwined with a broader social and political agenda.

Following the recommendations of the Cronjé Commission, the Deputy Minister of the Interior P.W. Botha proposed the Undesirable Publications Bill in 1960, which was never enacted but seriously contemplated. This Bill advocated censorship before publication, unprecedented – at least officially – in South Africa. It targeted any form of cultural expression, from the press to films, theatre, literature, and printed publications in general. It was denounced for trying to achieve, in the words of the leader of the South African Labour Party and member of Parliament Alexander Hepple, "political censorship of the most restrictive kind" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 34).

Cronjé, a strong advocate of separate development, wrote several essays where he discusses the issue of readers and readership. J.M. Coetzee points out that in "'n Tuiste vir die nageslag" ("A Home for Posterity"), in which he admittedly exercised self-

censorship, Cronjé speaks of two kind of readers, namely those who read with a magnifying glass, "searching for evidence to present to the natives and Coloureds that the Afrikaner is their greatest enemy"; as opposed to the *volks* readers, who need to read between the lines and "put back into the text what has been censored out", forming an "esoteric reading community" (Coetzee 1996, 169). Bearing in mind Cronjé's argument in favour of pre-publication censorship, Cronjé's "liberal reader" and "*volks* reader" referred to here can be better understood. Needless to say, the "native" and "coloured" readers were those easily enticed and influenced readers against whom the "average man" needed protection. Interestingly, it is seemingly assumed that he would not read the texts or at least not fully grasp their messages, as the liberal reader had to read for him, "searching for evidence" of discrimination on his behalf. The liberal reader, who read "with a magnifying glass", was therefore educated and harmful to the status quo. The *volks* reader, due to his education and sophisticated nature, could easily "read between the lines" and needn't worry about censorship, as some conventions and common interests would ensure that the messages implied in the voluntary censored texts would "esoterically" be identified, restored and understood. Himself being a writer, a reader and a censor, Cronjé posits himself as an accomplice to this privileged readership, which underlies an exclusive relationship between "enlightened" censors, writers, and "good" readers.

This tendency of censor's identifying with and speaking on behalf of readers will mark the evolution of the modern censorship apparatus from 1963 until the 1990s. South African readers were divided between the "good readers", whether naïve, prude, easily offended, or balanced, and the elusive group of other readers, which included subversive, reactionary and communist readers, who are, in Cronjé's words, "dangerous" and of whom "account must be taken" (Coetzee 1996, 169). These considerations, which are observable in the Commission's report, are of utmost importance for the legislations subsequently developed, as the reader eventually took a prominent place in the censor's arguments.

Cronjé justified the existence of institutionalised censorship as a measure of nurturing

and protecting Afrikaans literature, while furthering nationalist interests. In this perspective, the ingredients of "literariness" included an artistically-worthy literary piece, a "Christian outlook on life", a "consideration for the racial composition of the Union" and a particular sensitivity in addressing potentially "subversive" topics (McDonald 2009a, 26). The Afrikaans writer was expected to be responsible toward his nation and promote Afrikaner nationalist values and spirituality to the eyes of its readers. These provisions catered for conservative readers, and censorship's end-goal was to guide and channel reading, in a bid to promote, through the dissemination of good literature, good reading to good citizens, or what was later labelled as the "average" and "balanced" reader.

The Undesirable Publications Bill and underlying Cronjé Commission generated vigorous opposition from a broad spectrum of intellectuals, from within and outside of the Afrikaner literary establishment (Merrett 1994, 36). As McDonald points out: "opposing censorship was itself a matter of dispute" (2009a, 160). It must be noted that a great deal of the opposition concerned the Bill per se and not the idea of institutionalised censorship in general. Although the Bill was soon abandoned amidst pressure and protests, and reworked into a somehow softer Publications and Entertainments Act in 1963, a dialogue emerged from this controversy, involving different segments of the population, ranging from politicians, writers, publishers and critics, to intellectuals and academics. The exchanges were occasionally published, for instance in *Standpunte*, *Die Burger* and *Huisgenoot* (McDonald 2009a, 30-31). This opposition amongst Afrikaners' rank became a concern for authorities. Prominent intellectuals like N.P. van Wyk Louw and D.J. Opperman, as well as international organisations like PEN SA, openly criticised the Bill drafted on the recommendations. In reaction, Abraham Jonker, one of the ideological leaders behind the censorship apparatus, wrote in the newspaper *Die Burger* on 30 January 1963: "This proposal has nothing to do with serious literature. The Bill is directed against filth, pornography, blasphemy, offensiveness and the distribution of communistic propaganda. Everyone who opposes the regulations is in favour of these wrongs" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 34).

Van Wyk Louw, a central figure in the Afrikaans *avant-garde*, played a key role in the ongoing debates on the new Bill, which involved notions of literariness and the role of the writer as a "critical intellectual" (McDonald 2009a, 28). For van Wyk Louw, the Afrikaner nation depended not only on a strong political philosophy like apartheid to survive as a minority, but also on the creation of an Afrikaner Republic of Letters (McDonald 2009a, 30). McDonald points out that van Wyk Louw considered literature as a manifestation of the "national spirit" that should be under the guardianship of *avant-garde* writers, not of politicians (2009a, 31). This stance did not reject censorship as such, but proposed ways of operating within its framework, linking its end-goal to the creation of a nation whereby literature would serve as a rallying point where individuals would carry on their role of writers, readers, etc. It however advocated the purification of the arts from politics, a stance which would punctuate debates in literary circles for the decades that followed.

Another player on the Afrikaans scene was the Afrikaans Writers' Circle, founded in 1934 under government patronage. The Afrikaans Writers' Circle was not opposed to the fundamental principles of censorship but rather to its intricate technicalities, such as the definition of literature it proposed and the essence of literariness it implied. Its aim was to consolidate the *volk's* literary canons, which it must be pointed out, did not include black Afrikaans writers such as Adam Small and S.V. Peterson (McDonald 2009a, 164). It upheld the sanctity of the literary above politics, and believed in the artistic purity of literature.

Another grouping, the *Sestigers*, included some of the most prominent emerging Afrikaans writers of the 1960s, as the Afrikaans name meaning *Sixties* suggests, and included Chris Barnard, Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, Ingrid Jonker, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie, and Bartho Smith in its rank, to name but a few. Their work was frequently reviewed by censors, as they often broke away from the conservative Afrikaans cultural traditions and orthodoxies framed by censors, but they would not be affected by banning until the end of the 1960s, as discussed later in this chapter. McDonald sums the censor's general stance on literature in three succinct points, namely

that literature is an aesthetic space, that literature while belonging to a nation is universal, and that literature is not for mass readership but for literary readers (2009a, 163). It is striking to note that the *Sestigers'* concept of literary reader is at times similar to the censor's idea of an "ideal" and "sophisticated" reader. Despite this theoretical commonalty, these young writers, as Michael Chapman observes, felt a sense of alienation in the face of the paternalistic censorship structures (2003, 250). However, they never truly challenged the established authority, as Brink admitted in 1971: "No Afrikaans writer as yet tried to offer a serious political challenge to the system. We have no one with enough guts, it seems, to say: No" (quoted in Chapman 2003, 402).

The South African branch of international freedom of expression advocate, PEN, was another anti-censorship group founded in Johannesburg in 1927. Its first chairperson was Sarah Gertrude Millin, and in 1950 the Cape Town office opened. Although PEN SA opposed censorship in terms of freedom of speech and in principle, they were working within the system. The members were mainly white liberals, and included some Afrikaner *avant-garde* writers like van Wyk Louw, who was also sympathetic to the Afrikaans Writers' Circle, as seen above. PEN SA upheld an apolitical view of literature, which was in retrospect not so distant from the censors' stance about the incompatibility between arts and politics, and chiefly promoted the advancement of English South African literature.

Albert Luthuli voiced his concerns and those of many black South Africans in an interview with *New Age* in 1957, condemning the Cronjé Report's conclusions not only in terms of poetic licence, but as another building block of grand apartheid: "The recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry in regard to Undesirable Publications create another grave threat to the liberties of the people and constitute an unwarranted attack on the liberty of expression" (Luthuli 1957). This is a position which differs from the general opposition whereby censorship is condemned from within its institutional framework. For Luthuli, censorship was simply considered as yet another step towards the institutionalisation of apartheid and should be categorically rejected, a stance shared by Athol Fugard and Nadine Gordimer, amongst others. On this issue, Gordimer explains

in an article later published in *Staffrider*:

> One or two writers, like myself, had opposed the Act from the beginning three years before; you didn't have to look into a crystal ball to see that once you agree to accept censorship conditionally, you have endorsed it in principle and you will have to accept whatever means are used to apply it, in the end (1988, 13).

The relatively recent apartheid regime and its series of legislations naturally generated opposition well beyond literary circles, and in 1960 a State of Emergency was declared, following riots and anti-apartheid protests on a national level. The late 1950s to early 1960s saw unrest in the townships of Cato Manor (Durban), Langa (Cape Town), and Sharpeville (Johannesburg), to name a few. The events of Sharpeville in 1960, where the police opened fired on a protesting crowd, marked a turning point in South African history and politics, but also in South African literature, provoking a stream of literary production, or "documentary responses" to the tragedy (Heywood 2004, 194). Escalating resistance and opposition were met with increased repression, as the State tightened its control over the flow of ideas and information.

**The Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963**

It is in this general climate of increased protest and repression that the Publications and Entertainments Act was adopted in Parliament in March 1963, under Hendrik Verwoerd's leadership. Through this Act, publications control became relatively stricter and tighter. As seen earlier, censorship existed in South Africa well before 1963, through various legislations directly or indirectly affecting writers and publications. It is estimated that by 1963, 12,629 publications had already been taken out of circulation in South Africa, mainly through the Suppression of Communism Act, the General Law Amendment Act, and the Customs Act (de Lange 1997, 7). Literature by black authors was already caught in a web of legislations long before it could enter this new institutionalised publications control system. In this sense, black authors were not as drastically affected by the new legislations as their white counterparts, who thus far had had little contact with the system.

The Act was worded vaguely, using highly suggestive terminology. The central notion of undesirability, which would determine whether a publication was banned or not, is detailed in six points in Section 5 (2):

> A publication or object shall be deemed undesirable if it or any part of it:
>
> (a) is indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals;
> (b) is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic;
> (c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt;
> (d) is harmful to the relations between any inhabitants of the Republic;
> (e) is prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order;
> (f) discloses with reference to any judicial proceedings
>  i. any matter which is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals;
>  ii. any indecent or obscene medical, surgical, or physiological details the disclosure of which is likely to be offensive or harmful to public morals.

Furthermore, Section 6 (1) of the Act alludes to the notion of the probable or likely reader:

> If in any legal proceedings under this Act the question arises whether any matter is indecent of obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals, that matter shall be deemed to be:
>
> (a) indecent or obscene if, in the opinion of the court, it has the tendency to deprave or to corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence thereof; or
> (b) offensive to public morals if in the opinion of the court it is likely to be outrageous or disgustful to persons who are likely to read or see it; or
> (c) harmful to public morals if in the opinion of the court it deals in an improper manner with murder, suicide, death, horror, cruelty, fighting, brawling, ill-treatment, lawlessness, gangsterism, robbery, crime, the techniques of crimes and criminals, tippling, drunkenness, trafficking in or addiction to drugs, smuggling, sexual intercourse, prostitution, promiscuity, White-slavery, licentiousness, lust, passionate love scenes, homosexuality, sexual assault, rape, sodomy, sadism, sexual bestiality, abortion, change of sex, night life, physical poses, nudity, scant or inadequate dress, divorce, marital infidelity, adultery, illegitimacy, human or social deviation or degeneracy, or any other similar or related phenomenon; or

(d) indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals if in the opinion of the court it is in any other manner subversive of morality.

The usage of words such as "indecent", "obscene", "offensive", "harmful", "blasphemous", "prejudicial" and "public morals" in the Act in the context of apartheid creates a very fine line between morals and politics. As André Brink points out, in spite of the moralistic rhetoric of the censors, "the history of censorship in South Africa upholds the belief that it's primarily a political weapon" (quoted in Hachten & Giffard 1984, 155). The vagueness of the Act's wording led to interpretation, opening up a space for censors to manoeuvre secretively (McDonald 2009a). Censors' reports did not have to be made public, contributing to this general climate of secrecy and concealment of information which became characteristic of the apartheid regime as a whole (Merrett 1994, 71-2). With this in mind, moralistic concerns can therefore be translated into political terms. The concept of "public morals" designated in paragraph (a) is highly subjective and dependent on who the "public" is understood to be, which in the case of censors translated as the morals upheld by the Afrikaner nation. Similarly, the "religious convictions" mentioned in paragraph (b) that must not be offended were in all likelihood those of the Dutch Reformed Church (de Lange 1997, 17).

The first Publications Control Board, also called board of censors, was composed of nine full-time and part-time appointed members, for the most part academics in leading South African universities. The board, which was based in Cape Town, was assisted by a panel of secondary readers and subcommittees. Although it was in principle an autonomous body, it was nonetheless part of the broader apartheid project, disguising an otherwise Nationalist political agenda under moralistic and literary pretences. The appointment of chairman Gerrit Dekker, an *avant-garde* Afrikaans literary expert who assumed office from November 1963 to October 1968, was in part due to the lobbying efforts of prominent *avant-garde* intellectual and poet van Wyk Louw, and showed a desire from the part of the government, then under Verwoerd, to ease emerging tensions within the Afrikaans literary establishment. It also contributed, as McDonald points out, at placing issues revolving around literariness at the core of apartheid censorship (2009a, 39). The *volk avant-garde* was appeased with the appointment of Dekker and his team of literary

experts and academics as members of the first censorship board. As McDonald emphasises, the inclusion of Afrikaner literary experts in the censorship board "makes it difficult to construe the writer-censor relationship in the South African case as straightforwardly rivalrous" (2009a, 161).

The Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963 is a milestone in the institutionalisation of censorship in apartheid South Africa. With its literary experts and readers, the board mainly targeted potentially undesirable South African publications in English (McDonald 2009a, 42) and imports such as paperbacks and popular mass fiction. Since a Press Code was implemented parallel to the Publications and Entertainments Act, the board mainly dealt with novels, essays and literary magazines. Afrikaans literature enjoyed a privileged status in this first decade of censorship, while, as mentioned above, literature from African authors was often suppressed before it even reached the censorship bureaucracy, through other apartheid legislations in force. Once a book was deemed undesirable, it was banned and could not be quoted, reprinted, or distributed further. It was found that 52% of all publications submitted to the publication board in the 1960s and 1970s were banned because judged "undesirable literature" (du Toit 1983, 81). In addition, 60% of South African English books submitted to the censors were banned (McDonald 2009a, 45).

While the more conservative Afrikaans Writers' Circle did not formally object to the Act, it generated a fair amount of opposition from within the white constituency and beyond. An anti-censorship petition led by PEN SA and independent writers was signed in April 1963, by some 200 Afrikaans-speaking, English-speaking and few coloured writers and artists. McDonald observes that of these signatories, half ended up having some works banned, while the other half eventually played a role in the censorship bureaucracy (2009a, 37). As McDonald points out, the 1963 petition against censorship was submitted a couple of months after the Publications and Entertainments Act was passed, which diminished its credibility and impact (2009a, 37). Moreover, as Es'kia Mphahlele points out, the petition was, with the exception of five coloured signatories, only signed by white writers and artists (McDonald 2009a, 171). This division amongst South African writers along racial lines could be seen as a reflection of the division the apartheid

government tried to achieve in society and through its censorship system. This polarisation in the literary world prevented the creation of an inclusive notion of "South African writer", creating in its midst several parallel and at times intersecting ideas of writers, literatures, and readers. Inevitably, this led to multiple definitions of the writer's role and of literature, characterised by issues of linguistic, political and racial groupings.

Customs officials and police sent the bulk of potentially "undesirable" literature to censors for review, although post office personnel, publishers, librarians and booksellers also submitted publications. In a few instances, members of the public collaborated directly in their personal capacities. However, it is estimated that official agencies such as the departments of police and customs submitted 95% of all publications examined by censors (du Toit 1983, 85). The first book ever banned under the Act of 1963 was the explicitly titled *An Act of Immorality*, penned under the evocative pseudonym Des Troye (Merrett 1994, 62). The police sent it to the censors after an officer's wife bought it in a local bookshop (McDonald 2009a, 49). It was listed in *The Government Gazette*, as were all subsequent banned books. However, noting a relative inefficiency in picking up potentially undesirable publications, Dekker appointed a full-time inspector, J.J. Bloom, with the task of travelling throughout the country in search of suspicious literature (McDonald 2009a, 41).

Within this new system, censors posited themselves as a very elitist and privileged group of readers, invested with a self-proclaimed authority over the further circulation of publications brought to their attention, and believed to be, in the words of Merrett "enlightened censors" (1994, 62). By using their own benchmark for good reading, they had the power to choose what constitutes literature, which in retrospect might have played a role in the definition of South African literary canons as we now know them. The literariness of a publication was a potential mitigating factor against banning, as it was assumed that it would be of interest to a limited literary readership. However, such mitigation factors that could have "saved" potentially undesirable publications were at times ignored, given the ideological constraints inherent to apartheid censorship, as the banning of political books despite their obvious literary qualities suggests.

Censors had the dual responsibility of protecting readers from "undesirable" reading material whilst promoting "good" literature. The notions of "undesirability" and "average reader" became central in the censors' reasoning process, as censors developed a reader's profile against which evaluating morals and thresholds of offensiveness. This reader's prototype was in all likelihood similar to the "*volks* reader" Cronjé addressed in "'n Tuiste vir die nageslag", who was assumed to be faithful to nationalist cultural imperatives and socio-political conventions of that time, and in every aspect different from the liberal reader or from the masses, for instance. Through this narrow definition of the average reader and literature, a racial and politicised undertone inevitably infiltrated the censor's literary discourse. What constituted literature was assumed to be commonly understood, and as McDonald argues, censors became the embodiment of the "reasonable man" whose morals and literature they jealously safeguarded (2009a, 36). Through carrying out their duties, censors became "intrusive readers", "censorious bureaucrats" and "functionaries", but also readers, who upheld "aesthetic literary values" and posited themselves as, in the words of McDonald, "literature police" (McDonald 2004, 299; 2009a).

Journalists and writers in the country were a primary target, as their work had the power of exposing information and disseminating ideas related to the events occurring in South Africa on a daily basis. Some were detained without trial in order to intimidate and obviously interfere in the course of their work. In 1965, Ruth First of *New Age*, Margaret Smith of the *Sunday Times*, Paul Trewhela of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Hugh Lewin and Raymond Einstein were some of the 1,095 detainees arrested under the 90-day detention provisions (Merrett 1994, 48). On 1 April 1966, some 46 names were added to the list of banned persons in South Africa (Merrett 1994, 53), amongst them several contributors to *Drum* magazine. Politically-motivated trials were the order of the day, with publications being used as evidence of communism or threat to the state, serving as proofs and grounds on which to effectively ban an individual or organisation. Moreover, with the Act of 1963, bans could be served on entire series and genres, as the 1964 ban on the Penguin's African Library series exemplifies (Merrett 1994, 51). The fact that its first titles were penned by banned individuals, namely Brian Bunting, Ruth First, Govan

Mbeki, and Ronald Segal, surely did not help Penguin's cause.

On the political front, John Vorster succeeded Verwoerd as Prime Minister in 1966, after Verwoerd's assassination. In 1967, the Parliament adopted the Terrorism Act, which allowed indefinite detention for interrogation. Shortly after this, the General Law Amendment Act of 1969 made provision for the suppression of all information or publications that could jeopardise the state hegemony, leaving the door open for a loose and subjective interpretation of what exactly constituted a threat to the state. The goal was to silence opposition and dissent against apartheid (Merrett 1994, 47). This quasi-systematic suppression of information worked parallel to propaganda, through organs such as the South African Broadcast Corporation (Radio SABC), *The Government Gazette*, Radio Bantu and several pro-apartheid newspapers such as *Die Vaderland*.

This climate of fear and reprisals successfully instituted by the various legislations and institutions inevitably had consequences on whoever operated in the public sphere. For instance, the Central News Agency (CNA), who was the largest press outlet and distributor in South Africa, would not stock leftist publications (Merrett 1994, 65). Moreover, the idea of bringing television to South Africa was vehemently rejected during a parliamentary session in 1963, for fear it would be used by "communists" to "contaminate" a mass viewership. Censorship in South Africa rapidly developed into a complex system designed to combat social and political dissent and external influences, and as such was far bigger and deeply rooted than the Publications and Entertainments Act alone.

**The Great Gap**

During the 1960s, most prominent black leaders, writers and artists were imprisoned or exiled, predominantly in the period from 1965 to 1968 (Merrett 1994, 52). Through the General Law Amendment Act of 1962, a blanket ban silenced 102 anti-apartheid activists, which included many writers (McDonald 2009a, 33). A massive silencing of alternative voices occurred, and between 1964 and 1974 over 10,000 publications were

banned as per the Publications and Entertainments Act (McDonald 2009a, 33). During this same period, from 1950 to 1974, an estimated 1,240 banning orders were served in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act (Merrett 1994, 52). As Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane puts it, "the large-scale emigration of actors and musicians paralleled the drainage of intellectuals, writers and politicians" (1991, 180).

The marginalisation and suppression of South African oppositional writing and of black writing in particular created a situation where many works were only available overseas or not available at all, including in South Africa. Often labelled as the "silent decade" (Chapman 2003, 246), the 1960s in South Africa proved to be particularly harsh in comparison to the relative freedom prevailing in the 1950s, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In 1966, many South African writers living abroad were listed under the Suppression of Communism Act, such as Masizi Kunene, Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Es'kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Cosmo Pieterse, Can Themba, whilst Dennis Brutus, Alfred Hutchinson, and Alex La Guma were banned before that date, amongst others (Chapman 2007, 5). Gordimer denounced this state of affairs in 1972, saying that "black writing had been wiped out by censorship, bans and exile, and that black writers had become just names" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 63). She further lamented the fear instilled in black writers:

> Aspirant writers are intimidated not only by censorship as such but also by the fear that anything at all controversial, set out by a black in the generally explicit medium of prose, makes the writer suspect, since the correlation of articulacy and political insurrection, so far as blacks are concerned, is firmly lodged in the minds of the Ministers of the Interior, Justice and Police (1973, 51).

That climate of fear and the bans created an irreversible gap in the South African literary landscape, and as independent publisher David Philip explains, "it was a period of swingeing censorship and became known as the 'Unbridgeable Gap' in South African literature because so many classics of South African literature became unavailable to us South Africans" (Philip 1990, 13). This gap refers to a lack of literary continuity, and also to the absence of continuous literary references for future generations, both in terms of leisure reading for adults or curriculums for learners. As Philip points out, referring to the

"unbridgeable" nature of the gap, even when some titles were unbanned, "they had lost much of their edge and immediacy" (1990, 13). These conditions placed the progressive reader in a quasi deserted literary landscape, where readings were limited to the authorised pool of publications or else sourced clandestinely, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Miriam Tlali similarly explains the inevitable sense of loss experienced amongst readers and writers alike, in relation to the "great gap": "They say writers learn from their predecessors. When I searched frantically for mine, there was nothing but a void. What had happened to all writings my mother had talked about?" (quoted in de Lange, 126). This position is reiterated by, amongst others, Merrett, when he notes that "a generation of readers was deprived of ideas, attitudes, role models and cerebral stimulation" (1994, 201). Brutus confirms this general feeling, pointing out that physical access to books was one of the foremost obstacles to reading (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007). Readers tend to read books that relate to their experience and to which they can relate to, and the fact that South African censors and authorities banned nearly all African writers and black literature deprived the vast majority of South Africans of literary experiences and models. This gap could therefore be understood as a gap between readers and writers, and as a gap in terms of literary continuity.

**Towards the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974**

In 1968, Dekker's mandate came to an end, and Jannie Kruger took over the chairmanship of the censorship board, inaugurating a new era in South African censorship, still in the hands of mostly Afrikaans literary experts *cum* bureaucrats directorate. Kruger was himself a literary reviewer, former editor of Afrikaans newspaper *Die Transvaaler*, and a cultural advisor to the SABC. The board members remained virtually the same, with the exception of the replacement of C.J.D. Harvey with J.M. Leighton in 1969, and the addition of G.S. Nienaber, R.E. Lighton, A.J. van Niekerk and J.P. Jansen in 1971 (McDonald 2009a, 53). Under Kruger, the number of banned publications increased; whereas in 1968 the Dekker board banned 53% of publications

submitted (or 426 publications banned out of 798 submitted), the Kruger board banned 72% of publications submitted in 1973 (or 889 out of 1230) (McDonald 2009a, 52). Some minor amendments were made to the Act of 1963, but the substantial changes to the censorship system emerged from the Kruger Commission initiated in May 1973, following the crisis surrounding the first ban on an Afrikaans novel, as discussed in details below.

Kruger's board continued more or less on the same path as his predecessor, at least during the first years in office. The focus remained on mass-market fiction and political fiction in English, while a new focus on poetry emerged, with the banning of *Cry Rage* in 1972, an anthology edited by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas (McDonald 2009a, 53). This new concern with poetry coincided with a surge in poetic production in the 1970s, as compared with the relative lethargy of the 1960s, which mainly finds its roots in the Black Consciousness Movement. As Chapman points out, regarding the so-called new black poetry of the 1970s, "Soweto poetry tapped the imagination, ideas and issues of a Black Consciousness challenge to the apartheid police state" (2007, viii). This surge of writing came as a contrast to the void left by the great gap and gave a new direction to black writing, creating space for a new readership. On this new surge of black poetry, Gordimer observes the formation of not only a new authorship and literary production, but also of a new readership:

> There are signs that, for the first time, black writers' works are beginning to be bought by ordinary black people in the segregated townships, instead of only by liberal or literary whites and the educated black elite (1973, 51).

In 1968, the South African Student Organisation (SASO) was founded by Steve Bantu Biko, who became its first president in 1969. The same year, Barney Pityana became SASO's second president. SASO was an all-black movement, the result of a breakaway from the National Union of Student African Students (NUSAS) (Thompson 2000, 206). One of its main characteristics was the promotion of the Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy, which was disseminated via newsletters for which Biko served as editor from 1970, as detailed in the "Black Students Manifesto" (Buthelezi 1991, 121-2). SASO's newsletter could be considered as a militant publication in the vein of *Classic*, *Donga*,

*Staffrider*, and *Wietie* (Mzamane 1991, 182), as it contained editorials and essays on the state of politics and society under apartheid, and was meant for a wide yet literate readership, which was largely marginalised in the mainstream literary and political discourse. The newsletters' editorials revealed the essence and core of the BC movement, and were aimed at being simultaneously informative and educative whilst responding to the interests of its readers; and included poetry, prose, columns, and socio-political comments and analysis (Biko 1970). This approach, together with similar publications, combined artistic merit with politics in its definition of literariness.

The newsletters openly strived at bringing social change through communication, as Sipho Buthelezi explains: "Through this medium, students were urged to engage in dialogue amongst themselves and to 'reassess their position, role and responsibility within the South African student movement and society in general' (SASO Newsletter, June 1970)" (Buthelezi 1991, 119). In a way, these newsletters opened up a space in the public arena for a new identified readership, which was young, educated, politicised and black, generating a new voice in the public discourse. In 1973, Biko and several of his colleagues were banned under the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act, which meant they could no longer speak in public, write, be published, or travel (Stubbs 1979, 2). Biko was from then on listed as a banned person, and was confined to his native King Williamstown, where he pursued his political activism clandestinely despite the banning order served on him (Wilson 1991, 46).

Whilst fostered in the academic space and despite its main leaders being banned, the BC ideology rapidly expanded and penetrated the social fibres of society, gaining currency in South African urban areas. Its philosophy and message are often linked to the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 (Thompson 2000, 207), a seminal date in the history of South African resistance to apartheid. Beyond the political, BC played a major role in South African popular culture in the 1970s, and generated a new wave of resistance to the apartheid regime, literarily translated into a body of progressive publications such as *Staffrider*. As Chapman points out, Soweto poetry, or black urban poetry from the 1970s, was initially targeting a white liberal readership (2007, 12). However, with the shift that

occurred through the advent of the BC philosophy, a change occurred in the tone and form of Soweto poetry:

> By the mid-seventies, however, the emphasis had shifted with Serote's Black Consciousness voice (predictably less popular with Whites) finding its full power in an uncompromising poetry of resistance. This is a mobilizing rhetoric utilizing epic forms (in a highly contemporary, almost Brechtian sense) and traditional African oral techniques of repetition, parallelism and ideophones. By these means the poet seeks to impart a Black communal audience, often in a context of performance, a message of consciousness-raising and race pride (Chapman 2007, 12).

Inevitably, the BC Movement and the literature derived from it was under close scrutiny from the security police, who paid particular attention to its writers and readership. Merrett explains: "the course of 1975-76 SASO-BPC trial of 13 activists in Pretoria illustrated the fact that Black Consciousness as an ideology, and its documents, speeches and philosophy, rather than individuals, were on trial" (1994, 98).

Whilst black literature gained momentum and regained a space in the public discourse amidst repression, the first ban on an Afrikaans novel caused a stir amongst Afrikaans literary circles. This ban, and the responses it generated, led to changes in the censorship bureaucracy. Published in 1973, Brink's *Kennis van die Aand* is the story of coloured actor Joseph Malan who awaits execution for the murder of his white lover. According to the back cover of the 1974 English version entitled *Looking on Darkness*, "André Brink panders to no one's political, ideological or religious beliefs in a controversial novel which has achieved international significance and abundant acclaim" (Brink 1974, back cover). Whilst acclaimed by critics and reviewers, the book was reviewed by the publications committee, who published the ban under Section 5 (2) (b) of the Publications and Entertainments Act in *The Government Gazette* in the first week of February 1974 (de Lange 1997, 47). Section 5 (2) (b) of the Act refers to a work being undesirable if it is "blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic". Brink and his publisher appealed the ban on the Afrikaans version, which turned out to be unsuccessful. Judge J.T. van Wyk found that the novel in fact contravened all sections of the Publications and Entertainments Act (de Lange 1997,

48), or more precisely that "the novel was obscene, harmful to public morals, and blasphemous" (McDonald 2009a, 57).

The ban was seemingly more political than, as officially pronounced, moral or religious, as Brink had broken all conventions in terms of "mainstream Afrikaner ideas about literature and its function" (de Lange 1997, 49). Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach went in the same direction in a comment in the paper *Die Transvaler* of 2 October 1974: "The book reflects a South African reality, but the Government does not want the people to know about it. The ban indicates absolute panic and clearly shows the climate of fear and repression" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 49). This comment also highlights an alleged need for readers to be protected from the "South African reality" exposed by Brink, namely the "good" Afrikaans reader thus far being the benchmark reader for all decisions on submitted publications.

The incipit, or first few lines or paragraphs of the novel, clearly posits the narrative style and tone of the novel:

> To know who I am. To define myself through the why and the how of her death. To enumerate and name it all, trying to determine not what a man can know of man, but simply what I dare to know about myself. […] For the rest – the rest is a muddle of memories, of words, dreams, possibilities, names.
> I can say: Jessica.
> I can say: I love you.
> I can say: Willem, or Dulpert, or Richard, or Jerry.
> And then I can proceed to recall them and describe them in detail. I can say: Jessica Thomson, with dark blonde hair and stubborn chin, with peculiar grooves in the nails of her thumbs, with the small, definite, round breasts of a portrait from the innocent age preceding Raphael, with a skin smooth and starkly White against my brownness, making love in the dark light of the dawn. (quoted from the English version, Brink 1974, 7).

As de Lange points out, censors found that *Kennis van die Aand* presented a "false" world view of contemporary South Africa at that time (1997, 50), in other words that clashed with the *volk*'s worldview nurtured by censors. The racial identity of the narrator, as a South African coloured who narrates events from the first person point of view,

could be said, as de Lange argues, to have marginalised the white reader, who became the "other" (1997, 51). Because Joseph Malan speaks, through Brink, from the point of view of a coloured person, censors felt that white readers – who were in the censors' mind Brink's readership – would not be in a position to identify with Malan's character and world view, and possibly be exposed to a situation thus far foreign to them and unsettling. This includes masters raping black servants, a coloured theatre director running into troubles with censors and security police, interracial relations, forced removals and racism, amongst others. As Judge van Wyk wrote, "I believe that a large majority of probable readers will get the impression that the author has tried to write a historical novel which pretends to be based on facts" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 49).

By all accounts, *Kennis van die Aand* and *Looking on Darkness*, the English translation also banned in 1974, marked a first in terms Afrikaans literary aesthetics. By writing protest or committed Afrikaans literature, or by staging a reality other than that of conservative Afrikaners, Brink opened up a space for the articulation of divisions within the Afrikaans literary establishment. As McDonald reminds us, a strong anti-protest literature feeling prevailed within the Afrikaner literary elite, who were strongly against the politicisation of literature (2009a, 54). This unprecedented case shattered the definitions of *volks* literature and readers propagated through the official discourse, and opened discussions on the issue of likely readership that would have far-reaching consequences on the censorship system.

D.J. Opperman, a prominent Afrikaans *avant-garde* poet and ally of Brink, testified during the appeal on the ban in 1974. Touching on the heart of the censors' definition of literature and readers, Opperman argued that "The function of the art work as a mirror is no longer accepted; your likely reader sees a novel as a soap-bubble which offers a spherical vision, curved reflection of reality" (quoted in McDonald 2009a, 56). This position criticised the supremacy of one reader over another, and denounced the concept of the "reader" as being static and pre-determined. Opperman's argument did not have much incidence on the appeal board's decision to ban the novel, but summarises a point of dissension within the Afrikaner intelligentsia that would change the official literary

discourse in South Africa. Brink went on to write an open letter to head censor Jannie Kruger, and as McDonald recounts, asks if "uncle Merwe, uncle Theuns and uncle Apie – Merwe Scholtz, Cloete, and Grové – were so broad (i.e. wide-girthed and broad-minded) that they could straddle the stools of the literature they promote and the stools of the literature they condemn" (McDonald 2009a, 57).

The Afrikaans intellectual world divided itself into two camps, namely between the pro-censorship *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge* (FAK), and the newly formed anti-censorship *Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde* (Afrikaans Writers' Guild) (Merrett 1994, 80). In the face of stricter measures against Afrikaans literature, the Guild organised a conference on censorship in 1975. The conference was closed to the press and public, arousing speculations and suspicions about mobilisation amongst progressive Afrikaans authors, who were relatively not affected by censorship, in a direct manner, until then (de Lange 1997, 38). This would eventually lead to the formation of progressive Afrikaans publishing house Taurus, which would play a critical role in the development of South African literature, as will be detailed in the next chapter.

**The Publications Act No. 42 of 1974**

In the face of increased opposition and dissension amongst Afrikaans writers, and the general climate of increasingly organised and vocal resistance in the country, the apartheid regime reinforced its grip on public discourse and by doing so, looked at ways of tightening its publications control apparatus, which became more repressive from the mid-1970s.

Launched in May 1973 by deputy Minister of Interior J.T. Kruger, the Kruger Commission advocated a complete rework of the censorship system, focusing on countering the influence of international communist infiltrations on South African morals, and using, as McDonald points out, an anti-liberal and anti-literary rhetoric (2009a, 58). By promoting a political approach over a literary approach to publications, the influence and powers of literary expert board members would be diminished. Despite

opposition from PEN SA and the Afrikaans Writers' Circle who, amongst others, pleaded for a more literary approach in the proposed Act, the recommendations of the Kruger Commission were turned into law through the Publications Act No. 42 adopted by Parliament in October 1974.

A Directorate of Publications based in Cape Town, then headed by J.L. Pretorius, replaced the Publications Control Board. The Minister of the Interior had powers to appoint the members of this Directorate. Other new structures included the country-wide censorship readers committees, which included a few token coloured and Indian readers appointed by the Directorate of Publications (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 162). However, censorship was still being controlled by whites, who represented 95% of all committee members in 1975 (McDonald 2009a, 62).

The right to appeal to independent judiciary courts was replaced by an internal Appeal Board based in Pretoria, an idea initially proposed in the Cronjé report. The Publications Appeal Board (PAB) was composed of 14 members appointed by the State President. J.H. Snyman was appointed as chair of the new PAB. The PAB reviewed decisions for a nominal fee should an application be lodged by the Directorate of Publications, an individual or group with a financial interest in the book (such as the author or publisher), or the Minister of the Interior. The Directorate required that the list of banned titles and the rationale behind these bans be published in *The Government Gazette* (McDonald 2009a, 60). Another novelty, the new Act made provisions for outlawing possession of banned books, as per Section 9 (3).

The dissociation between politics and literariness was embodied through the creation of distinct literary and security committees, who sometimes worked in collaboration to achieve decisions. As McDonald observes, Black Consciousness authors' works which entered the censorship system were for the most part submitted by police officers, and were read by security censors (McDonald 2009a, 64-5). This exemplifies how the "literariness" of black South African literature was sometimes overlooked, an issue which turned out to be the subject of many literary discussions and polemics. A case in point is

that involving Mafika Gwala's *Jol'iinkomo*. This volume was initially submitted to a literary committee and read by Merwe Scholtz, who extensively pondered on the literary qualities and politically seditious nature of the collection of poems, finally referring the publication to the security committee. The final decision, achieved through a joint literary and security committee, found the publication to be not undesirable so not banned, mainly on literary grounds.

The Publications Act of 1974 opens with Section 1, where it is stipulated that "in the application of this Act the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian value of life shall be recognised". This definition designated the "average man" against whom undesirability would now be gauged. Section 47 (2) of the Act defines the potential reasons for undesirability, and reads as Section 5 (2) of the previous Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963. However, Section 6 (1) of the Act of 1963, pertaining to the criteria of undesirability relative to the person likely to be exposed to such undesirable publications, does not appear in the Act of 1974.

The criteria for undesirability became the "average reader principle", which consists of "an attempt simply to transpose the average reader principle from literary to political contexts" (du Toit 1983, 95). Undesirability therefore had to be measured against community standards which, as André du Toit points out, could be highly suggestive. Du Toit argues that:

> It may be possible to give some content to the notion of the average member of a particular section of the community, and what his representation views might be, but otherwise a generalised reference to the views of the 'average decent-minded citizen' is so vague as to be almost meaningless (1983, 95).

Interestingly, the PAB was seemingly aware of the vagueness of this premise, and took on a role of "social mediator", to borrow a term coined by J.M. Coetzee (1996, 188). The PAB affirmed:

> [We are] aware that in South Africa, and indeed in any country, there is in fact no single communal standard, just as no 'reasonable man' in fact exists in the determination of negligence in law. Hence, when assessing the

> community standards the arbiter must endeavour to find a median among the various viewpoints obtaining within the South African community (quoted in du Toit 1983, 95-96).

In 1978, the Publications Act was amended with the Publications Amendment Act No. 109, this time following an outcry surrounding the 1976 ban on one of the most prominent Nationalist Afrikaner authors work, Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!*. The literary committee initially passed the novel, acknowledging its literary qualities. The PAB subsequently overturned this decision on obscene and blasphemous grounds, following the pressure exercised from conservative Afrikaner groups. The fact that Leroux received the Hertzog Prize for the second time in his career as well as the CNA Literary Award for *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!*, in the midst of this controversy, made it even more difficult for the PAB to defend its divisive decision. Afrikaner writers and media increasingly questioned the censorship system, and even conservative Afrikaans newspapers supported the writers' stance on the literariness of the novel. A *Die Burger* and *Beeld*'s editorial dated 22 November 1977 denounced the decision in these terms:

> When a brilliant novel by what may be our greatest writer – a satire whose literary value is not doubted – is summarily banned, our censorship system has become a monster; a threat to the creative artist, our intellectual like and the Afrikaans press (quoted in de Lange 1997, 40).

One of the prominent groups in this contestation was the *Aksie Morele Standaarde* (Action for Moral Values), lead by Eddie van Zyl, who had on previous occasions successfully lobbied the government against "moral pollution of South Africa" and organised book burnings of offensive publications (de Lange 1997, 39). The re-evaluation of the literary committee's decision by the PAB was in line with the censors' accommodating attitude toward church and political leaders, characteristic of the application of censorship under Pretorius and Snyman. This meant that Afrikaans works were no longer sheltered against the possibility of being banned through the literary argument. Between 1975 and 1980, Afrikaans works reviewed by censors were for the most part banned at the rate of about 10 out of 14 (McDonald 2009a, 68).

Leroux, following these intense debates on his work, started to doubt his own writing. He expressed his feelings on censorship, after receiving the Hertzog Prize in 1979:

> I have to say that, when the book was banned and I was asked whether I would continue to write, I bragged terribly when I said that I would write as though the law didn't exist. Don't kid yourself. This surely has an effect on a person. One cannot suppress the feeling: maybe these people were right? And then you start to check your style, your way of writing. You are very insecure and I believe all people whose books are banned feel the same (quoted in de Lange 1997, 41).

Responses to the pressure caused by censorship varied and were multiple; yet all included consideration for the readership, as the act of reading completes the act of writing.

Even if the outcome was in favour of a ban, the case surrounding Leroux instilled other changes in the censorship system, putting literary committees to the test. Leroux's editor, Human and Rousseau, contested the PAB's decision before the Supreme Court in 1978, putting forward the argument that the undesirability of the novel on obscene grounds was evaluated relative to the "average reader", and not the "likely reader" (McDonald 2009a, 72). As Silver emphasises:

> The Board worked with an absolute concept of undesirability, with no allowance being made for the likely reader of the work. As late as 1978, the Snyman Board found that while the Publications and Entertainments Act 26 of 1963 made allowance for the 'likely reader', the present Publications Act of 1974 did not (1984, 91).

The ban remained enforced on the basis of blasphemy, but this high-profile case reopened the divisions within the literary circles, and initiated discussions around the idea of reintroducing the concept of the likely reader in the literary and censorship discourse.

In part because of its readership, in part because of it being a cornerstone of Afrikaans culture and *volk*, Afrikaans literature enjoyed a privileged status, at least until 1978. Events surrounding Etienne Leroux's case, as seen above, marked the beginning of the end of the Pretorius and Snyman's reign as chief censors, paving the way for the reformist approach typical of the 1980s censorship bureaucracy (McDonald 2009a, 72-

73).

**The "Repressive Tolerance" of the 1980s**

Vorster resigned in 1978 as Prime Minister and was succeeded by P.W. Botha, who led South Africa into the turbulent events of the 1980s. The end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s was a decisive period in the unfolding of events in the land of apartheid. The intensity of the popular uprising was matched with increasing repression.

On the literary side, following the tensions between the literary establishment and the censorship board caused by Leroux's case, the Publications Act of 1974 was amended in 1978, by the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, and those amendments were implemented in 1980. As J.C.W. van Rooyen points out, these amendments introduced two new features: a committee of experts, which would once again give a voice to the literary elite, and the imposition of conditions such as age and display restrictions, which "recognizes the interests of the likely reader" (1987, 9). Whilst this series of amendments contributed to appeasing some corners of the literary community, it was received with scepticism and contempt in others. As Gordimer puts it, these new provisions merely translated as the application of "new gloss on old procedures" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 81). With these new stipulations, censorship became more arbitrary as the mitigating factors such as "literariness" and "likely readership" were subjective, and acted almost exclusively for the benefit of white writers. As de Lange points out, "because the standards, as applied, were so clearly ideologically biased, censorship affected each group of writers differently, depending on its relation with the ruling elite" (1997, 29). Silver also emphasises the subjective nature of the Act:

> The style of writing is also an important fact in determining the potential effect on the likely readers: if a work is boring, as are many works of propaganda, its likely readers are less likely to be motivated to commit acts of terrorism, subversion or violence than they would be by work written in direct and compelling language (1984, 89).

In 1980 a shift occurred in the censors' approach, with the appointment of J.C.W. van

Rooyen as chair of the PAB and Abraham Coetzee as director of publications. Under their reign, the amendments proposed in 1978 were fully implemented, once again shifting concerns around the literary elite. Literary experts' opinions were taken into consideration, in an effort to reinstate good relations with the Afrikaner literary intelligentsia (McDonald 2009a, 79). Literary and artistic merit surfaced again as a mitigating factor, despite these concepts being highly suggestive and debatable in nature. Expert committees, appointed after a request was lodged by an appellant, advised the PAB (van Rooyen 1987, 9). In 1983 the board included black literary experts for the first time, a move typical of van Rooyen's "repressive tolerance" an expression coined by Jaki Seroke, as pointed out by McDonald (2009a, 77).

The effects of the long-term suppression of so-called undesirable publications were ironically not only felt in the ranks of anti-apartheid resistance, but also by censors themselves. Van Rooyen once wondered "whether the South African reading public [was] isolated from knowledge about the enemy" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 27). Not only were writers isolated from their readers, but politicians were seemingly also out of touch with the "other". It is in this twisted spirit of "getting to know the enemy" that censorship in the beginning of the 1980s took into consideration the necessity of tolerating committed or protest literature, as it was called, as an outlet to express frustrations and protests. This official reconnaissance of protest literature led to the unbanning of several publications, such as the unbanning of the Freedom Charter in 1984 and the contested release of John Riley's *Cry Freedom*, even if security police still confiscated copies of the movie based on the novel. A space opened up for moderate political discourse to be expressed in the public arena, protest being differentiated from sedition, although under the paternalistic and ever-watchful eye of the censors. However, as McDonald points out, these seemingly progressive reforms of the publications control apparatus were parallelled with a series of repressive legislations that acted as direct forms for censorship, such as the Internal Security Act of 1982, and the State of Emergency declared in 1985, which empowered the State to ban and detain individuals and organisations (2009a, 78). Responses to van Rooyen's reformist and seemingly conciliatory attitude did not make unanimity. Coetzee saw these "compromises" from the

part of the censors as treating Afrikaans writers as "harmless dabblers" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 81), while Gordimer expressed her contempt for this notion: "I really have no concept of an ideal reader. I leave that to the Censorship Board with their 'probable reader' and 'ordinary, average South African'" (quoted in Gray 2000, 37).

**The Likely Reader Test**

With van Rooyen at the helm and given his desire to recognise the interests of the likely reader, issues of readership came at the forefront of the censors' preoccupations. As J.M. Coetzee observes, censors posed as "arbiter between contending social forces" (1996, 186). Censors read through the eyes of an imagined yet thought of as a realistic reader, or as Coetzee has it, "via an interposed fictional figure, whether reasonable or likely" (1996, 188).

What became known as the likely readership test was applied to assess whether a publication contravened Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) of the Act, namely the articles pertaining to relations between inhabitants of South Africa and to the safety of the State. The test was carried out to determine the impact of a publication on the likely reader, and "whether a work would have the effect of turning the average, decent-minded man, who embodied the median opinion of the law abiding citizens in South African society, to revolutionary or lawless conduct" (Silver 1984, 63). Therefore, a likely "popular readership" and "mass readership" would be an aggravating factor, as opposed to a "sophisticated readership" or "educated readership", which would be limited in numbers. The effects of the act of reading on the likely reader were based on speculations and observations. As Silver points out, "the effect is determined in terms of likelihood. Mere intent is not sufficient. It is the real effect that counts" (1984, 66).

Several categories of readers were identified and reinforced - or created - such as the pro-revolutionary reader who finds inspiration in political publications, the communist reader who identifies with communist material, the academic reader who reads academic books, and the literary reader who find literary satisfaction in serious novels. As Silver notes, the

PAB stated that the effect of a publication on the likely readers should be determined by probabilities and not possibilities (1984, 72). The case of Mothobi Mutloatse's *Forced Landing* exemplifies this trend of imagining the probable mindset and circumstances of the likely reader:

> The argument, the protestations have the ring of sincerity and, as has been said above, will be regarded by the reader as a matter of opinion. The insight of the South African reader must not be underestimated: he is daily confronted with political news and political comment from the left and the right and is generally not so easily influenced as is sometimes thought. The Act cannot guard against possibilities and the adjudicators must base their decisions on probabilities (quoted in Silver 1984, 73).

Likewise, the case of *A Ride on the Whirlwind*, a novel by Sipho Sepamla, also reveals these intricate considerations related to the probable reaction of the likely readership:

> Although the readership of this publication cannot be regarded as sophisticated or intellectual, the likely reader would be the more arduous kind who would be prepared to labour through parts of this book. Parts of it could just as well have been left out. […] The likely readership of the present novel would, as has been pointed out above, come close to a popular readership, but on the other hand, revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries find their inspiration in publications of a more direct and inciting nature (quoted in Silver 1984, 68).

Another example of the censor's operative mind is the case of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was allowed because of its limited sophisticated readership (van Rooyen 1987, 10).

It was pointed out however, that these new provisions were still intrinsically discriminatory and filled with paternalistic overtones (de Lange 1997, 133), despite the elaborate literary analysis involved in the process. De Lange argues that the censors' bias towards certain genres and authors was the result of the quasi-immunity of literature with so-called international "high visibility" or "serious literature", after the uproar caused by the ban on Leroux's *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!* (1997, 139). Merrett, for his part, argues that "Black writers were targeted because they were likely to have a Black readership, especially among the young" (1994, 80). Coetzee further points out that

works with a "sophisticated likely readership" would be used as "useful safety-valves for pent-up feelings", in the words of van Rooyen, where "disaffected intellectuals could let off steam" (1996, 213). Publications were therefore banned not merely because of the topic and themes at stake, but because of who was likely to read them and the effect of the publication on the latter. Es'kia Mphahlele, noting the persisting inequalities in the ways censorship applied to black and white writers even in the context of "protest literature", emphasises that "the White writer can still get away with a lot in South Africa. A Black man who wrote the same things the liberal-minded among the Whites write, who represented the liberal and egalitarian ideas, would most likely be banned" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 130).

Several examples of "white publications" being unbanned or passed while "black publications" treating similar topics were banned can be found. For instance, in 1979 Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at the Metropolitan* was banned at the same time as Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* was unbanned, although both novels allegedly held Afrikaners in contempt in some passages of the texts. Another example, André Brink's *A Dry White Season* and Wessel Ebersohn's *Store up the Anger* were not banned, while Mtutuzeli Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* was banned, even if all three illustrated some similar aspects of the black experience in South Africa, more particularly police brutality, prison conditions and forced labour (Merrett 1994, 80). On this particular example, which addresses a parallel between Brink and Matshoba, and given that *A Dry White Season* was considered more radical than C*all Me Not a Man*, Nadine Gordimer comments:

> Why may White writers deal with inflammables? It is because the new censorship dispensation has understood something important to censorship as an arm of repression – while White writings are predominant critical and protestant in mood, Black writings are inspirational, and that is why the Government fears them (quoted in de Lange 1997, 132).

The transition from the average decent minded reader to the likely reader had a great influence on the way censorship bureaucracy operated. Intrinsically linked, artistic and literary merits were in fact the key factors in defining the likely readership of a given publication. Once identified, the effect of a publication on this readership was assessed

and determined whether a publication was undesirable or desirable. These underlying principles were to prevail until the 1990s.

**Post-1990 Developments**

The Publications Act No. 42 of 1974, as amended by the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978, remained in force. Abraham Coetzee remained the chief censor until 1997, and in 1990 van Rooyen was replaced by Louis Pienaar, who was chair of the PAB until 1992. Even if democracy was looming, it is interesting to note that as Nelson Mandela gave his celebrated speech in Cape Town on 11 February 1990, his writings were still banned for possession (Merrett 1994, 170).

In 1992, the Publications Amendment Act No. 90 came into effect. As Merrett points out, this Act provided for speedier appeals which led to the unbanning of many publications, but books undergoing the appeal process could not be sold while this was underway (1994, 171). Each banned publication had to be re-evaluated, as the Directorate of Publications had rejected a blanket unbanning of banned publications in 1991 (Merrett 1994, 170). Between 1991 and 1992, the PAB reviewed more than 4,000 titles, most of which were unbanned (McDonald 2009a, 82), while other publications, like *Sechaba*, were considered so dated that they did not need to be unbanned, according to the Directorate of Publications (Merrett 1994, 171).

Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, the Minister of Home Affairs in the Government of National Unity, commissioned a task team to draft proposals to replace the Publications Act as amended, which aimed at encompassing democratic ideals and the spirit of the new South Africa. However, as de Lange notes, the new Film and Publications Bill resembled the Publications Act in many ways, and three out of the 12 members of this working group were in fact high ranking in the previous Publications Board (1997, 157). Robert Kirby wrote in the *Sunday Times*:

> This is quite an unseemly loading of the task group with activists of the vintage school of censorship. One wonders what chief Buthelezi hopes to

> gain by these two inclusions. It certainly can't be credibility, simply because including them looks like a sanction for continuity – you never invite a hangman to the wake. Or is the minister just being fair and giving the pair a chance to fight for their jobs? (quoted in de Lange 1997, 157).

The transformation occurred progressively, and started with the suppression of some clauses of the infamous Section 47 of the Publications Act of 1974, mainly those pertaining to politics (de Lange 1997, 155). In March 1995, the draft of the Film and Publications Bill was published in *The Government Gazette* and later tabled in Parliament. The Senate approved the Bill with some amendments, turning it into law in 1996. Under the new law, the former Directorate of Publications became the Film and Publications Board, and the Publications Appeal Board became the Film and Publications Review Board.

**Censors' Definitions the Reader**

Throughout the apartheid era, censors aimed at isolating writers and readers from each other along racial lines, on par with their policy of separate development. Gordimer, who was categorically against all forms of censorship, deplored the climate of isolation created by censorship amongst writers, pointing out that "as South Africans we do not know what the rest of Africa is thinking, just as, as Whites, we do not know what the Black and Coloured population is thinking" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 63). However, they ultimately failed to entirely alienate writers from one another, as Brink reminds us:

> For a very long time three different streams of literature ran their separate courses: Black, Afrikaans and English. But during the last few years a new awareness of a common identity as writers has arisen, creating a new sense of solidarity in a body of informed and articulate resistance to oppression (1979, 51).

From 1948 onwards, with the NP in power, a vision for the Afrikaner population, the *volk*, took shape. Particular expectations towards the Afrikaans literary and cultural field formed part of this collective project and had a great impact on the evolution of the censorship apparatus. As the historical overview of censorship in South Africa above has suggested, ideas about readers have shifted with changing ideas about censorship, along

with definitions of "literature" and the consolidation of this nation-building project.

The Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, which aimed at protecting South Africa from the communist doctrine, implies different ideas of readers without focusing on literature or readers as such. By prohibiting certain publications judged communistic, the censors aimed at protecting naïve and vulnerable readers from potential contamination, and avoid an effect of incitement on the easily influenced readers. The subversive or communist readers were thought of as finding ideological affinities in communist publications, which could serve their communist agenda and activities. Moreover, the mere fact of reading or being in possession of an alleged communist publication was enough for an individual to be labelled a communist and banned.

The Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, with its considerations for "the person likely to be exposed to the effect or influence" of a publication (Section 6 (1) (a)), introduced a more nuanced if not equally subjective concept of reader. A publication, depending on its literary and sophisticated nature, amongst others factors, could attract a sophisticated limited readership or an uneducated mass readership. The former reader, the literary reader, was held in high esteem by censors, as he was thought of as grounded, intelligent and enlightened, whilst the latter was in all likelihood easily influenced, reactionary and potentially dangerous, and generally blended into the masses. Between those two seemingly stood the average reader, who was neither overtly sophisticated nor too popular, who was upholding the "public morals", "religious convictions" and "good order" of the general public and was thought of as relatively passive. For censors, this reader embodied the ideal citizen, whose morals had to be preserved and who had to be protected from obscene, offensive or harmful ideas and publications.

As McDonald points out, censors, who were in the early days of institutionalised censorship mainly literary academics, experts and intellectuals, had a very elitist notion of what constituted literature (2009a, 39). They posed as the official "enlightened" reader whose opinion was qualified as "balanced" (Merrett 1994, 62). Censors acted as the guardians of "good" Afrikaans literature (McDonald 2009a, 26), protecting it from

potential contamination and dangerous influences. This notion of "serious literature" would punctuate the censors' discourse in the 1960s, calling into play the notion of "good reading", "good book" and "good reader". The concept of "literariness" at work was rather vague, and it seems at once easier to grasp what was not considered literature than what was. Literariness was characterised as being artistic, Christian, sensible to race relations and steering clear of potentially subversive themes (McDonald 2009a, 26). Concerns related to aesthetics, morals, politics, religion, themes, language register, race relations and authorship played a role in this definition, which accommodated a very elitist and exclusive group of readers and writers. The notion of "pure literature" while implicating an elitist readership, was designed to preserve Afrikaans literary "standards" and place the literary above the political, a rather paradoxical position as censorship contributed to the broader apartheid project, which was inevitably political.

This desire to promote good reading coincided with an alleged decline in Afrikaans literary production occasioned by the advent of imported paperbacks from the West which were, in the eyes of the censors, mass market fiction to be curbed (McDonald 2009a, 25). Popular literature, also called mass market fiction, was a threat from which readers had to be sheltered as it contained potentially dangerous ideas. Prominent lawyer, judge and academic John Dugard explains the censors' vehement objection to imported popular literature in this way:

> The real objection to the social and cultural freedom of the twentieth century is that, if exported to South Africa, it might release the average Afrikaner from the tenacious grasp of those institutions which at present control both his mind and his voting habits: the Dutch Reformed Church, Afrikaner cultural organizations, the Afrikaans language press and the National Party (quoted in Hachten & Giffard 1984, 158).

Literature, in its narrow definition as elitist and serious, was used as one of the many tools consolidating the hegemonic position of the NP and legitimising the censorship system. Debates emerged on the essence of the literary and on the role of literature. Ezekiel Mphahlele, one of South Africa's leading intellectual figures and literary critics, reflected on the meaning of literature, linking the discussions on South African culture with international and continental debates prevailing in the 1960s. He argued for an anti-

prescriptivist, anti-elitist, African, humanistic literature, that would blend aesthetic and political components into one crafted artistic product (McDonald 2009a, 176). This perception was in opposition to the official definition of literature developed and refined by censors, as it gave authors greater freedom of expression and poetic licence to include socio-political comments into their prose, whilst making it more accessible to the so-called masses.

The fine boundary between the "literary" and the "political" in South African literature is a recurrent theme in South African literary criticism (Ndebele 1991; Nkosi 1965; Sachs 1990). Some literature was quite explicit in its protest, while to the other extreme some writers avoided alluding to politics altogether, and focused on the "literariness" of literature. However, the act of writing could be seen as an internally motivated process as well as a socially driven activity. As such, it often ends up being politicised, as the writer participates, contributes and is influenced by the society he or she lives in. Mikhail Bakhtin, alluding to the influence of the environment on the individual, points out that "the organizing centre of any utterance, of any experience, is not within but outside – in the social milieu surrounding the individual being" (quoted in Bolland 1996, 2). Georg Lukács similarly conceptualises literature as a complex interaction between creative writing and realism (1963, 25). In South Africa, Njabulo Ndebele echoes this link between fiction and reality by stating that:

> The state of literature in South Africa also mirrors in a very fundamental way the larger historical imbalances in the country and that lasting answers to some of our literary problems are to be found in the manner in which the larger struggle for liberation is finally resolved (1992, 23).

By asserting the inevitable link between politics and literature, Ndebele points to the fine line between literature, politics and national culture in a context where several cultural, political, social and literary identities coexist and struggle to survive.

The increasingly political nature of South African literature in the 1970s found its match in an increasingly political publication control, in the form of the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974. Although the wording of the Act expunged any references to the likely reader

and replaced it with the elusive "man of balance", one can read between the lines and identify ideas of readers at play, particularly in the Section 47 (2). The balanced reader is seemingly opposed to the political agitator, the subversive reader and the reactionary reader, who uses undesirable publications as a springboard for subversive activities.

With the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978, the notion of likely reader was reintroduced in the censorship terminology, and was applied in a very sophisticated manner from 1980 onwards. Through the practice of "repressive tolerance", as discussed earlier in this chapter, the liberal reader interested in "black problems" emerged as yet another reader figure, and while the black reader had until then generally been thought of as being part of an uneducated, easily influenced and subversive readership, the concept of an educated black readership entered the censors' discourse. It contributed, amongst other things, to overturn bans on several publications previously considered subversive and undesirable, as will be examined in the following chapters.

This new spirit of tolerance towards protest literature, a literature essentially committed to an anti-apartheid stance, speaks of the censors' relatively more complex understanding of black readerships. Black readers were understood to be diverse and heterogeneous, of various literacy and education levels, and not systematically influenced into subversive activities by reading undesirable publications, whether they were considered as having "literary merit" or not, or passive and illiterate.

A clear sense of otherness prevailed and dislocated the discourses and relations between censors, writers and readers. Gordimer highlights the relevance writers find in their readers when asserting that "writers cannot be a cultural force worth censoring until there is a mass population that can, and will have the facilities to, read our books" (1988, 16). This comment directly speaks about the marginalised position black readers found themselves in the censors discourse well before the institutionalisation of censorship in 1963. Through the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act, most of the black literary references were either banned and black intellectuals were exiled, and through the various apartheid legislations black South Africans were put in a disadvantaged position

from the onset in terms of public participation in mainstream socio-political affairs and access to books. The various definitions of readers intersected over time as the legislations were amended and definitions of literatures and readers were reviewed, but they provide a general framework with which the changes in the applications of the successive Acts can be understood.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the apartheid era, censorship was used as a political tool to control and influence public opinion. Numerous publications, both from South Africa and abroad, were banned and removed from circulation; school curricula were altered; an ambient discourse of "positive uplifting" was propagated; libraries and bookstores were scrutinised; and the vast majority of writers were directly or indirectly affected by publications control. Censorship was implemented through the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963, and the Publications Act of 1974 and the subsequent Publications Amendment Act of 1978. Censorship also operated through more diffused means, such as propaganda and other coercive tactics.

To some extent, the censorship apparatus, one of apartheid's most effective tools, successfully created a false sense of normality by depicting a one sided reality. Resistance and opposition to these legislations came from various artistic and intellectual communities, which found their voices through literature, arts, music, and so on. From a literary perspective, censorship invariably created a discontinuity in the various literary traditions and impacted on various facets of South African literary histories, creating particular genres and trends of South African literatures and influencing the formation of readerships and reading patterns.

So-called authorised or desirable literature in South Africa contributed to nation building, as it consolidated a strong nationalist identity amongst the Afrikaner intelligentsia. On the other hand, literature also contributed in creating an identity amongst resistance forces

and a sense of identity amongst readers, including amongst marginalised readers in the ranks of oppositional politics, as will be discussed in the following chapter. The printed word, in all its forms, was used to express views and support or challenge the status quo, generating debates amongst readers. Despite the bans and censorship measures, readerships other than those provided for by censors through their notions of the sophisticated reader or literary reader, for instance, survived. As André Brink observed in the 1970s:

> Censorship in South Africa has created for the reader a new sense of adventure, in literature, a new sense of being 'in touch'. This is illustrated by the increased demand for banned books amongst White readers and in the way in which new publications by Blacks are sold on the streets of Soweto (1979, 52).

As will be discussed in the next chapters, the effects of censorship on readers, writers, publishers and booksellers are various and complex realities. Censorship in South Africa transited from traditional censorship against immorality to become a political weapon integral to the apartheid state. Gordimer has summarised the political nature of censorship in these terms:

> We shall not be rid of censorship until we are rid of apartheid. Censorship is the arm of mind control and is as necessary to maintain a racist regime as the other arm of internal repression, the secret police (quoted in Hachten & Giffard 1984, 155).

The successive censorship legislations created various conceptions of readers, which contributed to nation building while marginalising a significant portion of the literary industry in South Africa. The following chapter will provide an account in more detail of the relations between censors and the various actors involved in the literary field, focusing on the marginalised and alternative sections of the industry.

## CHAPTER 4 | THE EMERGENCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE LITERARY INDUSTRY: CENSORSHIP VS. PUBLISHERS, LIBRARIANS AND BOOKSELLERS

"There can be no true culture where there is no freedom."
(Dennis Brutus 2006, 193)

Given the stringent censorship measures imposed by the apartheid government over the publishing industry, the mainstream literary industry became – at least on the surface – homogeneous and one-sided, depicting a reality befitting the status quo, as detailed in the previous chapter. However, several initiatives broke away from the prescribed mould, creating an alternative literary scene, whereby officially condemned publications could find their way to progressive readers through various channels. Responses to censorship were diverse and often underpinned by ideological and political trends, as was resistance to the apartheid regime as a whole.

This chapter sets to examine the various responses of some of the key stakeholders typically involved in the book industry, namely publishers, academics, librarians, booksellers, and their relations to readers and censors. Emphasis will be put on publishers, more particularly alternative publishers, who could be understood as the publishers outside the mainstream literary industry, who took risks in publishing books likely to be banned. As David Philip points out, the sector of the book trade that was the most affected by censorship was "academic books and serious trade books for the thinking public" (quoted in McDonald 2009a, 84). These alternative publishers provided alternative publications to progressive readers, as they defied the "good reading" campaign engineered by the censorship apparatus and managed, on different scales and through different channels, to reach a readership despite the restrictive enforced legislations. These were the suppliers of books who enabled the creation of a progressive literary environment, responding to the demand from some readers for oppositional books, thus fostering an alternative literary scene surviving in the margins of a mainstream literary industry responding to the conventions of the censorship apparatus. In discussing these alternative publishers, this chapter will set out the various strands of anti-apartheid resistance and examine how publishers reflected these different strategies

and ideas in relation to their target readers, and in turn how and if booksellers and librarians played a role in disseminating this literature to readers.

**Overview of Mainstream Publishers in Apartheid South Africa**

Mainstream publishing, or commercial publishing, can be defined as a business orientated, for-profit, market and commercially driven publishing venture. Publications are therefore edited to render them more saleable, and are distributed and sold by conventional commercial bookstores and outlets to the general reading public. The end-goal is to meet the demands of the reading market and abide by the dominant politics of publishing, in order to generate sales. Given that the imperative of mainstream publishing is to sell, it generally needs to conform to the socio-political factors regulating the public space. In the case of apartheid South Africa, the public space was informed by a Nationalist nation-building project, where readers were grouped into racial categories and channelled towards particular reading materials and patterns, as discussed in the first chapter. The politicisation of the public space inevitably led to the politicisation of various areas of activities, including the publishing industry. South African mainstream publishers, in order to survive as commercial entities, had to conform to the prevailing market diktats, which meant that they needed to support, or at least not oppose, the increasingly hegemonic status of the National Party's (NP) politics and ideology, and provide books to conform to official policies for readers.

The Afrikaans and English publishing sectors shared the mainstream publishing market during the apartheid years, as missionary presses, which served the previous British colonial order's interests, were gradually superseded in favour of the new apartheid regime's interests. The set of relations between the various mainstream publishers and the NP circles of power were complex. Patronage and vested interests often underpinned publishing ventures and the book trade, in a political climate typically characterised by hegemonic ideological discourses and imposed social and racial stratifications and divisions. As seen in the previous chapter, a "good book" campaign was engineered as part of the censorship programme, in a bid to control what the population read and was

exposed to. To that effect, McDonald points out that censors intervened in the publisher's traditional role of defining literary canons and establishing trends and conventions around particular literary genres (2009a, 84).

Big players on the Afrikaans publishing scene included Nasionale Pers (Naspers), J.L. van Schaik and Afrikaanse Pers (Perskor). As McDonald notes, these presses "endeavoured to reshape the market by creating a series of *national* canons of African literature, which reinforced, or at least did not unsettle, apartheid thinking" (2009a, 88). Historically, literature in African languages depended mainly on missionary British presses established in South Africa during the colonial period. Missionary presses, while publishing several novels in African languages, also published a bulk of textbooks in African languages for their missionary schools and published some translations. For instance, Lovedale Press published several novels by African writers, amongst them Sol Plaatje's seminal novel, *Mhudi*, in 1930. While these presses were under white ownership, the practice of employing black editors was common (McDonald 2009a, 87). The transition from the colonial era to the apartheid era had consequences for the publishing sector, as the configuration of the market changed, in particular as far as the profitable textbook market was concerned.

The missionary presses' relations to the ruling elite fluctuated as the political regime changed. Mpe and Seeber (2000) emphasise the impetus with which Afrikaner nationalism infused the publishing industry from the 1940s, notably through the textbook market, which constituted the bulk of missionary publishing. The relative independence enjoyed by missionary presses during the colonial period was gradually superseded by the National Party government's language boards and Bantu Education programme. As Caroline Davis notes, "Bantu Education created a homogeneous market, with books being prescribed centrally" (2011, 85). The newly formed language boards recommended books to be prescribed by the education departments, which meant that "much of the adventurous, creative writing in African languages produced by missionary presses, which was critical of the racist policies and practices of the government, was rendered unsaleable" (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 18). As Dumisane Ntshangase points out, with the

restrictions on missionary presses through their language boards, "the apartheid system […] also aimed at exposing readers to works that glorified the state. In the end writing was almost totally restricted to members of these boards. […] This inevitably led to corruption in the prescription procedures" (quoted in Mpe and Seeber 2000, 20-21).

Literature in African languages progressively became the terrain of Afrikaner publishers, who gradually gained monopoly over this publishing sector as well. As McDonald points out, this partly explains why censorship had little or no direct impact on it, as by 1973 no books in African languages had been submitted to the censorship board's "Bantu language specialist" (2009a, 89). Seemingly, an informal pre-publication control was exercised and manuscripts were carefully written or edited to conform to the prevailing ideology dictated by the politics of, and through patronage within, the apartheid influenced mainstream publishing industry. Afrikaans presses' interests in African languages publishing enabled the creation of a "canon" of African literature revolving around ethnography and oral tradition, praise poetry, animal tales and myths, in line with the newly formed Bantustans which aimed at curbing the influence of modernity and detribalisation on the African majority, which needless to say played in favour of the status quo (McDonald 2009a, 88).

Through privileged relations and overlapping positions held by some NP officials and publishers, who were at times both members of parliament and of a publishing company's board, the Afrikaans publishing industry worked in close collaboration with the state and the various censorship and educational boards dictating the market. As Colin Bower observed in 1985, "publishing is driven not so much by educational vision or great entrepreneurial flair, but by a sober appreciation of market requirements" (quoted in Mpe and Seeber 2000, 22).

Compliant publishers aligned to the apartheid ideology eventually gained practical monopoly over the publishing industry in general, and on the school market in particular. Perskor and Naspers, two powerful Afrikaner-owned media conglomerates who enjoyed privileged relationships with the ruling NP, entered and practically took over the lucrative

African primary schoolbook market alongside HAUM-de Jager, Oxford University Press Southern Africa (OUP) and Longman Green, with the implementation of the Bantu Education Act (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 21-22). Human & Rousseau, Juta & Company and Shuter & Shooter, amongst others, also played a role, although to a lesser extent, in the educational publication field even though they were outside the immediate circles of power. Importantly, the question for these mainstream publishers was not whether these trends were followed out of ideological affinities, but simply that compliance ensured profitable business deals for the parties involved.

Admittedly, not all Afrikaans writers and intellectuals conformed to this state monopoly over the book trade, and with a focus on textbook publishing (McDonald 2009a, 91). Breyten Breytenbach, a strong opponent to censorship, argues that censorship was not necessary in the Afrikaans book trade, because the "'Establishment' had other, more 'discreet' methods of dealing with its own 'dissenters' before publication" (quoted in McDonald 2009a, 99).

In 1945, Afrikaner veteran poet and playwright N.P. van Wyk Louw created the Coalition of the Free Book, in reaction to the mainstream Afrikaans publishers' tendency to focus on the school book market and "create space for the younger generation's avant-garde ideals" (McDonald 2009a, 91). Even if this venture was short lived, it provided a platform for a wider range of Afrikaans literary voices to be heard. In 1945, van Wyk Louw created the literary magazine *Standpunte* which quickly became a mouth-piece for the Afrikaans literary *avant-garde*, and published writers from the *Sestigers* movement before ideological, social, political and aesthetic dissentions emerged within the *volks avant-garde* ranks in the 1960s (McDonald 2009a, 93). In this regard, the Afrikaans dissident movements such as the *Sestigers* played an important role in diversifying the mainstream book trade outside the confines of textbook publishing, which eventually led to the creation of Taurus, the first major alternative Afrikaans publisher, as discussed in the following section.

As McDonald points out, debates around Afrikaans identity and on the situation of

Afrikaans writers intensified within the mainstream public discourse. In part inspired by increasingly exclusive definitions of literature adopted by censors, a group including André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach and Adam Small, amongst others, adopted a literary approach more inclusive to all races and literatures (2009a, 94). The avant-garde movement's literature was essentially available to readers through *Standpunte*, the *Sestigers'* literary magazines, and two mainstream publishers, namely APB and Human & Rousseau (McDonald 2009a, 95). Although committed to the Afrikaans literary *avant-garde*, which at this stage was not alienated from the Afrikaans intelligentsia and therefore still operated within the limits of mainstream publishing, these literary outlets had their differences, observable in their lists of authors, ideological and political affiliations and aesthetic conventions. These disparities were representative of the emerging internal divisions within the Afrikaans cultural field in dealing with Nationalist political interference in the publishing industry, and with the effects of censorship bureaucracy on the latter (McDonald 2009a, 95).

McDonald provides an insightful comparison of Human & Rousseau and APB in terms of their relations with the censors and their writers. It emerges that although their lists of authors was generally relatively similar, including writers such as Chris Barnard, Breytenbach, Brink, Ingrid Jonker, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie, and Bartho Smit, they differed in many ways. In a nutshell, Transvaal-based Afrikaans fiction publisher APB was closely linked to the elite in power, with Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd having chaired its board of directors before it was merged with Perskor, which by all account was "closer […] to the inner circle of state power" (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 20). Although APB counted some *Sestiger* writers on its list, the relations between the publisher and the young writers were tense and "testified to the strength of the opposition the younger generation of writers met from established Afrikaner publishers" (McDonald 2009a, 96). Cape-based Human & Rousseau, for its part, was considered more liberal, before it merged with Nasionale Pers in 1977, which was a "vehicle for the promotion of Afrikaner interests" (Mpe & Seeber 2000, 19).

In this context, some writers broke away from the mainstream publishing scene and either

joined independent publishers, such as Breytenbach with Buren publishers, or founded alternative publishing outlets, such as Taurus. As McDonald explains, within the Afrikaans literary circles the dissent found its root in a form of resistance to cultural hegemony:

> The cleavage was not so much between the loyal tribal bard and the upstart dissident as between two forms of cultural resistance, one that could be accepted within the terms of the minority volks avant-garde and the other that could not. This gives an added significance to the change in the censors' attitudes in the mid-1970s and to the fact that neither of the first Afrikaans titles to be banned was published by a mainstream Afrikaner-owned firm (2009a, 99).

Seemingly, the Nationalist project of a unified Afrikaner identity was being disrupted with opposition from within its own ranks, as will be discussed in the next section.

Whilst the Afrikaans mainstream publishing industry benefited from close relationships with the ruling elite, the English publishing industry had another set of politics to deal with. Benefiting from exposure to a wider and more global market, English publishing was – at least until the 1960s – under the influence of the British colonial legacy and patronage. As McDonald reminds us, the Traditional Market Agreement of 1947 shared the international English market between Britain and the United States of America, and Britain gained exclusive selling rights over South Africa, the largest English market in Africa, and Commonwealth countries until the 1970s (2009a, 104). This translated into a situation where English-language books were mainly imported by British publishers and were scrutinised as per South African customs legislations, which constituted a precarious and unpredictable form of censorship, as discussed in the previous chapter.

English mainstream publishers operating in South Africa were for the most part subsidiaries of multinational companies. They included Macmillan, Penguin, Hodder & Stroughton, Heinemann, McGraw-Hill, Oxford University Press Southern Africa and Longman Green, to name a few. Whilst they shared a portion of the textbook market before it was virtually taken over by Afrikaans presses in the context of the Bantu Education, they mainly focused their activities on importing and distributing books

published abroad to a South African readership. In the early 1960s the book trade in South Africa was underpinned by several risk factors, including the 1963 censorship legislations, the international cultural boycott against apartheid and a new configuration of the international book trade (McDonald 2009a, 105).

The policies adopted by British publishers operating in apartheid South Africa were at times ambivalent. As Dick Cloete notes, relations between the business and publishing missions fluctuated, leading to a situation where "the line between the two becomes blurred" (2000, 43). The "dilemmas and contradictions" entailed by a dual policy juggling both commercial and ideological publishing are emphasised in Caroline Davis' account of OUP's operations in South Africa during apartheid (2011). Supporting her argument with Pierre Bourdieu's model of cultural and economic capital, Davis argues that the position of OUP changed over time, and that initially "scholarly publications for the 'restricted' academic market were subsidised by the 'large-scale' education market-place" (2011, 98). In other words, "cultural capital was accumulated through OUP's publications for the white academic market and tertiary market, and economic capital through the profitable black educational market" (Davis 2011, 98). As Davis notes, OUP balanced this relation between educational and literary publishing through, amongst others, Rex Collings' project of creating the Three Crowns Series, which would serve "the importance of embedding 'high culture' in the African publishing programme for the purpose of prestige and public relations, [predicting] that Three Crowns might serve an important function in compensating the more commercial activities of the press" (2007, 227-228). Seemingly, the "African publishing programme" was thought of as being on the margins of the mainstream publishing programme, and was perceived as a "culture enterprise" rather than a strictly commercial one (Davis 2007, 228). The Three Crown Series closed its press in 1976, but nonetheless served to justify OUP's presence in Africa "as cultural rather than commercial" (Davis 2007, 232). As Davis points out, this could apply in South Africa until 1970, when the accumulation of economic capital became OUP's official policy, meaning that it had to do concessions in order to secure its place in the mainstream South African market (2011, 98). In doing so, OUP eventually compromised its ideological position in favour of profitability, which translated in OUP

avoiding the publication of oppositional literature and focusing on "Bantu Education approved texts" such as language textbooks depicting African rural life (Davis 2011, 79; 86). Seemingly, the fine line between cultural and commercial publishing had by then been crossed, as OUP's list became increasingly commercial (Davis 2011, 95).

While OUP remained active in South Africa from the colonial throughout the apartheid era amidst international protests (Davis 2011, 91), some multinational publishing companies closed their South African branches or interrupted their activities in South Africa as a political gesture, refusing to cooperate in an industry accomplice of apartheid. For instance, Heinemann left South Africa in the 1960s, followed with McGraw-Hill in the early 1970s (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 22).

For South African publishers who were not aligned to the NP or found themselves on the outskirts of its close-knit network of influence, publishing almost became a gamble. The space for innovative, creative, independent and thought-provoking publishing aimed at a progressive public was at best curbed, at worst rendered impossible. Dissent came from within and outside of the Afrikaans circles, as seen in the previous chapter, and led to the creation of alternative publishing ventures of various scope of influence and impact, but nonetheless providing alternative books for alternative readers, as will be discussed in details in the next section.

The configuration of the mainstream publishing industry was determined by political considerations, and a campaign to channels readers towards certain pre-determined reading material that would not incite opposition was engineered. Despite the difficulties facing alternative publishers, on financial and political levels, they managed to develop a publishing industry that was not strictly driven by a business mission, or as Bourdieu puts it, "orientated to the accumulation of symbolic capital" (quoted in Davis 2011, 80).

**South African Alternative Publishers**

The definition of what constitutes alternative publishing in the South African context is

itself open to debate and consideration. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the adjective "alternative" as something "offering a choice" (2007). In this light, and in the context of publishing in apartheid South Africa, alternative publishing could generally be understood as all publishing initiatives situated outside of the mainstream NP controlled publishing industry. As seen in the previous chapter, the cultural orthodoxies promoted by censors advocated a literature that promoted a Christian and moral view of life; that reinforced or at least did not challenge the powers and legitimacy of the apartheid state; and that upheld Nationalist values in general. Mainstream publishers published books reinforcing or at least not challenging this view. Alternative publishing, by contrast, sought to offer a choice or an alternative to readers espousing an alternative view of life, by publishing literature that fell outside of the mainstream body of literature sanctioned by apartheid ideologies, policies and legislations, and a platform for writers who refused to subscribe to the dominant prerogatives dictated by the publishing politics, in turn influenced by the censorship apparatus and other means of state control and interference. In all likelihood, these were publishers for whom the "publishing mission" took precedence over the "business mission" (Cloete 2000, 43), or in the words of Bourdieu, for whom the "cultural capital" was more important than the "economic capital" (quoted in Davis 2011, 80).

Dick Cloete (2000) provides valuable insights on the nature of alternative publishing in general, and on its role in building ideological and cultural resistance against apartheid. He explains that the privileged relationships developed between the various players involved in alternative publishing in these terms:

> [These] publications [represented] a community of interest wider than the fortunes of a specific organisation. This community can support publishing activities in a variety of ways ranging from providing a loyal and responsive audience through writing and volunteer support for editing, production, distribution and sales to sponsorships and financial contributions (2000, 43).

The conventions and well-defined roles characterising mainstream publishing are therefore made indistinct through the creation of this alternative "community of interest" underpinned by solidarity around a common cause, a notion which will be helpful in

understanding the readership for these publications.

A community of interest is typically understood as a grouping of individuals around a common and shared interest or issue, whose avowed goal is to achieve a shared outcome. In the South African context, alternative publishers could therefore be understood as literary spaces where left-leaning, liberal, oppositional or anti-apartheid cultural and political ideologies and individuals strived to survive in order to offer an alternative to the mainstream publishing industry's discourse, which had consequences far beyond literary and aesthetic concerns. As Cloete points out, such initiatives go beyond what the market dictate, as they promote "innovation", "growth", "development of ideas", "perspectives", and "concepts" (2000, 44). A political facet inevitably infused these publishing ventures, as the end-goal was the end of apartheid through political resistance expressed through the cultural field.

Commercial gain, while certainly helping in producing more books and keeping the business viable, is not the end-goal of alternative publishing ventures even if this lead to a precarious survival. Cloete explained this choice when defining alternative publishing versus commercial mainstream publishing:

> Broadly defined, it includes anything outside mainstream commercial publishing, where the market is the final determinant of what is published. In contrast, the publishing mission takes precedence over the business mission in alternative publishing, although there is a point where the line between the two becomes blurred (2000, 43).

Alternative publishing "supports change by disseminating new ideas and values and expressing an 'ideology of renewal'" (Cloete 2000, 44). By expressing a public conscience in the face of mainstream NP controlled corporate publishers, alternative publishers gave a voice to marginalised communities and discourses: "Alternative media provides the space to represent voices that are not heard in the mainstream or have such limited exposure that they hardly impact on public consciousness" (Cloete 2000, 44). In a politicised context such as apartheid South Africa, the various strands of political resistance found their niche in the alternative cultural space, and as such it could be

proposed that the various alternative publishers reflected and represented these forms of resistance as they were shunned out of, or deliberately distanced themselves from, the mainstream. While it is not possible within the limits of this thesis to include all publishers that could be considered as alternative in the context of apartheid South Africa, as it would have to include the numerous anti-apartheid organisations as well as other oppositional publishing ventures of various scales and scopes producing magazines, newsletters, bulletins, pamphlets, etc.. This thesis will discuss a selection of alternative publishers of literary books and magazines, in line with the strand of resistance they emanated from.

As far as the genesis of oppositional publishing goes, before the mid-1940s one could identify, as David Philip does, "the occasional publisher like a mission press that might bring out the odd oppositional book" (1990, 10). However, it seems that the first recognised oppositional or alternative publisher in South Africa who wanted to "publish literature suitable in language, content and price for African readers" was the African Bookman, founded in 1943 by Julian Rollnick (Philip 1990, 10). The venture closed in 1947, but nonetheless managed to publish some sixty titles, amongst which ten African writers, which included the likes of Govan Mbeki, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Eddie Roux, to name but a few (Philip 1990, 10). African Bookman existed in the context of the intensification of Afrikaans nationalism, which ultimately led to the rise of the NP to power and a division of society along racial, and to a certain extent linguistic, lines. Despite its short life-span, African Bookman sought to provide books for the increasingly marginalised group of readers that are the "African readers", and in this way was alternative to the mainstream corporate commercial publishing industry.

The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), founded in 1929, could also be considered as a pioneer in alternative publishing in South Africa. While it only started to publish books in the 1960s, as Philip reminds us, it aimed at giving a space for alternative voices critical of the ambient colonial and subsequent Nationalist discourse to enter the public domain through newsletters and booklets. The annual political review *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa* was one of their key publications. Typically

spanning over a couple of hundred pages, each edition of the *Survey* discussed the political affairs and developments that occurred in South Africa for a given year, as a kind of socio-political almanac. As Philip points out, in their mission to "seek the facts and make them known", the SAIRR could "hardly avoid ending up oppositional" (1990, 17). It emerges from the themes and editorial inclinations of its publications that the SAIRR was involved in a non-racial resistance to apartheid, providing factual information and statistics on the situation on the ground regarding the various population groups, refusing the one-sided and biased facts as they were officially presented.

The *Survey of 1965* (1966) contains headings such as: "Political Parties" (1), which lists the political parties active on the political scene and their respective policies; "Political Representation of Coloured People" (9); "Non-White Political Parties" (14); "Secret Organisations" (15), which discusses organisations such as the Afrikaner *Broederbond*, the Sons of England and the Freemasons; "Security Measures", including an overview of the Suppression of Communism Amendment Act No. 97 of 1965; "General Protests Against the Suppression of Communism Act and Criminal Procedure Amendment Act" (39), which speaks of the protest meetings held in Cape Town and Durban; "Control of Publications" (41); "Foreign Affairs" (84) which discuss the proceedings of the United Nations on South Africa and the international sanctions against the apartheid regime; "General Matters Affecting Africans" (162), which discusses issues such as population control and the homelands; and "Coloured and Asian Affairs" (174), amongst others. A review of other editions reveals that the content was generally more or less aligned to this outline, in a bid to counter propaganda and indeed make the facts known. Also published by the SAIRR, the booklet *Action, Reaction and Counteraction. A Companion Booklet to Legislation and Race Relations* is, as explained in the title page, "A review of non-white opposition to the apartheid policy, counter-measures by the Government, and the eruption of new waves of unrest" (Horrell, 1963).

While the SAIRR continued its activities – and is still an active civil society organisation in contemporary South Africa – liberal leader Leo Marquard, one of its cofounders, set up the South African branch of Oxford University Press (OUP) in Cape Town. As

discussed earlier in this chapter, and as Philip points out, although OUP could to a certain extent be labelled as an alternative publisher in its early days of operation, from the 1970s to the 1990s OUP could no longer be perceived as alternative as it proved to be a major player in the international commercial book trade (Philip 1990, 13), and more precisely in the South African school publishing market (Davis 2011). However, up until the early 1970s, OUP's general publishing list included several oppositional books, for instance Alan Paton's *Hofmeyr*, Edgar Brookes's *Civil Liberty in South Africa*, David Welsh's *The Roots of Segregation* and Marquard's own book, *People and Policies of South Africa* (Philip 1990, 11).

David Philip, who was Marquard's assistant editor and later editorial manager at OUP, left OUP in 1971 to set up David Philip Publishers, with his wife Marie. Also embracing the liberal tradition, David Philip Publishers focused on tertiary education and general publishing "to provide previously unavailable texts of South African literature for use in universities and in the process going some way towards bridging the 'unbridgeable gap' in our literature caused by the banning of the 1960s and 1970s" (Philip 1990, 14). By publishing what they termed "books that matter for Southern Africa" (1990, 90), David Philip Publishers contributed in making works by progressive authors available, providing books for progressive and politically aware readers within the anti-apartheid circles and beyond. As in the case of *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, edited by H.W. van der Merwe and David Welsh and published in 1972 suggests, David Philip Publishers did not hesitate in taking risks and publishing books likely to be banned or at least attract the censors' scrutiny. *Student Perspectives* is a collection of essays written by representatives and members of the various students' movements active in the early 1970s, such as SASO, NUSAS and the Afrikaans *Studentebond*. While the first impression sold out, some of its contributors, amongst them Black Consciousness leaders Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, were declared banned persons, which meant that the book could no longer be distributed in South Africa. Having recently printed a second lot, David Philip sent it to London for distribution overseas. This example is revealing of the daring attitude of liberal publishers such as Philip, who explains that:

> If one were actually to read and take seriously the details of their legislation for instance on censorship and banned people, and the penalties for infringements, one would end up publishing nothing. It was therefore necessary for a publisher to develop a blanking of the mind towards this legislation and above all to be careful not actually to be guided by it. This may sound irresponsible but it was better to be irresponsible than scared stiff of publishing anything (1990, 14).

With its Africasouth Paperbacks series launched in 1982, David Philip Publishers sought in some ways to bridge the unbridgeable gap in South African literature caused by the bannings of the 1960s and 1970s (1990, 14). As Philip recalls, "many previously banned books were unbanned as the result of our applications to the Publications Committee, and then republished in Africasouth Paperbacks" (1990, 14).

Faith-based resistance and liberal patronage opened the doors to English-language alternative publishers that would prove to have a great impact on the South African literary and socio-political scene, such as the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), funded by the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches. SPRO-CAS was founded in 1969 by Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist C.F. Beyers Naudé "to explore the possibilities and problems of creating a social order in South Africa based on the 'integrated thrusts of love and association' as an alternative to the apartheid society" (Stadler 1975, 102). SPRO-CAS, through its community projects and publications, served as an incubator for political debates and analysis involving diverse groups of population. As Stadler points out, SPRO-CAS operated in two phases, namely SPRO-CAS I and SPRO-CAS II. SPRO-CAS I was more of a study project, and focused on an analysis of the situation and enabled the creation of a series of commissions which resulted in publications such as *Anatomy of Apartheid*, *Towards Social Change* and *South Africa's Political Alternatives*, all edited by Peter Randall in 1970, 1971 and 1973 respectively. The second phase could be labelled as the action project, and aimed at formulating strategies leading to social, political and economic changes, and published, amongst other titles, Rick Turner's *The Eye of the Needle* in 1972, James Matthews' and Gladys Thomas' *Cry Rage* in 1972, which were both banned in March 1973 (Stadler 1975, 107). In total, SPRO-CAS I and II produced dozens of reports and some hundred papers and essays (Stadler 1975, 102), of which the bulk were

edited by Peter Randall who served as SPRO-CAS' director between 1969 and 1972, after having served as assistant director at the SAIRR between 1965 and 1969.

The Black Community Programme (BCP) was established in 1970, under SPRO-CAS II's umbrella. The BCP would serve as an incubator for the emerging Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), with the involvement of anti-apartheid activists such as Steve Biko, Bennie Khoapa, Barney Pityana, and Mamphela Ramphele, to name a few. The BCP also contributed in producing several publications through its publishing programme, for example the periodical collection of essays by black activists *Black Viewpoint*; the periodical examination of black political activity *Black Review*; and the *Handbook of Black Organisations* (Stadler 1975, 108). As Khoapa points out, referring to the body of BCM inspired literature, "All these publications are selling much more widely in the black community than any other publications of literary value" (quoted in Cloete 2000, 46). The introduction to the *Black Viewpoint* issue of September 1972, penned by Biko, corroborates this view and clearly states the objectives of the publication:

> It is significant that in a country peopled to the extent of 75% blacks and whose entire economic structure is supported and maintained, willingly or unwillingly, mainly by blacks, we find very few publications that are directed at, manned by and produced by black people.
>
> Black Viewpoint is a happy addition by the Black Community Programmes to all those publications that are of great relevance to the black people. Our relevance is meant to be in the sense that we communicate to black things said by blacks in the various situations in which they find themselves in this country of ours. We have felt and observed in the past, the existence of a great vacuum in our literary and newspaper world. So many things are said so often about us and for us but very seldom by us.
>
> […] In terms of thinking, therefore, Black Viewpoint is meant to protect and further the interests of black people. We do not intend to venture beyond this. We shall not serve as an exclusive mouthpiece for any particular section of the black community but merely to pick up topics as they come and as they are dealt with by blacks in various situations (Biko 1972).

The editorial excerpt is telling, in that it pinpoints the question of a marginalised black readership and the existence of the gap, or "vacuum" as Biko terms it, in the black "literary and newspaper world". Biko reminds us that relevance and common interests are central to the formation of this readership, once again highlighting the dichotomy between the mainstream commercial publishing industry and the ideological needs and purpose of the alternative literary space. It also represents a step away from white liberal resistance to apartheid and oppositional publishing, as all-black publishing ventures were about to take the stage.

Although it was banned in 1977, the BCP and the Black Consciousness ideology underpinning it provided the leverage needed for several black publishing ventures to take shape throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with black publishers and editors producing books and publications by black authors for black readers, and by doing so fulfilling the needs of a newly identified reading public, as we shall see in further details later in this chapter. Cloete sums it up when pointing out that "As the struggle progressed, trade unions, community and civic organisations showed themselves as the building blocks of organised resistance and their members became an important audience for alternative publishing" (2000, 47).

Also through SPRO-CAS, Ravan Press was established in 1972 in Johannesburg, and played a central role in the alternative publishing scene. Founded by members of the Christian Institute Peter Randall, Danie van Zyl and Beyers Naudé, Ravan Press could be described in the following terms, in line with SPRO-CAS' overall vision and ideology:

> We are part of that section of South African society engaged in changing the present social system… we aim to produce books that inform the struggle in the present… and that create a climate in which the new society can be discussed (quoted in Philip 1990, 15).

Ravan Press posited itself as a literary outlet for emerging and established oppositional writers, initially focusing on Black Consciousness and liberation theology and eventually including various genres, such as "class-orientated analysis, trade-union and workerist books, literacy, history and social studies, fiction, and children's books" (Philip 1990,

15). Its primary objective was to publish SPRO-CAS' radical research (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 25), and publish the SPRO-CAS commissions' reports (Cloete 2000, 47). By shackling both literary and book trade conventions, Ravan positioned itself as the prime publisher of alternative creative writing and anti-apartheid literature and social research in South Africa, which inevitably attracted the censors' attention and scrutiny. As social and literary activist Glenn Moss points out:

> The State and its various organs were predictably antagonistic and this manifested itself in repetitive banning and confiscation of books, general harassment and intimidation, interference in the infrastructure necessary for formal business operations (telephone, postage, relations with printers) and physical attacks on Ravan premises and property. This included the firebombing of Ravan's offices (quoted in Mpe and Seeber 2000, 26-7).

Peter Randall was Ravan's first director, until a banning order was served to him in 1977, when Mike Kirkwood replaced Randall. Kirkwood, editor of *Bolt*, had contacts with black township writers and artists, such as Mothobi Mutloatse and Jaki Seroke, amongst others (Cloete 2000, 48). Writers and publishers were working in close collaboration and were involved in the different stages of production, and as Cloete points out, the idea of an arts magazine where artists would also be editors matured, leading to the creation of *Staffrider* magazine by Kirkwood in 1979 (2000, 48). Around the same time, at the end of the 1970s, Mutloatse became a director at Ravan whilst also working at *The Voice*, a newspaper edited by the South African Church Council (SACC). Seroke was also closely involved in the running of *Staffrider*, coordinating the relations between *Staffrider* and community arts groups and organising workshops with artists on various topics including writing skills and African literature, from which several of Staffrider series' books emerged, including titles such as Ingoapele Madingoane's *Africa my Beginning* and Mtutuzeli Matshoba's *Call me not a Man* (Cloete 2000, 48). As Seroke points out: "The intention was not to achieve the highest aesthetic standards but to produce a literature of poor communities, a little rough perhaps, but able to express their life" (quoted in Cloete 2000, 48). It is interesting to note that *Staffrider* was published in English, as were most oppositional publications, thus positioning English as the language of resistance.

*Staffrider* magazine and series aimed at reaching "a sizeable reading community in the

townships", as McDonald points out (2009a, 144), and in doing so opened up a space where black readers and writers could convene in their communities, in their own terms, thus framing their own literary experiences. Mutloatse asserts this sense of self-discovery through literature as a people when stating:

> We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true self – undergoing self-discovery as a people (quoted in Mpe and Seeber 2000, 25).

Ravan's offices in general, and *Staffrider* magazine in particular, turned out to be a space where, as Glenn Moss points out, "the enormous well of angry yet creative energies bottled up in South Africa's townships" could be expressed through literature (quoted in Mpe and Seeber 2000, 26).

In typical BC fashion, this trend advanced a step further from sole reactionary and oppositional literature, inserting an element of self-realisation and empowerment into the black literary experience. Unsurprisingly, *Staffrider* rapidly ran into trouble with censors, and the first issue was banned a month after its publication in 1978, on the grounds of obscenity, harm to race relations and sedition, and for portraying the South African police forces in an unfavourable and undermining manner (McDonald 2009a, 147). Ravan had initially adopted the policy of non-cooperation with the censors, therefore refusing to appeal through the Publications Appeal Board. Kirkwood however engaged in meetings with J.C.W. van Rooyen, who was soon to be the reformist chair of the Publications Appeal Board, and initiated dialogues with censors through Ravan's lawyers (McDonald 2009a, 147).

The correspondence between Ravan and censors was published in the subsequent issue of *Staffrider* and highlights the discourse around the issue of readership at stake in the debates, emphasising the close relationship Ravan had with its contributors and readers. In this extract of a letter from Kirkwood to van Rooyen we can note, as McDonald points out, the type of discourse that would be typical of van Rooyen's "new pragmatic

language", used here in favour of Ravan:

> The authority and image of the police are, let's face it, in considerable disrepair as far as blacks are concerned… Nevertheless all the black readers we consulted (did you consult any?) thought that the depiction of the police in the magazine was fair. Moreover, they felt that the depiction, openly published, would relieve tension rather than exacerbate it: a 'safety valve', if you like (2009a, 147).

*Staffrider* would often be examined and reviewed by censors in the following years and cause debates between the conservative and reformist censors' factions, albeit tolerated to a certain extent, as the reformist censorship discourse tolerating "protest literature" and considering questions of "likely readership" came into play (see McDonald 2009a, 148).

In 1982, Chris van Wyk was appointed as the first editor of *Staffrider*, as community groups had been editing the magazine ever since its creation. In 1987, Kirkwood resigned and was replaced by Glenn Moss as managing director, and Randall returned after his ban was lifted. This era marked a change in Ravan's publishing programme, whereby less fiction and poetry were published. As Cloete explains, this editorial change was in part due to quality but mainly to the fact that the market for Ravan's oppositional and resistance literature was starting to collapse, because of the pending political transformation and increasing withdrawal of international funding with the dismissal of apartheid (2000, 50). In 1990 *Staffrider* fell under the control of COSAW and Andries Oliphant became chief editor, and in 1996 Ravan's personnel was retrenched and Ravan integrated into mainstream publisher Hodder (Cloete 2000, 50).

While one of *Staffrider*'s strengths was nurturing and empowering emerging writers, it could also have turned out to be a weak point as polemics and debates surrounding the quality of the contributions published in *Staffrider* began to surface in the early 1980s and created divisions. As Cloete explains, "in the highly charged political climate these differences took on political overtones and were seen by some as a contest between charterist and BC viewpoints" (2000, 49).

The case involving Kirkwood and Mbulelo Mzamane sheds light on the debates that occurred in the alternative publishing industry and the complex relations between white publishers and black writers, which are in turn reflective of the inclusive versus separatist approaches characterising the political resistance movements in South Africa, as McDonald points out (2009a, 154). The contentious issue as stake in this case revolves around Mtutuzeli Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man*, which was published by Ravan in 1980 and banned soon after publication, at a time when Mzamane was himself looking for a publisher for his short story collection *Mzala*. Essentially, Mzamane criticised Ravan's editorial policy or lack thereof, advocating a more rigorous pre-publication editorial process that would contribute in instilling a greater sense of self-criticism in writers. In doing so, Mzamane directly confronted Kirkwood in his capacity as an editor, emphasising the importance of craftsmanship in literature, proclaiming that "the art of writing is re-writing" thus emphasising the important duty of an editor (McDonald 2009a, 150). Kirkwood responded to Mzamane's rebuke, arguing that as editor of a publishing company promoting black empowerment and supporting Black Consciousness writers, he did not want to interfere and preferred to act as a "transitional editor" or "outsider" (McDonald 2009a, 151). This series of exchanges brought the question of black ownership at the forefront of the debate, Mzamane concluding that the problem persists because "Ravan is in your hands and not mine or Mothobi's, for that matter" (McDonald 2009a, 151).

Tensions of this nature, revealing the place of black writers in a white-dominated alternative publishing industry, culminated in the break-away of several prominent black writers from so-called non-racial literary and intellectual spaces such as Ravan and PEN SA, for instance, to form the African Writers Association (AWA), which in turn set up the independent black publishing house Skotaville Publishers. Skotaville was founded in 1982 in Soweto, Johannesburg, by Jackie Seroke who was later joined by Mutloatse. Besides Seroke and Mutloatse who served as executive directors, the all-black board included members such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Sipho Sepamla and Miriam Tlali. In the words of Mutloatse, Skotaville aimed at being a "truly independent black printing and publishing house", providing "affordable books aimed at a mass market" (quoted in

Cloete 2000, 51). Skotaville targeted readers who were seemingly black trade union members and community activists, and it gained publishing rights over some of the International Labour Organisation's and World Health Organization's publications. Skotaville's list also included some educational and children's books, and prominent anti-apartheid activists' works such as Desmond Tutu's *Hope and Suffering* and Nelson Mandela's biography *Higher than Hope*. It also published the socio-literary magazine *The Classic*. In total, Skotaville published just under 100 titles in the 1980s, which consisted mainly of political, theological and educational publications, with a fifth of its total output being literary books (McDonald 2009a, 151).

Skotaville's objectives were, in the words of McDonald, "to create space in which the needs, aspirations and objectives of Black writers could be recognized without being subject to the criteria, constraints and restrictions imposed by (white-owned) commercial publishing houses", "to offer a different perspective on Black South African history, which has hitherto been studied only from a white viewpoint" and "to produce alternative educational books outside the framework of Bantu Education" (2009a, 152). The Black Consciousness tone underlying Skotaville was therefore clearly asserted and put in practice through the board members' nominations, authors on its list, themes and editorial policies. The idea of providing an alternative to the white-owned commercial publishers positioned Skotaville in direct competition against Ravan, particularly in terms of the black writers involved, as several black writers migrated from Ravan to Skotaville.

In the late 1980s, as the political climate in South Africa grew tense, Skotaville's contributors and offices were often subjected to harassment from the security police. Seroke was arrested in 1987 for furthering the aim of the Pan-African Congress, and was only released in 1991(McDonald 2009a, 154). These political factors, combined with a change in the market and internal dissensions, led to a partnership between Macmillan's Nolwazi Publishers and Skotaville. In 1999, however, Skotaville was revived and repositioned "as an alternative to the predominantly white-owned commercial and media houses", mainly targeting black professional readers (Cloete 2000, 52). Nevertheless, the

bulk of its publishing output occurred in the 1980s, which earned it the reputation of being "the last major literary imprint to be founded during the apartheid era" (McDonald 2009a, 152) and one of the leading anti-apartheid publisher of "struggle literature" (Berger 2000, 83).

From Skotaville grew yet another innovative albeit short-lived publishing venture, Seriti sa Sechaba. Seriti sa Sechaba was founded in 1988 by Dinah Kefakane, who was previously with Skotaville. It was the first publishing house founded, owned and run by a black South African woman. As Philip points out, Seriti sa Sechaba's initial intention was publishing feminist literature but its publishing scope soon expanded to include children's literature (1990, 15). Its list, which had a strong literary component, included Portia Rankoane's *Moment of Truth: A Collection of Poems*, Dinah Lefakane and Seageng Tsikang's *Women in South Africa: From the Heart, An Anthology of Stories*, amongst others. The aim was to support and empower black South African women writers by offering them a platform promoting women writing. As Cherry Clayton points out regarding the anthology *Women in South Africa*, "For the first time women actually employed as domestic servants were writing or inventing their own stories and poems and finding a forum other than magazines like *Staffrider* in Johannesburg (in which women were always under-represented)" (1993, 30). It is interesting to note how Seriti sa Sechaba, with literary outputs such as this anthology, nurtured and accommodated black working-class women readerships in its midst.

While English publishing under liberal patronage arguably produced the bulk of oppositional or anti-apartheid literature, the Afrikaans alternative scene also played a role in providing a platform for alternative Afrikaans voices to be heard. One of the major players on the Afrikaans alternative literary scene was Taurus, a clandestine publishing house founded in 1975.

Afrikaans literature had enjoyed a privileged status until the mid-1970s. Other means of control were exercised over Afrikaans writers, such as pre-publication social pressure. The close-knit relations between censors and publishers instituted a disguised form of

pre-publication censorship. Examples of publishers' interference and pre-publication control include the case of Ingrid Jonker's *Die Kind wat doodgeskiet is deur soldate by Nyanga*, a poem denouncing the shooting of a child by soldiers in Nyanga township. Jonker's poem was to be included in the collection of poetry *Rook en Oker*, and while the contract between Jonker and the publisher was signed, a member of the publishing house's board opposed the political tone of the poem, requesting its withdrawal from the collection. Having signed the contract, Jonker refused but shortened the title to *Die Kind*, only to find that the poem had been relegated to the end of the book in the children's poetry section in the final edition published in 1965 (de Lange 1997, 35).

Taurus came into existence in the Afrikaans and Nederland Department of the University of the Witwatersrand. Founded by progressive Afrikaans intellectuals and academics Ampie Coetzee, Ernst Lindenberg and John Miles, Taurus was a response to the ever looming and watchful scrutiny of the censors over Afrikaans literature, and as such involved itself in the debates revolving around the issue of domestic censorship raging in the 1970s amongst Afrikaans intellectuals, sparked by the ban on André Brink's *Kennis van die Aand*, the first Afrikaans novel to be banned since the enactment of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963. Taurus' promotional brochure pledged to give "writers of literature the assurance that it would publish any manuscript of value without any form of pre-censorship being exercised" (McDonald 2009a, 100). As the first major Afrikaans initiative directly confronting the dominant position of established Afrikaans commercial publishers, Taurus exposed the growing internal divisions amongst the Afrikaans intelligentsia. It adopted a distribution system reminiscent of van Wyk Louw's scheme in the 1930s albeit with a slightly more progressive and inclusive intent. In McDonald's words, Taurus "was designed to create an opening for more radically interventionist kinds of writing by side-stepping both the censors and over-compromised publishers like H&R" (2009a, 100).

As McDonald points out, Taurus started as "a cross between a clandestine publisher and a mail-order book club" (2009a, 101). Taurus kept a subscription list of readers and distributed its books by direct mail orders, thus reducing the financial risks associated

with post-publication censorship by assuring that some books would be in circulation before attracting the censors' attention. Taurus' first novel was Brink's *Oomblik in die Wind*, which narrates the story of an interracial love affair in the Cape colony, and was thought of as highly susceptible to being banned. To ensure that some copies of the book would be in circulation in the event of a ban, Taurus sent the novel to its subscribers, and moreover hired the services of an Asian printer who did not read Afrikaans, and the first print of 1,000 copies was sold out within five days (McDonald 2009a, 101). In total, Taurus published over 80 titles, amongst which several were banned.

Other South African alternative publishers deserving mention include: Buren-Uitgewers, an interventionist Afrikaans publishing house which released several of Breyten Breytenbach's books and some of André Brink's; Renoster Books, launched in 1971 by Lionel Abrahams and which published Oswald Mtshali and Wally Serote's books; BLAC publishing (Black Literature Arts and Culture) founded by James Matthews in 1974, the first publishing house founded by a black South African, which focused on radical anti-apartheid publishing by black writers but closed down in 1991 after suffering from several bans and constant harassment by the apartheid regime and its censors; Bateleur Press founded by Lionel Abrahams and Patrick Cullinan in 1974 which focused on poetry; Dutch-born publisher Ad Donker, who initially imported books and eventually opened a South African publishing venture specialising in academic publishing, with anthologies such as *The Companion to South Africa English Literature* destined for a school and university market, and so-called serious literature, including John Conyngham, Athol Fugard, Mafika Pascal Gwala, Bessie Head, and Mongane Wally Serote's works; and Prog, a small alternative Afrikaans publisher founded in 1988 which focused on black Afrikaans poetry.

Even if through these alternative presses progressive writers could find means of reaching their readers, a majority of them did not survive more than a few years, due to various factors, ranging from censorship constraints to financial issues. As a result, they closed down, were bought by or merged with commercial publishing. Besides David Philip Publishers and Ad Donker, which were not solely dependent on foreign funding

for their survival, most alternative presses financially depended on foreign investment, which partly explains their precarious and sometimes short lifespan and disappearance with the advent of democracy in South Africa (Oliphant 2000, 19). As Cloete points out, the configuration of the reading market for oppositional publishers changed as political changes were looming, and critical and oppositional political texts were seemingly less read and in demand (2000, 50), as if loosing their immediate relevance and urgency and opening the space for new literary trends and alternatives yet to come.

**Distribution Strategies**

As seen with the case of Taurus above, alternative or independent publishers often had to adopt unconventional distribution methods in order to reach their readers without the interference of censors, even if this meant adopting underground publication and distribution processes.

Direct distribution was often used by alternative publishers, as the idea was to get as many copies as possible in circulation before a publication could attract the censors' attention. This often meant a small-scale production, in comparison to mainstream publishers, and subtlety and secrecy were keys to reaching readers. As the case of Brink's *Oomblik in die Wind* indicates, marketing and distribution strategies had to be fast and subtle. As Nadine Gordimer points out:

> The general idea is that it is better to have the books ship in quietly and sell modestly than to be unable to sell at all. If the book is subsequently banned, the author has the satisfaction of knowing that at least it has some chance to be read, if not widely (quoted in de Lange 1997, 75).

David Philip recalls how in 1987 they published *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, a title at high risk of catching the attention of censors. The book, edited by Don Foster and Dennis Davis, was a strong denunciation of the security police practices, and was considered a significant contribution in exposing the injustices perpetrated by the apartheid judicial and police systems. Philip recalls how the books were distributed in a swift and secret manner to evade the censors' scrutiny:

> We made a list of 600 sympathetic persons whom we regarded as likely purchasers, before the book appeared in the shops, dispatched 600 copies to them, with a letter explaining that we wished to ensure a wide distribution for what we regarded as an important book and that we enclosed our invoice in the hope that they would be prepared to pay for the book, but that if not they could either return it or keep it without obligation (Philip 1990, 14).

This direct contact between publishers, writers and readers reveals a certain degree of proximity between them, which is often unheard of in conventional mainstream publishing. By adapting the conventions of the book trade to the situation, relations between its key players were therefore altered and took the allure of a community of interest whereby feedback and outcomes could be appreciated through other means than sales figures, for instance. Philip points out that the experience of *Detention and Torture in South Africa* nevertheless failed, as they experienced financial loss and received complaints from some targeted readers, who did not appreciate receiving goods they did not order and being expected to pay for them. Moreover, ironically, the book in question was never banned.

Brink also recalls how another one of his novels, *A Dry White Season*, was dispatched in this manner with the collaboration of Taurus:

> A list of subscribers was even established and when, in 1979, it became obvious that my novel A Dry White Season was in danger of being banned (in its Afrikaans version), 2,000 copies were quietly printed and dispatched to Taurus subscribers, followed by another edition within a week. By the time the censors pounced […] there were enough copies in circulation to ensure a long clandestine existence (Brink 1983, 52).

Brink further speaks of a "psychological victory" as the novel reached, even if in a limited manner, a substantial readers base that could potentially expand beyond initial expectations through the circulation of the copies available.

Transnational distribution also occurred. While formal importations and exportations of books is generally a norm in the book trade, some books were literally smuggled in and out of the country, evading both custom officials and censors, as is the case of *Student*

*Perspective on South Africa* published by David Philip, the collection of essays from a spectrum of students' movements, ranging from SASO to NUSAS and the *Afrikaanse Studentebond*. Having sold out the first impression, another printing was produced when two of its contributors, Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, were banned. This meant that the publication was banned *de facto*, and that the second printing could not be distributed in South Africa. Philip took the decision of quietly shipping the books to publisher Rex Collings in London who, as Philip recounts, said he had been expecting them (1990, 13).

These examples demonstrate how some publishers managed to facilitate contact between progressive writers and their readers despite the climate of fear and reprisal, and more evidently, reveal the presence of a progressive readership aware of alternative or oppositional books, existing in the margins of the mainstream book trade.

It must also be noted that several continental and international publishing ventures focusing on African literature contributed to publish several African and South African writers in particular. A reconfiguration took place on the international book trade in the late 1950s early 1960s, with the advent of post-colonialism and the Cold War, amongst other factors. As McDonald highlights, Seven Seas Books, Heinemann African Writers Series, Mbari and the East African Literature Bureau proved to be influential players on the African literary scene, attracting several young South African black writers to their ranks:

> Partly because of this, the key group of independent literary publishers in London came to be associated almost exclusively with white writers after 1960. Bessie Head, who was initially published by Gollancz, Peter Abrahams, who remained with Faber, and Lewis Nkosi, who was published by Longman and Oxford University Press, were the main exceptions (2009a, 106).

The paperback series Seven Seas (1958-1978) was based in East Berlin and promoted "international socialism", "anti-colonial resistance", "the American civil rights movement" and the "anti-apartheid struggle" (McDonald 2009a, 109). Heinemann's African Writers Series (1962-2004) focused on post-colonial African literature and notably counted Chinua Achebe as the founding editor. The aim of this paperback series

was to develop "a modern literary canon fashioned by Africans for Africa", and its list of authors included a wider South African element when James Currey became managing director in 1967 (McDonald 2009a, 110). Several South African authors were published abroad and eventually distributed in South Africa. A couple of novels by Alex La Guma were published in Nigeria by Mbari Press (Brutus. Personal Interview. 25 May 2007), several of Nadine Gordimer's novels were published by Penguin in London, Steve Biko's *I Write What I Like* was published by Heinemann in Oxford, and Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* was published by Faber & Faber in London (Mpe and Seeber 2000, 23). As Davis points out, some African imprints of international publishing companies at times served public relations purposes and to publicise "the press's role in Africa as cultural rather than commercial" (2005, 232), but nonetheless contributed to the development of important lists of African writers and reinforced the African literary canons in the post-colonial context.

These international publishers imported books to South Africa through their South African branches, rendered viable through their commercial publishing portfolios, until some of them closed their South African operations as a sign of protest against the apartheid regime. South African alternative publishers, for their part, operated on the outskirts of the mainstream book trade, at times even going completely underground in order to survive. While some distributed books directly to readers, some conventional points of distribution contributed to disseminate progressive literature, such as formal and informal libraries and bookshops. Formal librarians and booksellers had to manoeuvre through the pressure exercised by authorities on their acquisitions and operations, and as Piet Westra notes, while most librarians "remained quiet, either through ignorance, fear or just a lack of commitment" (McDonald 2009b), some few librarians and booksellers condemned censorship and kept and distributed books potentially undesirable or found undesirable by the censorship board.

**Distribution and Circulation of Books in Libraries**

Archie Dick points out that the various political, religious, cultural and voluntary

organisations promoted reading and empowered readers whilst supporting the creation of libraries throughout South Africa throughout the colonial and apartheid era (2007b, 12). Through these organisations, readers gained access to books as they frequented "private reading societies", "private and public subscription libraries", "libraries subsidised by the government", "Carnegie-funded libraries", and "free-public libraries" (Dick 2007b, 13). As Dick explains, self-help clubs, political organisations as well as various independent initiatives in the townships nurtured reading amongst the black population (2007b, 17).

Readers' access to formal libraries was however limited and controlled with the installation of the apartheid regime. Segregation and censorship legislations successively and simultaneously impacted on readers' access to books and libraries. Libraries in South Africa officially became segregated in the 1950s. Libraries in city centres were typically reserved for white readers, while each section of the population had its libraries in its respective area or township, as per apartheid population groupings. A mix of various reading spaces, in the form of municipal libraries, library associations, reading centres, "non-European" reading rooms, community and private organisations and independent interventions, contributed in growing a working class readership: "Libraries and readers grew both inside and outside of formal library and educational structures even when an increasingly authoritarian state tried to direct and control thought, especially from the 1950s onwards" (Dick 2007b, 19).

Several municipal libraries in so-called black areas were built immediately before the advent of the apartheid regime in South Africa. As Alan G. Cobley points out, in 1940, the Winifred Holtby Memorial Library, the country's first municipal library for black readers, was built in Soweto for "non-Europeans readers" and administered by the Johannesburg city council (1997, 71). In 1948, the NP government's rise to power had great consequences on public services in general, including education and library provisions. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 led to the "purge or closing of many existing black school libraries" (Dick 2007b, 19-20). The Eiselen Commission on Native Education, which was published in 1951, listed forty-two teacher, school, and public libraries in black areas in the country, with a total of 26,944 registered readers and a total

stock of 130,108 books (Cobley 2007, 76). Some of these public libraries survived through the apartheid era, albeit often poorly stocked and serviced, while others were literally destroyed by protesters in the wake of political violence and school boycotts, especially in the 1970s and 1980s (Dick 2007b, 20). "Information centres" and "reading initiatives" were set up in black areas in the 1970s and 1980s to compensate for these inadequately stocked or lack of formal structures, and were often aligned with anti-apartheid organisations and activism (Dick 2007b, 20).

As was the case in black townships, libraries in white cities were used as nodes of thought control amongst the white youth, where readers had to be protected from allegedly a contamination from subversive ideas and publications:

> This protection of the minds of young innocents from dangerous ideas included Afrikaner youth, in the form of information resistance and youth preparedness schemes and the encouragement of teacher librarians to promote good books and healthy reading (Dick 2007b, 20).

Public and school libraries played a direct role in the formation of readerships and in nurturing a culture of reading that was inevitably influenced by socio-political factors such as apartheid segregation, education and censorship. Academic libraries and the South African academia in general greatly suffered from the consequences of the censorship legislations in force, and as former director of the South African Library Piet Westra recalled during a talk given at the Society of Bibliophiles at the University of Cape Town, "Few members of the public or even librarians were aware to what extent censorship under apartheid was restricting the availability of publications" (quoted in McDonald 2009b).

Located at the crossroads between the functions of writers and readers, tertiary institutions often played the role of publishers for academic outputs. As revealed by the context of the emergence of some alternative publishers and literary magazines, university departments were often conducive environments for alternative literary production and political activism. One can for instance think of the University of Natal Press and Wits University Press which include several oppositional publications on their

lists, the Department of Afrikaans and Nederland at Wits where the idea of Taurus flourished, and the various students associations which not only produced several anti-apartheid newsletters and pamphlets but also played a central role in South African oppositional politics.

Many academics served on the various censorship boards and other government agencies, varying in terms of conservatism and political engagement, as discussed in the first chapter. One could suggest that the influence between academia and the censorship apparatus was mutual. The successive censorship boards influenced the scope of academic research through various direct and indirect means, whilst conservative academics also had an impact on, and at times presided over, government decision-making processes as was the case with the first censorship board, for instance, on which several academics were sitting.

As Westra points out, most academic libraries were authorised to acquire and keep some banned publications, but these could not be circulated amongst readers without permission from the censorship board (McDonald 2009b). The South African Library in Cape Town and the State Library in Pretoria enjoyed more latitude, and not only could they acquire banned publications but they could also make them available for consultation within the library and strictly for academic purposes, as Westra points out:

> While head of the South African Library I informed all local universities of this concession and as a result groups of students from the University of Cape Town and other institutions would regularly visit the SAL with their supervisors to consult and study specific banned publications (quoted in McDonald 2009b).

This example could point towards a form of library activism from the part of librarians, but in fact initiatives such as these were isolated and constituted an exception rather than the rule:

> In reality the library profession largely remained silent on the issue and accepted the status quo. They became the keepers of keys through which an ever-increasing number of publications were locked away from the public (quoted in McDonald 2009b).

The limited availability of books inevitably had consequences on various fields of research, and on the scope and range of research produced in South African universities (Merrett. Personal Interview. 23 October 2007). This was particularly true in the field of social sciences, where one out of two political publications submitted to the publications committee were banned (du Toit 1983, 92). Dr. André du Toit, from the Department of Political Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, was amongst those who warned that the research in political philosophy, amongst other disciplines, was rendered virtually impossible because of bans on seminal literature in the field (Hatchen & Giffard 1984, 167). Ironically, research on South African history, for instance, was often easier to pursue outside of South Africa than inside, as the necessary documentation was often more readily available overseas (Merrett 1994, 199). The inaccessibility to documentary sources posed a serious threat to research in South Africa, to the point where, in 1987, the Human Sciences Research Council officially declared that censorship was a major obstacle for South African academics (Merrett 1994, 198).

This official climate of connivance with the censorship bureaucracy prevailing within the librarian profession not only limited access to books for potential readers but generally limited the production of research and publications within the realm of the official authorised ideological inclinations. Some provisions contained in the legislations however made it possible for books banned for possession to be kept in academic libraries, as seen above, but they were reserved for exclusive usage by researchers who, in the minds of censors, were in all likelihood sophisticated, educated readers, all mitigating factors curbing the potentially harmful influence of these publications. Librarian Christopher Merrett, who strongly and vocally opposed censorship and the prevailing silence amongst librarians in South Africa, recalls how such a room existed at the Natal University Library:

> There was a big walk-in storeroom and on the sides, shelves were full of banned books and banned periodicals. At the university library we had a more modest cupboard, it used to stand right in the passage by the head librarian's office, and it was full of banned books (Personal Interview. Pietermaritzburg. 23 October 2007).

However, these special exemptions granting consultation of banned books could prove to be quite a lengthy administrative procedure, and required an official authorisation stipulating that the reading of these books was essential to the research in question. Dr. David Welsh from the University of Cape Town, for instance, had to provide such a letter to consult five of his own books that had been recently banned:

> When he asked for permission to consult them, he was required to supply a statement from his dean certifying that they were absolutely necessary for his research. The permit was given but the books were kept for personal study only and had to be kept under lock and key and not loaned to anyone (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 167).

These publications were kept in locked rooms and cabinets and accessed on approbation from the publications board, which would study the application on a case by case basis (Merrett. Personal Interview. 23 October 2007). However, the applications often remained without response, and as Merrett recalls, the final decision to grant access to banned publications or not was at times taken by the head librarians (Personal Interview. 23 October 2007).

The official climate of concealment surrounding banned books reveals how the potential danger of so-called subversive books could presumably be activated if subversive readers were exposed to them. It also brings into play the likely reader test performed by censors, as seen in the previous chapter, whereby the effects of a publication were evaluated in the light of its assumed readership's responses and reactions. Within the confines of the academic space, readers were thought of as academic readers, who were educated and sophisticated, and therefore who could process their readings on an intellectual level. However, it is interesting to note that sometimes the act of reading contributed to the production of further material and publications. In this light, it could be submitted that academics, as readers, contributed to a certain extent to unlock – literally and figuratively – the messages and information contained in banned books. By analysing, disserting, quoting and paraphrasing banned publications, these readers cum writers presented the information they contained in different formats and communicated them through various channels. Tertiary institutions thus played a role in the dissemination of banned

publications in various forms. As explained in the following chapter focusing on informal distribution strategies performed by readers through the act of reading, the messages and information contained in these books managed to reach a more popular or mass readership, to borrow from the censors terminology, whether orally or in writing. One can turn to the example of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko extensively quoting Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, two major *Négritude* intellectuals, in his speeches and essays to observe the popularisation of otherwise highly intellectual concepts and ideas to reach a more popular readership or audience.

While academic libraries were designed and meant to accommodate an alleged sophisticated and educated readership, public libraries were, as their denomination suggests, designed for the general public, which implies a mass readership. The nature of this readership could partly explain why more stringent measures were applied in public libraries as opposed to university libraries, in terms of the librarians' reactions to censorship, storage and access to books.

The librarian profession was generally politically aligned to the National Party through the South African Librarian Association (SALA), a powerful lobby group against which smaller progressive organisations such as the Cape Library Assistants Section (CLAS) and the Cape Library Association would appear as alternatives to the dominant ideology. Even if not all librarians working in formal institutions colluded with the system, the majority of them supported or tolerated it (Dick 2004b, 35). A climate of self-censorship prevailed amongst librarians as they regulated reading by suppressing "offending books" and propagating "good books" (Dick 2004b, 36). This attitude was either underpinned by ideological connivance or by a climate of fear. Informers at times visited libraries (Merrett. Personal Interview. 23 October 2007), and officials randomly checked libraries in search of prohibited literature, a practice introduced by publications director Gerrit Dekker when he hired the first "travelling inspector" in the 1960s (McDonald 2009a, 41). Librarian Merrett emphasises the power of librarians through the role they seemingly played in supporting or hindering accessibility to books for readers: "had librarians as a body so chosen, the Publications Act could have been rendered unworkable" (1994, 212).

This statement reveals the pervading effects of censorship on critical points of distribution of information in the public domain, and speaks of the relative power held by librarians in terms of control over what readers read, libraries being a direct point of transaction between books and readers. As Dick emphasises, "library directors acted as censors themselves when they made a final selection in their offices of books that had already been selected by librarians, and were neither accountable nor reported to anyone" (2004b, 35).

Librarianship was a conformist and conservative profession, and public libraries played a major role in implementing the suppression of undesirable publications throughout the country. Once books were deemed undesirable, librarians had to remove them from the shelves and put them away, sometimes by locking them in restricted rooms, as discussed above in the case of academic libraries, and sometimes by burning them, a practice which occurred in several public libraries across South Africa. As Dick points out (2004b, 33), some of these books were sent to central depots or central libraries, where they would constitute an impressive and most probably eclectic collection of undesirable titles. Central librarians were in turn responsible for keeping these publications out of circulation, and often resorted to destroying banned books. At times, banned books kept in central libraries were burned, pulped, or shredded (Merrett. Personal Interview. 2007; Dick 2004b, 33). In a few instances, books were returned to the supplier (Merrett 1994, 61). Westra remembers one of these book burning incidents which ended on an unpredictable note, while he was director of the State Library:

> One good day the Central police station in Pretoria wanted to get rid of heaps of items they had assembled as asked us for advice on how to do this. My boss suggested that the material could be burned in one of the enormous ovens that ISCOR [then South Africa's largest steel manufacturer] used for their steel producing process.
>
> […]
>
> This oven may have been 20 meters high, spitting flames and smoke from an opening at the top. Hundreds of items were lifted in one scoop by a huge mechanical shovel from the lorry and dumped into the opening at the top of the oven, which resulted in smoke and big flames. But at about the

> third load that went up something went wrong. Midway between the lorry and the oven the shovel suddenly opened and hundreds of publications, Playboys, Hustlers, Men Only and others, often more explicit were spilt on the floor.
>
> What happened next reminded me in a way of a scene out of Dante's Inferno. Out of nothing from all dark corners of the hall dozens of helmeted workers in overalls suddenly rushed in, grabbing as many items as they could carry in their arms and disappeared as quickly into the darkness again as they had come. The news of our operation must have leaked out. But the end result was that we had not only burned publications, but also redistributed quite a few (quoted in McDonald 2009b).

The practice of burning books, which is by all accounts contrary to the librarianship's spirit, led to the destruction of thousands of books seized by police or other government agencies in South Africa's municipal furnaces and incinerators between 1955 and 1971, in what Dick calls a "bibliocide" (2004b, 31) generally perpetrated in a climate of "unquestioning obedience to authority", "mindless performance of duties" and "uncritical attitude" (Dick 2004b, 35). Initially, only pornography was thrown into furnaces, but as the Publications and Entertainments Act came into effect in 1963, any banned material could be subjected to this treatment. It is reported that in 1964, 800 books were burned by the Cape Town Library Services, whilst in 1968 the number of banned books being burned by the Natal Provincial Library amounted to 5,375 (Dick 2004b, 32).

Officially, librarians did not oppose or denounce this massive destruction of books. Destroyed books were typically replaced with "good reading", in what is being labelled "the new library spirit" (Dick 2004b, 35). The reason why librarians performed these destructive acts amidst a general silence from the profession is open to debate, as book burning was not prescribed in terms of the legislations in force. The police notified in 1954 that banned books had to be removed from the shelves and public circulation, but that they could simply be stored in sealed bags in the libraries (Dick 2004b, 33).

**Distribution and Circulation of Books in Bookshops**

Just as librarians are the last loop in the chain before books reach readers, booksellers played a role in promoting or hindering access to books for the book buying market. Taking part in the book trade on commercial terms, booksellers' attitudes were mainly dictated by economic rather than ideological concerns, contrary to the librarians' position operating in the public system. The financial risk was real for booksellers as once banned, undesirable books were rendered illegal and therefore could no longer be sold. Besides the financial loss associated with books being removed from shelves, retribution for displaying or selling banned material, which contravened the law, ranged from a fine to imprisonment.

Censorship unwittingly crept in at various levels of the book trade, and had an impact from the provision of books to the selection of publications made available to readers, creating a situation where booksellers became – at times unintentionally – regulators of reading. The selection of titles and authors that a bookseller would stock was somewhat of a gamble, based on the probabilities of a publication being banned. Although they enjoyed relative independence from government structures, as opposed to public libraries for instance, they were nonetheless subjected to inspectors and security branch officers' random visits. Chris van Wyk recalls the presence of such undercover officers who scrutinised bookshops' shelves in search of "communist" and "subversive" literature (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Some zealous customers also informally took upon the role of censors and reading regulators, as this incident recalled by David Philip reveals:

> In the bookshops like CNA, the managers had been reluctant to buy oppositional books because they claimed that their shop assistants' lives were endangered if they stocked such books, and because the books themselves were often mutilated and made unsaleable by ill-disposed customers (1990, 17).

Some booksellers were seemingly harassed by law-abiding or conservative members of the public, and it is also recounted that individuals selling alternative publications were at

times harassed by government officials. In such an incident that occurred in the early 1960s, a seller of the liberal publication *Contact* was detained for being in possession of the copies of the banned publication he was selling (Merrett 1994, 44).

Precautions were also necessary when ordering imported publications, as customs officials perused incoming publications and redirected them to the publications board if found necessary. Some wary booksellers would sometimes send a sample to the publications board before importing in greater numbers, while local publications were at times sent to lawyers for assessment (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 164). Imported written media were also scrutinised, and sometimes articles were cut out or blackened before being distributed in South Africa. For example, prominent South African Communist Party leader and anti-apartheid activist Bram Fischer's article on South Africa published in London's *The Observer* was literally cut out of the imported copies (Merrett 1994, 53). Similarly, towards the end of 1963, the last three lines of an article on the Penguin African Library were blackened from the copies of *The Times Literary Supplement* published for a South African reading public, as anti-apartheid activist Ronald Segal was quoted on his anti-apartheid views (Merrett 1994, 51). A portion of an article from a 1965 edition of London's *The Times* was also blackened before it could be distributed in South Africa, as is quoted by anti-apartheid activist and banned ANC leader Nelson Mandela (Merrett 1994, 53).

These measures were often carried out by officials out of duty, or at times by wary publishers in an act of self-censorship to insure access to the market, as was the case with OUP's *Oxford History of South Africa.* The South African edition of Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson's *Oxford History of South Africa*, was published in 1969 with 52 blank pages under the header *South African Nationalism*, a chapter researched and written over a period of two years by Leo Kuper that inevitably quoted and referred to banned persons and organisations (Merrett 1994, 63). As Davis observes, the decision was seemingly taken in good faith, although it was heavily criticised:

> Marquard, Philip and Cannon presumed that the volume would be banned on account of this one chapter, and argued that 'the availability of the

> work should not be jeopardised; … that the chapter concerned was expendable in the interests of the availability of the rest of the work'. The decision was made to publish the South African edition of the second volume with 52 blank pages where Kuper's chapter would have appeared, although the international edition was published intact. As a result, the book was not banned, although the censor apparently argued that the missing pages were so annoying that he wished he could ban it. OUP has been criticised for being willingly silenced in this fashion and for not even testing the system (2011, 88).

The censors' avowed objective was to protect so-called good or reasonable readers from dangerous utterances and messages, in the process isolating subversive readers from readings that could encourage further contestation and threaten the status quo. The climate of fear and repression seemingly infiltrated all levels of the book trade industry and created conditions of censorship and at times drove writers and publishers to self-censorship, ensuring that the system functioned despite increasing opposition and the emergence of alternative means of communications. For instance, booksellers were reluctant to purchase books even once a ban had been lifted. South African author Miriam Tlali, who had several brushes with the censorship system throughout her career, explains how this practice affected literary continuity and exacerbated the gap in South African literature: "*Muriel* and *Amandla* were unbanned since 1985 but they are still unavailable. The booksellers simply do not take the books in their stock. The self-censorship of booksellers presents a significant barrier for the free flow of information" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 144).

**Conclusion**

The convening points and interactions between readers and writers, publishers, librarians and booksellers can contribute in raising literacy levels and influencing the creation of readerships, or on the contrary hindering it. In a context like apartheid South Africa, censors, through the various legislations impacting on thought control such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the Bantu Education Act, the Publications and Entertainments Act and the Publications Act and subsequent publications control legislations, exercised an influence on the modalities and *modus operandi* of the book

trade.

Some alternative publishers, alternative in that they are set against the mainstream or commercial publishers, adapted the conventional modes of production of books in order to be able to operate despite the prevailing circumstances, at times even going underground in order to produce books for an equally alternative readership, offering a choice in terms of reading material and discourses articulated even if in a marginal fashion. As discussed in this chapter, alternative publishers were often aligned to – and indeed emanated from – specific strands of anti-apartheid resistance, adopting liberalism and Black Consciousness as an ideology, amongst others, with various factions of writers showing resistance and opposition in the face of a hegemonic, paternalistic and oppressive system. These oppositional publishers, as they got to be called, contributed in producing publications that mainstream publishers would not publish, for various reasons ranging from ideological affinity with the censorship apparatus to practical financial concerns.

While the onus of distribution would traditionally fall on libraries and bookshops, in a situation of censorship as in apartheid South Africa, the roles and responsibilities of the agents involved in the alternative book trade were often polyvalent and multitasked. Some dispositions contained in the censorship legislations made it possible for some readers to access banned or subversive books in public and academic libraries, while post-publication censorship definitely played in favour of readers who knew where to buy potentially subversive books in bookshops before censors pounced or before wary booksellers became aware of their books' potential undesirability. However, the general climate of self-censorship amongst librarians and booksellers led to the creation of an alternative scene, where unconventional and clandestine distribution strategies were adopted, as will be discussed in more details in the next chapters, and where alternative publishers often used creative and unorthodox distribution channels to reach their readers.

Alternative points of distribution existed in the margins of the space occupied by

mainstream publishers, libraries and bookshops. Some alternative publishers interacted directly with their readers, as was the case with Taurus and Ravan, amongst others, in order to get some of their titles in the market before attracting the censors' scrutiny. In doing so, alternative publishers such as David Philip, Ravan, Skotaville, and Taurus, to name but a few, encouraged the formation and sustainability of alternative readerships, involving them in the communication circuit followed by books by encouraging these marginalised readers to perform several functions, namely that of writers, publishers, and distributors of books, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The alternative literary space, where writers, readers and publishers interacted on various levels and in different ways, became a space conducive for the incubation of alternative politics, and the next chapter will demonstrate how the alternative literary scene and political activism at times interacted and reinforced each other through readers. So-called alternative readers asserted their choice when turning to the oppositional publishers' outputs as a source of reading material, and by reading alternative publications that were essential to the very existence of the alternative publishing industry as they created a demand and *raison d'être* for these publications. As such, readers and publishers could be understood as feeding into each other, in the same ways as readers are essential to writers.

## CHAPTER 5 | THE READERS' ROLES IN THE ALTERNATIVE LITERARY CIRCUIT

"The death of the author is the birth of the reader."
(Roland Barthes 1968)

As seen in the previous chapters, the literary industry in apartheid South Africa was characterised by a mainstream book trade compliant with the dominant conservative ideology, which was close to the centres of power and did not pose a threat to the status quo. Through their carefully crafted censorship apparatus, censors regulated reading to a certain extent, by controlling the availability of and accessibility to books. So-called "good readers", who were thought of as good, obedient citizens, were encouraged to read "good books", and this attitude filtered to the various points in the mainstream industry, namely the publishers, librarians and booksellers, who would produce and distribute so-called good books whilst suppressing allegedly undesirable books from the mainstream industry. In doing so, it was thought by censors that the minds of good readers would be protected against subversive messages, because subversive readers would not get enticed or agitated through their readings as undesirable publications would not be available to them.

However, despite this intense censorship climate, a strong alternative literary industry emerged, mainly led by anti-apartheid writers, alternative publishers and as advocated in this chapter, alternative readers. This alternative industry played a major role, not only in the alternative book trade, but also in oppositional politics. Within the realm of this alternative industry, the traditional roles conferred upon agents such as writers, publishers, distributors (booksellers and librarians) and readers, were multifaceted and at times blurred. This aspect of the alternative book trade will be discussed through an analysis of the roles performed by readers who were active in the alternative industry, by the same token emphasising these readers' agency and creativity.

Readers of banned books, simply by keeping, reading and passing on banned or subversive publications within their entourage, proved to censors that publications could, on various levels and scales, circumvent the censorship-controlled mainstream literary

industry and generate a culture of engaged reading. Based on interviews carried out for this study and several accounts of readers from secondary sources, this chapter will examine the social context in which banned books were read, exchanged, stored and distributed in the alternative circulation networks by these groups of readers, investigating, as French book historian Robert Darnton terms it, "the world behind books" (1982, ix).

Roger Chartier emphasises the necessity of treating these aspects independently from one another, explaining that "to exist at all, the history of reading must be radically distinguished from the history of what is read" (2002, 49). For her part, Isabel Hofmeyr emphasises that "if we are to address questions of reception properly, then minimally we will have to relativise our understanding of the book and reading rather than exporting this practice out of all other areas of social life" (1996, 115). In this light, the "social context of reading", as Robert Darnton terms it (2002, 21), implies an understanding of reading relative to the environment in which the reading activity occurs, and not purely on the semiotic analysis of texts read. In line with this advice, this chapter will focus on how, when, why and where alternative readers read, and discuss the ways in which these identified readers were not only literary activists through the role they played in the life cycle of books, but also political activists through their usage of banned publications in the anti-apartheid ranks.

In order to understand the life cycle of books, one must turn to the various agents involved in the book trade, and examine how they each contribute to promote various genres and canons of literature, from the production to the reading phases, including external political, social and economic factors. Darnton proposes a very useful communication circuit which involves eight actors namely the author, publisher, printer, supplier, shipper, bookseller, and reader (2002, 12). In Darnton's proposed circuit, readers are described as purchasers, borrowers, members of clubs and libraries. Readers are situated where the process runs full circle because of their influence on authors, both before and after the moment of writing. Within the circle lies the "intellectual influences and publicity", "economic and social conjuncture" and "political and legal sanctions"

(Darnton 2002, 11). It is against this cycle that the path followed by undesirable publications in apartheid South Africa will be understood.

In a typical mainstream book economy, publications go through these stages in a relatively swift manner as they are published, marketed and distributed in a conventional fashion for the commercial viability of all involved, thus following market demands and fluctuations. Readers are free to choose their reading material, as books are generally readily available or at least accessible. However, this cycle exists within a structured society and is not immune to external and internal influences. As Darnton points out, various intellectual, social, economic, political and legal factors can alter the workings of the system, as was the case during censorship in apartheid South Africa (2002).

The South African censorship apparatus influenced the ways in which books transited from one pole of the cycle to the other. Whether books were effectively banned or likely to be banned, the extreme conditions caused by censorship altered the linearity, role and function traditionally attributed to the actors involved in the book trade, prompting the creation of alternative transmission modalities that enabled these publications to get through to the end of the cycle despite the adverse conditions, leaving in its midst gaps and spaces needing to be fulfilled. This chapter will explore how some readers often assumed the responsibility of compensating for these gaps in order to obtain banned or likely to be banned publications distributed and read, contributing in securing the survival of the alternative scene, not only by reading those publications thus securing a demand for such books, but also by being actively involved in it.

**Readership of Banned Books**

Based on the data collected for this thesis from primary (interviews) and secondary (documentary) sources, a portrait of the sample of the readership or group of readers of alternative publications emerged. Whilst not pretending to be an exhaustive national survey of the overall situation, the findings discussed in this section will present a sample of individuals who participated in the alternative industry in apartheid South Africa, in

their capacities as readers. It seems that the relations between readers and banned reading material were at times arbitrary and spontaneous, in the sense that many readers were often not aware of the banned status of a publication whilst reading it, although they obviously were aware of it partaking in an alternative discourse attempting to counter the mainstream official discourse in the public domain. Amongst the readers interviewed for this thesis and those identified in the secondary sources cited feature: workers, unionists, political activists, students, academics, teachers, writers and publishers. They came in contact with banned publications through various channels and used them in different ways, as will be discussed in this chapter.

Most readers would not consciously label themselves as "readers of banned literature", but rather as readers who happened to read some banned material from time to time, as their interests resided in oppositional politics. Moreover, depending on the decade and political climate where the act of reading occurred, the dynamics informing the readership for banned literature would at times operate in a very isolated manner; such is the case of a banned person in the 1950s. A sense of community amongst readers prevailed in the 1970s, for instance around the *Staffrider* magazine in Johannesburg and other similar alternative literary outlets.

The various readerships that were shaped around banned political literature included individuals from various social classes, stratifications and ideologies, although they all shared a common interest in oppositional politics, as far as banned political publications are concerned. As such, the readers examined for the purpose of this thesis were part of a larger and elusive group of readers that could generally be designated as politically aware individuals espousing various anti-apartheid strands, backgrounds and ideologies, and involved in resistance politics to varying degrees.

Utilitarian reading is defined by Robert Escarpit as "the reading of militants or autodidacts. For them the book serves as the instrument of combat techniques or of social promotion. Thus the book may be read in order to acquire culture, not primarily to enjoy reading" (1971, 90). In this light, readers of banned literature were utilitarian readers, as

reading were integrated in the anti-apartheid discourse and did not primarily constitute a leisure or purely escapist activity.

Perhaps it is useful to remind ourselves of the formation of readerships in South Africa before examining in detail a specific and select sub-category of readers. Archie Dick (2007b), while discussing the history of libraries in South Africa, examined the formation of black readerships through the activities of religious, voluntary, cultural and political organisations in South Africa. It emerges that missions, self-help clubs, political organisations and other similar groupings contributed to heightening levels of literacy and developing reading amongst the black population from the 19th century, parallel to the literary and reading programme aimed at the white colonial population (2007b, 13). For instance, political organisations active in Cape Town's District Six such as the Lenin Club, New Era Fellowship and several Trotskyite groups ran "Sunday schools" for children and study groups for adults (Dick 2007b, 17). These study groups, as discussed later in this chapter, contributed to the formation of readerships around predetermined texts and ideologies. It could be suggested that the formation of readerships in South Africa often grew parallel to a political awakening, whereby "the number of libraries and readers grew in this curious mix of cultural and political contexts" (Dick 2007b, 18). As such, these readers could be understood as belonging to an active readership. The cultural origins of these politicised readership groupings, which turned out to play a role in alternative politics, echo Amilcar Cabral's comment that it is "generally within the culture that we find seeds of opposition, which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement" (1973, 56).

The idea of readership, readers' groups or community of readers can be understood in different lights. Drawing on Roger Chartier, this thesis understands a readers' group to comprise readers who share similar practices, usages and understanding of texts. For Chartier, communities of readers are individuals who share "the same reading styles and the same strategies of interpretation" (1989a, 158). One could complement this definition of readers with an examination of readers in their social environment, as "complex actors shaped by a complex set of institutions and social relations" (Newell et al. 2000, 9).

As pointed out in the literature review, readership could be understood as being a public, as it receives and process a message in the public domain. Michael Warner differentiates various kinds of publics, namely "a public", "the public", and "the public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation" (2002a, 50). Through these differentiations, he emphasises the importance of noting the multiplicity of publics, and the necessity of approaching them historically (2002b, 9). Warner's idea of a public created in relation to texts and their circulation underpins the examination of the South African reading public for alternative and banned publications. However, in this particular context, a problem arises since one has to conceptualise a *secret* public, an apparent contradiction in terms. Warner defines a public as showing "common visibility and common action" (2002a, 50). In regard to this visibility aspect, his concept of "counter public" (2002b) can be useful in the context of this research, as readers of banned texts were in fact a dissident public, moving the public sphere into a secret social space opened up by books, at once blurring the traditional understandings of the exposed and open nature of the "public". Drawing on Warner, the readership for banned literature could be understood as being created through the clandestine circulation of illegal texts via alternative channels, amongst progressive politicised readers who become, in Warner's words, "by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity" (2002b, 11-12).

In the South African context, several reading communities coexisted, including the one rallied behind censors, to which the readership for banned political publications was seemingly opposed. While the former read a political publication with a sense of genuine outrage, contempt or shock, the latter read it with a sense of excitement and satisfaction at being one of the privileged few to have gotten hold of a book that passed through the censors' net, and more so to be in possession of a book in touch with this ideology.

These considerations revolving around the formation of readerships are reminiscent of Brian Street's assertion that literacy is not strictly understood as "a set of technical skills learnt in formal education, but as social practices embedded in specific contexts, discourses and positions" (2007, 1). Literacy and readings are used in specific contexts

and situations, as Street notes, and the genres of literacy are construed by the dominant groups (2007, 4-5). These can range from a functional literacy strictly designed to fulfil minimal everyday requirements, to higher levels of literacy enabling a reader to use highly intellectual and complex texts on ideological and theoretical levels. Whatever the case might be, Street reminds us that literacy practices are always embedded in power relations:

> An ideological model of literacy begins from the premise that variable literacy practices are always rooted in power relations and that the apparent innocence and neutrality of the 'rules' serve to disguise the ways in which such power is maintained through literacy (2007, 5).

Street's ideological model goes beyond his previous autonomous model, "where literacy, regardless of context, was seen as producing particular universal characteristics and giving rise to particular good effects" (Prinsloo and Breier 1996, 16-17). By adopting an ideological approach to literacy, one can better understand the nuances and levels of literacy at play in various contexts, and in this case will help to shed light on the practices of reading amongst a politically aware pool of readers such as those discussed in this thesis. In this light, reading tastes and practices must be understood in relation to the context in which the reading act occurs, which is conditioned by several factors such as gender, religion, geographical location, class and political affiliations, etc. (Lyons and Taksa 1992, 8).

The group of readers surveyed for this research include individuals from various backgrounds, although they all had in common their involvement – at various degrees – in the resistance against apartheid. They also developed various forms of literacy, as the readers' sample ranges from writers and intellectuals to farm workers and trade union members. The fact that they read the same books and shared some common reading practices despite these differences shows how a broader community of interest, united around a common oppositional stance, took precedence over class affiliations within the resistance ranks.

The writers discussed in this thesis, in their capacity as readers, were involved in the cultural resistance against apartheid in general, and against censorship in particular, both at grassroots and leadership levels. The act of reading is often imbedded in the act of writing, and authors revolving around alternative publishing houses were often avid readers and more particularly, readers of alternative – and often banned – publications. Several autobiographies, literary and socio-political studies reveal how anti-apartheid writers read and used banned books to further inspire their own writings. While these writers' opinions diverged in terms of the impact of literature on politics and vice-versa, as the debates such as those included in Albie Sachs' *Spring is Rebellious* (1990) exemplify, a politicisation of reading was often echoed in a politicised writing style. Mandla Langa, for instance, remembers how he, Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, read Jean-Paul Sartre, Lewis Nkosi, and Alex La Guma and found inspiration in these authors for their own writings (Wilson 1991, 28-9). Black Consciousness philosopher Noel Chabani Manganyi, for his part, recalls how reading W.E.B. du Bois, Joel Rogers and Frantz Fanon had an impact on his 1977 work entitled *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society* (Heywood 2004, 210).

It is interesting to note that the censors' assumption that subversive readings would have adverse effects on progressive readers is not entirely false, at least in terms of the censors' ideology, as reading undesirable material proved to be a major driving-force and leverage for further oppositional publications and messages to be diffused in the alternative literary and political space. Not only did reading promote the development of literacy, but also led to the development of writers, as readers were at times encouraged to write books where a gap was identified in terms of reading material available in South Africa. Dick notes that this is what happened "when Peter Abrahams, who worked at the library in 1937, was motivated as a writer upon reading W.E.B. du Bois's *The Soul of Black Folks*" (2007b, 16).

South African teacher, poet and political activist Dennis Brutus remembers being an avid reader, who would read an eclectic selection of books, some of them banned, although he would not necessarily be aware of their illegal status at the time of reading (Personal

Interview. 25 May 2007). Brutus points out that some members of the Port Elizabeth branch of the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA) used to meet to discuss literature from a variety of genres, which inevitably included undesirable or banned books. As Brutus recalls, these meetings often led to broader political debates: "From these book circles I recall discussions on *On Liberty* by John Locke, *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler, *Jazz* by Rex Harris…" (Correspondence with author. 10 November 2007). Amongst these teachers were opinion-makers and individuals who would disseminate books outside of their immediate circles, who would often share these books amongst themselves and their students. Writer Chris Van Wyk recalls reading Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* after one of his teachers, who took note of his love of reading, lent him a copy of the book (Personal Interview. Johannesburg. 12 October 2007).

As several documentary accounts reveal, for instance librarian Christopher Merrett's *A Culture of Censorship* (1997), and the history of Taurus's beginnings as recounted in the previous chapters, some progressive academics also represented a portion of the readership for subversive or banned literature. These readers accessed banned political books whether for research purposes, as emphasised by political scientist André du Toit (1983), for instance, or by personal choice. Within the academic space, some politically active tertiary students also represented a portion of the readership for banned political publications. Associations such as the South African Student Organisation (SASO), amongst others, provided a space where political activism would develop, often from debates around banned and oppositional literature. As Lindy Wilson stresses, "everybody read books outside their university subjects. These provided the essence of the debates and the discussion that made the future have some kind of possibility" (1991, 28). The majority of readers interviewed for this research noted that they were introduced to oppositional politics through oppositional books circulating in the academic space, directly or via a close friend or relative. Student activists such as those involved in SASO borrowed extensively from literary sources and newspapers, inserting elements of political philosophy such as the African American Civil Rights movement and quotations from Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, James Cone, and Malcom X, for example, into their own speeches and essays (Wilson 1991, 29).

Mamphela Ramphele notes to this effect that Steve Biko, for instance, often quoted Césaire and Fanon in his speeches and in his writings (1995, 55). Biko was involved in the SASO newsletters, where he published a column, *I Write What I Like*, signed under the pseudonym Frank Talk to defy the ban served on him in 1973 (Stubbs 1979, 2). Wilson points out that SASO became a sub-culture of the university (1991, 28). Students' publications like the SASO newsletter played an important role in South African politics and literature, and as Merrett emphasises, "Student publications, in some senses the precursors of the alternative press which flourished from the 1980s, were an important target [of censors]" (1994, 83).

The example of the series of articles written by Biko allows taking stock of the usage of pseudonyms by banned writers. The use of pseudonyms enabled the creation of a persona that would grant access to otherwise banned writers in the dominant cultural discourse. By changing their names, these writers' works could enter and exist in the public domain and find their way to the mainstream culture, even if ever so briefly. For instance, a collection of poems by banned and exiled Brutus found its way into South African schools, as it was published under the pseudonym John Bruin (Brutus. Personal Interview. 16 May 2007). In this sense, pseudonyms could be considered as another means of combating censorship. Moreover, Brutus's example highlights the expectations at times created in the censors' minds, instilled by the mere identification or labelling of a writer as being subversive. Without knowing the identity of the writer of these more than acceptable and "literary" poems, the censors unwittingly overlooked the "dangerousness" of a man they had otherwise listed as a terrorist and communist, as no expectations inherent to the extra textual elements of the book influenced the way in which the publication was received and read. It is even more ironic that John Bruin's poems were prescribed in the school curriculum, which is a direct appendage of the censorship and thought control apparatus. Needless to say, Brutus recalls being extremely surprised when learning about this situation (Brutus. Personal Interview. 16 May 2007). Likewise, Biko's tongue-in-cheek use of Frank Talk as an alter ego is an example of defying a ban not through self-censorship as a writer, but by challenging the reading performed by censors through the alteration of extra textual elements that could influence the reception

of texts. Similarly, the choice of Des Troye as a pseudonym for the author of *An Act of Immorality* is to say the least provocative, and implicitly carries a political statement.

*Work In Progress* (*WIP*), founded in 1977 by some students at the University of the Witwatersrand is another example shedding light on a portion of the readership for banned literature in South Africa, which could be considered as comprising progressive academics operating in the university environment. The objective of *WIP* was to disseminate unavailable papers and ideas within the academic space and beyond, unavailable because of the ambient climate of intellectual repression. The result was a socio-political newsletter with a strong anti-apartheid ideology (Maré. Personal Interview. Durban. 24 May 2007). *WIP* was a small-scale production venture, as Gerhard Maré and Glenn Moss, founder/editors of the periodical, controlled all aspects of pre-production and post-production, from the selection and writing of articles to the distribution stages. *WIP* published articles on political and social current affairs, as well as a section on political court cases, strikes and disputes, exposing a reality the censors and more generally the apartheid regime tried to conceal. *WIP* was often scrutinised by censors, and the correspondence between the editors and the censorship board was often published or discussed in the publication's editorials. Through initiatives such as this one, information on banned political organisations, amongst other things, was diffused in the public domain. Its avowed aim was to "stimulate debate and present views on a wide range of issues" (*Work In Progress* 1989, 58).

Networks developed amongst students and lecturers in the academic space. Interviewee 1 recalls that whilst studying at the Traansval Technikon, "the senior students would come to us, first year [students], to ask us about our political orientation and from there informed us and provided us with banned literature such as W.E.B du Bois, Mao Tse-Tung, and Kwame Nkrumah" (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004). This relation of trust amongst readers with similar ideologies suggests a relatively close-knit and engaged readership. This tendency is also revealed in Dick's account of such a practice identified in one of the country's night schools schemes, primarily aimed at developing reading and literacy:

> Teachers also encouraged learners to use other libraries. Mxolisi Mgxashe, for example, a member of the Kensington night school and a Pan-African Congress activist, regularly used the reference section of the South African Library in Cape Town to read and photocopy passages from books on communism, Garveyism (after Marcus Garvey) and Pan-Africanism (2007b, 19).

Besides readers belonging to the academic, student and writer categories identified above, some politically aware readers marginalised by censors also got hold of some banned books, as secondary sources bear witness. Merrett cites farm workers circulating banned publications amongst themselves, and an incident where a coal delivery man in Heilbron read and passed a copy of Nelson Mandela's *The Struggle is my Life* to another reader, at a time where Mandela and therefore all his writings were banned (Merrett 1994, 96). Family members and friends of agents involved in the alternative literary industry also became readers of banned literature, through their interactions with writers or publishers involved in the alternative literary networks (Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

The identification of readers from various backgrounds constitutes another example of the non-exclusive nature of the readership of banned political publications, as readers with seemingly different levels of literacy and class affiliations read these books. This heteroclite grouping of individuals was united around a common anti-apartheid stance, albeit it implied that they were involved at various degrees in the resistance. Moreover, it was not a systematically identifiable readership, as readers were dispersed through time and geographical locations, although urban areas were more favourable for this kind of readership to grow, in part because of the increased accessibility and availability of books in urban settings. The recognition of these readers shows that the readership for banned literature might have developed alongside a literacy practice aimed for political gains and emancipation, which was different from "formal schooled literacy practices" (Street 2007, 6).

In a nutshell, the readers interviewed for this study mainly included students, while secondary sources contributed to identifying writers and academics as another pool of

readers for banned literature. They all have in common the fact of being politically aware individuals, who positioned themselves in the oppositional corner of politics. The ways in which these readers, while sharing similar interests, experienced and made use of their readings will be examined in the following sections.

**Genres of Books Discussed in this Chapter**

The books read by alternative readers constituted an eclectic mix of various genres of literatures including: autobiographies, novels, short stories, poetry, socio-historical studies, political theory, philosophy, and current affairs articles, amongst others. Admittedly, not all books belonging to one of these categories were banned, although a lot were scrutinised by censors, as per Section 5 (2) of the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 25 of 1963, Section 47 (2) of the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974 and later amendments which pertained to the political nature of publications, as well as those banned indirectly as per the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950 and later amendments.

According to the Jacobsen's Index of Objectionable Literature (1974), the number of items banned over time totalled 14,499. Beside books and publications in the strict sense of the term, bans could be extended to any form of text printed on pens, posters, puzzles, greeting cards, stamps or in the form of lyrics in music, and objects such as novelties, T-shirts, calendars, etc. Section 1 (iv) (xi) and (xii) of the Suppression of Communism Act defines what is understood by the terms "publications and documents". It includes books, pamphlets, records, lists, placards, posters, drawings, photographs, pictures, periodical publications, magazines and hand-bills. The Act if 1963 defined "publications or objects" along similar lines in Section (1) (viii), with the addition of newspapers, printed matter, typescript, illustrations, paintings, and lithographs, amongst others. Through this ensemble of assorted material the various levels of literacy and uses readers made of the printed words were seemingly taken into account if not assumed.

The eclectic list of banned material is striking in its diversity and unusual amalgamation, and it is interesting to note that such a curious configuration was at times created by readers themselves through the genres of books in their possession. South African writer and intellectual Njabulo Ndebele's first encounter with banned books testifies to a feeling of amazement and puzzlement at being in possession of such a variety of literature having in common the fact of being banned:

> One day, alone at home and bored during school holidays in the mid-1960s, I began to explore my home. There was that wooden crate at the front right corner of the garage against which the silver bumper of my father's Ford Zephyr 6 sometimes rested. The crate had been there for many years. […] On top of it was a heavy layer of unused floor tiles; old copies of Huisguenoot, Zonk, and Drum magazines […]. Once I had removed everything from the top of the box, I opened it. Inside, were many books on music, art, and poetry, and others that I thought my father must have used for his degree studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. But as I got closer to the bottom of the box, my heart leaped with disbelief! Here was Down Second Avenue by Ezekiel Mphahlele; and Road to Ghana by Alfred Hutchinson; and Blame me on History by Bloke Modisane; and Naught for your Comfort by Trevor Huddleston; and Tell Freedom by Peters Abrahams; and Splendid Sunday by James Ambrose Brown; and Transvaal Episode by Harry Bloom; Chocolates for my Wife, by Todd Matshikiza; South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright by Mary Benson; The Ochre People by Noni Javabu; of Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah; Let my People Go by Albert Luthuli; Go Well, Stay Well, by Hannah Stanton, copies of Africa South magazine, and other lesser known books that I do not remember now. Banned books! (2007, 9).

The titles contained in Ndebele's box makes one ponder, as popular literature such as the *Drum* magazine stood side by side with classics of African literature, autobiographies and political philosophy by prominent African intellectuals and public figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Albert Luthuli and Ezekiel Mphahlele, amongst others. In all likelihood, a reader such as Ndebele's father did not fall within one of the readers' either/or categorisation created by censors, where readers were partitioned as being either popular or serious, educated or uneducated, etc. The heteroclite configuration of books such as the one observed in Ndebele's box transcends the classic popular versus serious literature divide, and challenges the belief that educated and popular readers only read serious and mass literature respectively. The choice of reading material went beyond class affiliations

and was unpredictable, in part due to circumstances whereby books were not easily accessible and were circulated randomly, as discussed in the section on distribution below. As Ndebele's discovery of the box full of banned books reveals, some readers literally stumbled upon banned books, at times accidentally.

Books addressing issues of social resistance, socialism and advocating emancipation were inevitably likely to be banned, especially if written by a black writer or imported from a communist country. Some readers seemingly were in search of such books. Often, these titles happened to be the ones relevant to progressive readers in South Africa, as pointed out by Dennis Brutus, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 9. Interviewee 1 listed amongst the books he read while they were banned: *I Write What I Like* by Steve Biko, *Sowing the Seeds of Revolution* by Samora Machel, and books from Mao Tse-tung, W.E.B du Bois, and Kwame Nkrumah (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004). Brutus also remembers reading Malcom X, Marcus Garvey, Fidel Castro, W.E.B du Bois, and Antonio Gramsci, as well as several titles from the African Writers Series (Personal Interview. May 25 2007). He also cites Govan Mbeki's *South Africa: the Peasant's Revolt*, which was sent to him by a friend abroad (Personal Interview. 10 October 2007). Interviewee 4 reveals that this kind of political literature was very popular in the Eastern Cape, where it facilitated political discussions (Personal Interview. 22 August 2004). Librarian Christopher Merrett reiterates this by pointing out that:

> Some banned titles that were regularly asked for by readers include Govan Mbeki's Peasant's Revolt. […] Books about South African history, about political history that were written by obvious ANC and PAC writers were much in demand. And some South African novelists like Alex la Guma (Personal Interview. 23 October 2007).

Many autobiographies from South African anti-apartheid leaders and writers were also subjected to the censorship laws or Suppression of Communism Act, but some were nonetheless read by South African readers. Chris Van Wyk recalls Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* as one of the first books to inspire him literarily, and Mtutuzeli Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* as one of those banned books that were widely circulated amongst readers (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Other biographies circulating

despite being banned include Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History*, and Luthuli's *Let My People Go*, as noted above.

As books in general and banned books in particular were not readily available in many areas during the censorship years, eager readers often had to be creative and open-minded about what they read. Chris Van Wyk remembers that due to the unavailability of books, avid readers would sometimes read everything they could lay their hands on, a fact that also points towards an interesting combination of books of various natures (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Imported popular fiction was sometimes read alongside political publications, even by readers who could be thought of as being highly literate intellectuals, falling into the censors' sophisticated readers' category. For instance, Dennis Brutus recalls reading popular literature such as American best-sellers Mario Puzzo's *The Godfather* series, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Whilst trivial at first sight, popular literature – banned and not banned – could create a space for discussions and reflections, as is the case with *Gone with the Wind*, which led to discussions on slavery and oppression (Dennis Brutus. Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

Seemingly trivial items were at times banned, for example, the ban of a Diwali, Eid-Ul-Adha and Christmas greeting cards sent by Yusuf Dadoo in the 1979. The card in question was submitted by a Police Lieutenant to the censorship board. The motivation for this ban was, according to the censors' report, that the card was "compiled by a communist in exile", contained "inflammatory remarks calculated to promote a sense of grievance and action" and "advocates ANC leadership" (IDP3/62 1979). Some of the printed evidence used during the Treason Trial of 1963-1964 is also telling of how an unusual configuration of publications was at times interpreted to suit the expectations of the authorities, in this case labelling the owners of such material as communists and extremely dangerous individuals. ANC leader Nelson Mandela, referring to the range of printed material found in Rivonia's raided farm and used as examples in the trial recalls that:

> One by one, every paper, pamphlet, document, book, notebook, letter, magazine and clipping that the police accumulated in the last three years

> of searches was produced and numbered: 12,000 in all. The submissions ranged from the United Nation Declaration of Human Rights to a Russian cookery book (1995, 244).

In the eyes of the authorities, such documents as those produced during the Treason Trial were undesirable as per the Suppression of Communism Act, as they indicated an affiliation to communism. It was assumed that what one read was an absolute indicator of who one was, and vice-versa. The readers of these documents were communists, and these documents served as proofs of a communistic inclination in readers.

By 1984, the *Government Gazette* officially listed some 20,000 items of various natures and genres as banned (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 165). The Publications Act of 1974 enabled the creation of a security committee, who worked alongside the censors' literary committee. A great number of books were from there on scrutinised by security readers who determined whether the submitted items represented a security threat. In 1975, 25.1% of publications submitted to the censorship board fell in the "state security" and "communist" category, a figure that reached 53.5% in 1978. Out of these, 24.5% were found undesirable in 1975, against 44% in 1979 (du Toit 1983, 88). André du Toit explains this increase in the number of political publications that were found "undesirable" by pointing out that "it corresponds with the increasing role played by the police and security police in submitting material to publications committees, now amounting to almost half of the total" (1983, 92). It must also be kept in mind that these figures do not include books by writers who were banned as per the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act.

In short, all banned books were not necessarily read in the alternative circuit, and conversely not all books read in the alternative circuit were banned. The books that were read – whether banned or not – often led to discussions and debates, and introduced new ideas, often illegal, that would transcend the immediate action of reading to enter a broader socio-political sphere of action within the alternative space, as will be discussed below. Educated readers could read popular literature, whilst uneducated readers could

grasp the ideas promoted in so-called serious literature, blurring the equations often proposed by censors.

**Sourcing, Storage and Dissemination of Banned Books**

As is apparent from the previous chapters, official post-publication censorship in South Africa ensured that books published in South Africa were most likely disseminated before the censors pounced. A book could remain on someone's bookshelf for some time before it was declared illegal. As far as imported books go, some were blocked at customs whilst others found their way to South Africa before they were identified by the authorities. In the case of bans on individuals as per the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act, all previous literature, essays, speeches and other communications produced by this person were rendered illegal and therefore automatically banned.

Books that were banned could either be banned for distribution, or worse, banned for possession at any given time after publication. Publications deemed undesirable were those whose production and distribution were illegal, whilst the radically or extremely undesirable publications were those whose possession was in itself illegal. While librarians and booksellers generally knew whether the books on their shelves were banned or not, the complex nature of the censorship system made it quite challenging for readers to be up-to-date in terms of the status of books on their private shelves.

The *Government Gazette* published in Cape Town was the official government newsletter. It listed items found undesirable in South Africa on a weekly basis, and included both imported and local publications. Librarians consulted these gazettes in order to remove banned books from their library's shelves before storing them in the banned book room (Jewel Koopman. Correspondence with author. 22 May 2007). The *Jacobsen's Index of Objectionable Literature* was in some ways an informal privately edited version of the *Government Gazette*'s listings. The *Jacobsen Index*, compiled by Jacobsen Publishing, was an updated guide throughout the ever-changing directory of publications prohibited from importation, and was available for consultation from

bookstores and libraries across South Africa (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 165). The list was updated weekly with loose pages adding the newly found undesirable publications to the previous list. It concentrated mainly on written texts, although this list also enumerated various objects ranging from novelties and calendars to political tracts. Ironically, some progressive readers performed an unauthorised reading of these listings and used them as sources of information on potential reading material to be on the lookout for. Lindy Wilson, for instance, notes that the gazette became a marketing tool, and was one of "the main source of information about relevant books […] that became required reading" (1991, 29).

A few independent bookshops were known within the alternative circuit for selling illegal publications "under the counter" to a limited trusted pool of readers. At least two were identified in Johannesburg by interviewees surveyed for this thesis, namely van Schaik (Chris Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2008) and de Jong (Gerhard Maré. Personal Interview. 24 May 2007). Brutus also recalls a bookshop selling banned literature in Port Elizabeth (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007), and Merrett identifies one located in Cape Town (Personal Interview. 23 October 2007). Cape Town's Open Books is also noted as an independent bookseller that would keep some banned titles (Cloete 2000, 50). Lutheran bookshops are also remembered as a source of banned books (Merrett 1994, 96), as recalled by Barney Pityana, who, besides the Lutheran bookshop, also accessed some banned literature from the United States through the cooperation of the United States Consulate (Wilson 1991, 29).

However, given the severity of the system and the risks associated with distributing banned books, these outlets opened this privileged access only to trusted customers. Chris Van Wyk reveals his own personal experience of such bookshops:

> Fhazel [Johennesse] and I used to go in there [van Schaik bookshop in Johannesburg] and browse around, and sometimes we'd ask him if he had banned books. Now obviously he would not tell anybody 'Yes I've got banned books', I could have been a policeman. But as soon as he started to trust us, he'd say: 'I've got something; it's under the counter or in the other room, come and look'. And we'd go and he'd give us what we

wanted (Personal Interview. 13 October 2007).

Alternative marketing strategies necessarily had to be adopted in the case of books likely to be banned, as attracting potential readers' attention could well mean attracting the censors' scrutiny. As mentioned in the previous chapter, an underground mailing distribution scheme was sometimes used by alternative publishers to disseminate books directly to readers while circumventing publication control.

Some bookshops which were not thought of as being independent or alternative sometimes had some banned books on their shelves, either because they were not yet removed or were thought of as being in a safe place, as it was assumed that higher prices and a more conservative clientele meant that "subversive readers" would be kept away from these potentially "dangerous books". However, as Mandla Langa recalls:

> We started sharing libraries, sharing books and also going to all these bookshops which had all these expensive books which we needed and, you know, finding a way to appropriate them. We started really widening our vistas and our minds by reading books which the regime never possibly thought we'd lay our hands on, anything from the African Writers Series to, well, we read Marcuse, we read the existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre. There was Mphahlele and maybe some hidden copies by Alex La Guma, Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane. We read all that (Wilson 1991, 29).

This comment from Langa highlights the resourcefulness with which readers found ways of "appropriating" their reading material, creating collections of banned books from multiple sources.

Interestingly, some informal book traders operated in black townships in Johannesburg, reaching readers where formal bookshops were not established (Chris Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). As Chris Van Wyk recalls, these vendors would stock pamphlets, literary magazines and books from Ravan's offices. Because publications were sourced directly from the publisher, in this case Ravan, the publications that were sold were not necessarily banned yet as censorship operated post-publication; however, some of the titles sold were at high risk of being banned if they ended up under the

censors' scrutiny, as were most books published by oppositional publishers. Chris Van Wyk recalls how community writers worked closely with the publishing house, as they contributed to *Staffrider* and Ravan's books not only by writing but also by making copies of these publications available to readers in areas such as Soweto, where books were not readily available:

> So these writer's groups would come and submit their poems and short stories, and then we'd phone them, when Staffrider came from the printers. And they take copies, hundred copies here, twenty copies there, sixty copies there, and take them to their various writers' groups, and that's how it got disseminated around the country. I remember when I was working at Staffrider, there were vendors, they were actually like hawkers who came to buy books and Staffrider magazines in our office, and they went and stood on the pavement, put them on a blanket on the pavement or in cardboard boxes in the pavement, and sold these books from there. Some would sell them in the train, walking up and down in the train selling them (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

As Van Wyk notes, these book traders took great pride and honour in being part of the activities of this literary sub-culture, sometimes at risk of being raided and arrested by the security police, and running in financial arrears with Ravan for not being able to pay for the stock taken.

Given this active search of books from the part of some readers as those described by Langa, it comes as no surprise that some readers found ways of getting hold of books from libraries' banned books rooms, even without official authorisation. Although relatively highly controlled, through registers and other administrative procedures as previously discussed, books kept in restricted areas in academic libraries sometimes disappeared, resulting in a phenomenon that could be labelled as "political book theft" (Merrett. Personal Interview. 23 October 2007). Locked areas in libraries are cited as a source of banned literature by a couple of readers interviewed (Interviewee 1. Personal Interview. 10 November 2004; Interviewee 15. Personal Interview. 10 May 2007). Conversely, some banned books sometimes "miraculously" reappeared on libraries' tables, perhaps anonymously abandoned by anxious readers (Merrett. Personal Interview. 23 October 2007).

In a few instances, some brave librarians made copies of banned books available. Commenting during a discussion at the Cape Town Book Fair in June 2006, an erstwhile Cape Town librarian, Vincent Kolbe, described how he would casually leave books in a kit bag and those in the know would then equally casually pick them up (Kolbe 2006). These are just a few examples, suggesting that a number of other bookshops and sources of diffusion probably followed this trend, while also indicating that at least some booksellers had the courage to defy the censorship scheme in order to provide progressive literature to avid readers.

A relation of trust and connivance grew between the various poles of the alternative literary circuit, as writers, readers, publishers and book traders worked in close collaboration to get these books read and shared by the largest number possible, even if at times they never physically met. As a writer and editor at *Staffrider*, Chris Van Wyk had privileged access to some books that were published and subsequently banned. He recalls how these books often ended up being shared with other readers, giving a new life to otherwise doomed books:

> I also happened to work at a publishing house at that time, and some literature was banned from time to time, and I'd bring these books home and I kept them for myself. And also you borrowed books from someone, somebody would give you a book saying this is banned, read it and bring it back or pass it on (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

Apart from these more or less traditional points of distribution of books, personal connections and relations between readers in South Africa and readers abroad played a role in providing the South African readership with banned literature. Some interviewees recall that some banned foreign books were received by mail, if not intercepted at customs (Interviewee 8. Personal Interview. 10 January 2005; Interviewee 5. Personal Interview. 8 September 2004), while Chris Van Wyk recalls exiled ANC members who regularly sent literature to South Africa (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Belinda Bozzoli also notes that an illicit flow of banned ideas and material came from exiled ANC members, and from European and American anti-apartheid movements (2004, 330).

Sometimes, literature was brought into the country by travellers, as the court case against political activist Ahmed Essop Timol illustrates. He was arrested for having brought an ANC pamphlet in the country as well as a draft copy of *Inkululeko* (Merrett 1994, 49). Trips to and from Swaziland are also recalled as facilitating the importation – or more precisely, smuggling – of banned books into South Africa, as some publications banned in South Africa could be found in some Swazi bookshops (Jewel Koopman. Correspondence with author. 22 May 2007). Gerhard Maré also recalls some Dutch anti-apartheid pamphlets that found their way to South Africa through the Durban harbour (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007), a fact also recalled by another Durban reader (Interviewee 3. Personal Interview. 10 September 2004). However, passing banned books across the border could be extremely perilous, as the case of Tsoeu Mokhele who received a five-year sentence in 1981 for having brought literature into South Africa through the Lesotho border demonstrates (Merrett 1994, 96).

Authorities were on the lookout, and Merrett points out that when returning from a trip abroad, one of the standard questions from the South African customs officials was if one was in possession of banned literature (Personal Interview. 23 October 2007). Authorities were in all likelihood aware of the practice of illegally bringing banned publications into the country, and besides the control of air or road travellers through questioning and searches, spot checks were eventually ordered on imported cargos in a bid to uncover banned literature (Merrett 1994, 81). It must be pointed out that customs officials played an important role in seizing undesirable publications even before censorship was officially institutionalised. Already in 1963, the year the first official censorship legislation was enacted, 9,000 publications were already prohibited (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 159). Tellingly, in 1979, of the 2,138 publications submitted to the Publications Directorate for scrutiny, 822 – or just below 40% – were submitted by customs officials (Hachten & Giffard 1984, 164).

Regardless of the way in which banned books got to be in possession of readers, the few copies of banned publications surviving in the country were from there on exchanged between readers and kept in various unconventional manners. In a context of severe

censorship restrictions, prohibited books had to be dealt with in an extremely cautious manner, as it is made apparent from the writing, publishing and sourcing phases of a book's path.

In private households, books were not stored in a usual fashion, as they could attract undesired attention from visitors if displayed in conventional bookshelves and communal rooms. Chris Van Wyk points out that "[we] never used to store [banned] books but hide them away" (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Interviewee 1, however, reveals that he used to mix banned books amongst church books and other authorised literature, as they would then be unlikely to be singled out (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004). Banned books were also hidden in yards and ceilings, at times even burned once read, as recalls Hilda Bernstein (Merrett 2004, 75). Interviewee 1 corroborates this by disclosing that he sometimes used to hide his books in a box in the dog's kennel (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004).

As Interviewee 12 recalls, illegal books were generally treated with secrecy, in a general climate of confidentiality (Personal Interview. 7 October 2007). Chris Van Wyk recounts how his personal library was always ready to undergo inspection from even the most unlikely visitors: "when I started to buy banned literature myself, I kept it in secret places away from other books so that people could not see – because you never knew who would come to your house" (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). It must be noted that during apartheid police raids in private households were likely, especially in the case of known political activists. At times, when such a raid was anticipated, books were conveniently stored at a kind neighbour's home, who was willing to take the risk of keeping illegal literature even if temporarily (Chris Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

On a slightly bigger scale, entire collections of books were sometimes hidden away in order to preserve archive material. Jewel Koopman, from the Alan Paton Centre in Pietermaritzburg, points out that the bulk of the South African Liberal Party's written

documentation was thus hidden upon the banning of the organisation, which allowed it to survive to this day:

> When the Liberal Party was forced to disband in 1968, the Liberal Party archives were hidden away by the members, as otherwise they would have been confiscated by the Security Branch, who wanted information, especially the membership list. The archives were hidden away in suitcases, boxes, trunks in people's attics, basements and garages until 1989, when the Alan Paton Centre opened. It was then thought to be safe to remove them from their hiding places and bring them to the Alan Paton Centre, where they were re-assembled as an archival collection. Some of the papers were stored here on the campus of the then University of Natal, in trunks, in the basement of the Old Main Building. Only a few people knew they were there (Correspondence with author. 22 May 2007).

The climate of secrecy and the high risk involved with carrying out such initiatives speak of the importance, at least in the eye of some concerned readers, of preserving memory through the preservation of printed material at a time when some librarians, who should be the custodians of books and information, conspicuously destroyed entire collections of banned publications.

Some organisations and individual readers, as those discussed above, sourced and stored banned publications in such a way that they evaded the authorities' undesirable publications decimation campaign. However, as is revealed through several accounts, these books were not only stored and kept idle in the hope of being read once censorship would be abolished, but were actively exchanged and passed from one reader to the other.

The hand to hand network of distribution amongst readers was in itself a mode of sourcing banned texts for readers who otherwise had no direct contact with alternative publishers or access to independent bookshops and banned sections of libraries. Banned publications were regularly shared amongst readers, either for wanting to have them read by the greatest number of readers possible, underlying the need of spreading an important message, or for fear of keeping them in one's possession for too long as they were illegal. This created a situation where books transited from one reader to the other on a fairly

regular basis and at a swift pace. This way of exchanging books frequently, from hand to hand, implies a fragmented mode of reading, where a book could be passed on to the next reader before it was finished, only to be encountered again when a copy of the book was passed back to them (Interviewee 2. Personal Interview. 20 October 2004). Chris Van Wyk recalls how readers casually swapped books amongst themselves, opening the door to a wider readership to forge itself in its path:

> We always passed books on to each other. […] Often people gave me books, sometimes banned books, and [they would] say, read it and pass it on. […] So it was happening. I remember some friends of mine from Soweto passed books to me and took things off my shelves (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

This kind of circulation reveals a situation where a book's ownership was sometimes lost along the way and shared amongst readers, leaving in its midst a trail of readers sharing similar values and reading strategies who cyclically took ownership of a book. As book historian Adrian Johns emphasises, the expected readership of a particular book might be restricted due to factors such as cost and availability, but the wider distribution of the few copies in circulation may well extend the readership beyond initial expectations (2002, 59). This is well illustrated in South Africa's alternative literary scene, where one copy of a book could reach many successive readers through exchange, lending, and borrowing.

A copy of a book could also be shared amongst several readers simultaneously, through the practice of photocopying and disseminating a single copy. All interviewees unanimously recall photocopying some excerpts or entire texts from a banned publication. Amongst others, Brutus recalls that sometimes photocopying happened for very practical reasons such as monetary constraints, and that it was also dictated by the ambient repressive intellectual climate inflicted by censorship:

> Because we did not have […] the money to buy books, or even physical access to books. So we had to source clandestinely. We copied in bulk, for an organisation's discussion or an activity, a teachers' organisation for instance, […] and we would then distribute (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

For politically aware readers interacting in the alternative space, the materiality of books as commodities invested with a certain value was seemingly not a preoccupation as important as getting to read the texts and spread the messages. For instance, Interviewee 2 reveals having seen the original copy of Biko's *I Write What I Like* only in the 1990s, even though he had read all the chapters during the 1980s, in the heights of political censorship and repression (Personal Interview. 20 October 2004). Interviewee 1 reiterates this by pointing out that most of the banned books he read were in fact not books but photocopies (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004), a detail shared by several other interviewed readers (Interviewee 10. Telephone Interview. 12 November 2004).

Photocopying did not only change the physical aspect of texts, but it also initiated a different set of relations between readers and texts. Readers took ownership of the book through this unauthorised duplication, creating their own personal copy for their personal use. These photocopies were also distributed amongst readers and even photocopied further, as Brutus, Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and Interviewee 10's experiences reveal. Through photocopies, more copies of a book otherwise considered scarce would widen the dissemination circuit. As Johns observes in relation to the reception of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* by the Indian and Pakistani governments, who both banned the book, piracy is often considered as a means of survival in a political environment prone to banning, as a way to "circumvent" censors (2002, 61). This could be said in the context of South African censorship, as banned books and texts were photocopied as a way to circumvent censorship, and as a way to curb the unavailability of books due to the strict publication control measures in force.

SASO activist Papi Mokoena recalls how books were thus disseminated even in the most unexpected places, through a series of everyday exchanges taking place in the informal literary space. Mokoena speaks of a "mobile library" in the Orange Free State (now Free State) through which books would constantly circulate amongst a network of readers: "we even had a mobile library – books which moved from hand to hand amongst selected people" (quoted in Merrett 1994, 96). This concept of mobility implies an elusive circle of readers connected through ideology and interests rather than physical space, where

each reader has the power to choose the next reader of a given book or text, creating a readership where working class readers and so-called marginal readers read similar texts to the elite readers. Dennis Brutus recalls how books were shared randomly and not in a premeditated fashion:

> There could be a single copy brought into the country by someone and then circulated by hand, but even then you were not targeting who you are going to circulate to – you would circulate it to whoever was nearby, your friends or colleagues (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

Chris Van Wyk similarly speaks of how books would be distributed from house to house in Riverlea, a township in Johannesburg, in a climate of complicity, camaraderie and trust (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

**"Marketing" of Banned Books amongst Readers in the Alternative Circuit**

While some readers, such as those discussed above, were seemingly on the lookout for banned books or "selected" as receptors of copies of banned literature by fellow readers, others came across banned literature through mere chance. Dennis Brutus comments on how he first got hold of Alex La Guma's novels in the early days of the apartheid regime by chance and through word of mouth:

> So here I am in a law class at Wits, someone passes the book to me, and I'm quite surprised at that time I don't know the existence of Alex La Guma and of Mbari Press. There was really a climate of isolation and ignorance, of course deliberately created by the government to control importation of books. They were not on display anywhere. […] It was by accident, or opportunity, that I got the La Guma books, discovering there is an author called Alex La Guma, and that he's published outside of the country (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

Njabulo Ndebele also experienced banned books through coincidence, as the incident where he found banned books hidden in boxes in his father's garage suggests. Seemingly, a fair number of readers came into contact with banned books unwittingly. However, the mere fact of a book or its author being banned at times created a sense of urgency in the act of reading, whether the book was procured accidentally or on purpose.

Ndebele recalls the thrill and the feeling of privilege felt when reading banned books from his newly found box:

> [I] began to read Down Second Avenue. Two days later, I read Blame me on History. I still remember clearly the thrill of reading these two books and beginning to discuss them with myself. How different they were from each other, conveying different aspects of the same overriding political and social reality! […] I had heard about these books and knew it was dangerous to possess them, but despite that I felt privileged that they were right there in my home and that I was going to read them in secret (2007, 9-10).

As French book historian Roger Chartier emphasises, the classification and designation bestowed on texts often creates expectations and anticipations of meaning in readers (1989a, 167). South African writer Christopher Hope notes that the sense of expectation worked in both directions between the censors' categorisation and the readers' appreciation of a given book: "We knew that anything that looked even remotely interesting, or lively, or original was likely to be either unobtainable, illegal, or would shortly be banned" (Merrett 1994, 64). As van Wyk emphasises, at times the censors accidentally marketed some banned books through the act of banning: "There were books for which there were expectations; people often said that if the government had not banned some books, we would have never read them, it would never have sold a hundred thousand copies" (Personal Interview. Johannesburg. 12 October 2007). J.M. Coeztee reiterates this when noting that "the book that is suppressed gets more attention as a ghost than it would have had alive; the writer who is gagged today is famous tomorrow for having been gagged" (1996, 43).

Some books were endorsed by a political or intellectual opinion-maker, who would recommend and praise the said book, thus encouraging other readers to read the book. This informal publicity expanded the existing readership beyond initial expectations. The implicit authority of an opinion-maker was sometimes decisive in constructing the reputation of a specific book. Interviewee 1 recalls how reading choices were often influenced by other readers, as banned books were discussed and shared (Personal Interview. November 2004). Interviewee 2 recalls that "the most informed amongst us

would suggest some books raising issues related to the struggle, so if one of us happened to come across the recommended book we would get hold of it and pass it amongst ourselves" (Personal Interview. 20 October 2004). Others, like BC activist Steve Biko, played an opinion-maker's role by virtue of their natural leadership abilities through their public speeches and essays. Biko's charisma was renowned beyond academic circles and university precincts, and some Black Consciousness literature rapidly reached a wider and more "popular" audience, either in its written or oral forms.

Belinda Bozzoli observes that some readers who were in a better position to provide banned reading material to a wider readership played a role in the dissemination of banned books:

> While the grassroots comrades straddled the legal and illegal worlds and had some access to ideas from outside generated by their own resourcefulness, they largely depended for access to illegitimate ideas upon a stratum of more highly educated readers formed during the 1980s, who had better access to resources (2004, 335).

It could be suggested that these readers in position of power played an important role in deciding which "illegal" ideas and books would be accessed by the grassroots readership, and as such performed functions not so dissimilar to those performed by censors, albeit they obviously differed in terms of ideology.

Word of mouth undoubtedly played a role in the dissemination of books, and oral dissemination also played a central role in the propagation of a book's message. In this sense it could be suggested that some publications were disseminated orally, as once read they were discussed and debated, entering oral networks and thus given a new life form. From the written form, books' messages entered the oral circuit to join a greater and more inclusive pool of readers of various literacy levels. By bringing a book's message forward, readers not only extended the scope of dissemination, but also extended its readership by creating an audience that would coexist side by side with the readers who read the books per se, once again blurring the traditional oral versus written, elite versus common readers, literate versus semi-literate dichotomies. The combination of oral and

written cultures constituted an alternative way of reading, namely "oral reading" (Lyons & Taksa 1992, 35). These social networks ensured the diffusion of a printed message in various forms and to an otherwise marginalised readership. As Lyons and Taksa point out, "book historians should not […] measure a book's popularity solely by its circulation figures. Oral testimony may suggest the true extent of distribution and open a way into the 'unknown public'" (1992, 190).

The example of *Work in Progress* illustrates this aspect of circulation and dissemination of banned texts in South Africa. Some essays and articles discussing the latest global and local theories and intellectual trends were thus made available in South Africa. *WIP* often ran into trouble with the censorship board, as is recalled by co-founder and editor Glenn Moss in a special edition marking by the tenth anniversary of the magazine:

> It did not take long to come to the attention of the state's censorship machinery. When issue number 5 was banned under the Publications Act, this began a series of bannings that continued almost unabated for the next 20 editions and four years. This culminated in 1982, when a censorship committee prohibited all future editions of Work in Progress (Moss 1987, 45).

*WIP* was initially distributed to a limited list of readers in the Transvaal in an artisan-like fashion, although as Maré explains, the readership soon expanded nationally via an informal and at times underground network of distributors (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007). Readers personally contributed to the further circulation of the publication, and ensured it reached other readers and that information still circulated.

In a nutshell, banned books were sourced from a variety of places, either accidentally or through some readers who were actively looking for them. From these sources, banned books were distributed amongst readers. Close-knit relations were developed in the books' path. Due to limited accessibility and availability of the few existing copies, banned books were sometimes distributed as photocopies, as the physicality of the book was not as important as the message it conveyed. In light of this, it could be suggested that banned books reached a relatively greater pool of readers through the activeness of some readers, who took risks in accessing, reading and distributing them.

**Reading Modalities in the Alternative Circuit**

Readers of banned books were generally, as seen above, passively or actively involved in the alternative literary scene, where they engaged with political literature. Through the peculiar ways in which books were recommended and passed on from one reader to the other in the alternative circuit, amongst other things, these readers formed a network. These texts were either read independently or collectively. However, as will be discussed in this section, silent or independent reading often led to collective reading and vice-versa, as both reading modalities do not necessarily exclude one another and can be simultaneously or consecutively performed by readers.

Individual reading creates the space for an intimate relation between readers and texts, and can occur in various places at different times, as reading is incorporated into everyday life activities. For Robert Escarpit, silent reading is defined as being both social and asocial:

> It temporarily suppresses the individual's relations with his universe to construct new ones with the universe of the work. Consequently, the motivation to read is almost always dissatisfaction, a lack of harmony between the reader and his milieu (1971, 91).

In apartheid South Africa, readers of political literature susceptible to being banned or banned generally felt "dissatisfaction" and "lack of harmony" with the ambient socio-political milieu, which motivated their participation in the alternative political or literary scene. The act of reading banned or oppositional literature served to create a new space, or milieu, where readers could interact. Through their individual choice of reading material, social usages and interpretations of what they read, readers collectively affirmed their political opposition to the dominant order.

When reading a text, the reader enters into a direct and intimate relation with the discourse it articulates, and in this light "reading is felt to be directly connected to the sovereign power of public opinion" (Warner 2002a, 83). In the case of reading banned material under censorship, the ideological aspect of reading is understood in relation to

the mainstream public opinion, which is challenged by the alternative discourse. Interviewee 1 recalls reading *I Write What I Like* after a friend returned from overseas with a copy, religiously reading each chapter before photocopying it, and linking his reading to other readings and to the ambient situation in the township and in the country in general (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004). Readings seemingly consolidated political ideology, whilst providing a framework against which everyday events could be understood and analysed.

Reading can also be seen as an act of consumption. As Michel de Certeau notes, "Reading is only one aspect of consumption, but a fundamental one" (1984, 168). However, in the context of banned reading material circulating in South Africa, this cannot be conceptualised as commercial consumption, as books were exchanged in a way that circumvented the actual commerciality of books, as pirated photocopies or in oral forms, for instance. As such, reading banned literature could be perceived as bearing political and social significance and in this sense literary consumption is, in the words of Hugh Mackay, "the articulation of a sense of identity" (1997, 4), devoid of commercial objectives.

Silent reading occurred in private households, libraries and other public spaces. In the case of libraries, subversive books could be read concealed amongst study material, going unnoticed. Interviewee 1 recounts how he would go to the library, choosing a seat not too close to the librarian's counter, where he would "pretend to study textbooks but in fact I was reading banned books" (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004), a memory also shared by Interviewee 13 (Personal Interview. 10 September 2004). In private households, reading a banned book could also end up being a secret experience. Banned books could for instance be read when everybody in the household was asleep, then hidden away and picked up again when an opportune moment presented itself. Chris Van Wyk recalls the sense of adventure and mischief felt when reading a book by a banned author:

> I used to read it [Down Second Avenue] in my room and hide it under the mattress or in a cupboard somewhere away from other books, even though

> I was not somebody that police would focus their energies on then (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

Individual reading could also occur in public settings, such as buses, train stations, or parks. When reading a banned book in public, readers would sometimes deliberately alter the book's physical aspect to render it unidentifiable to passer-bys, covering it with brown paper in an attempt at dissimulating the cover, or reading from photocopies (Gerhard Maré. Personal Interview. 24 May 2007).

Readers active on the alternative circuit would often meet to discuss their readings and in the process learn of new ideas and potential reading material, activating meanings and processing subversive ideas, theories and ideologies against their reality with like-minded fellow readers. These groups were labelled under different appellations by readers themselves, amongst others "study groups" (Interview 2; Interview 14; Brutus 2007), "discussion groups" (Interviewee 1; Brutus 2007; Dick 2007b), "working groups" (Wilson 1991) and "debating societies" (Newell 2002b). Regardless of the chosen denomination, these groups played a role in both alternative politics and alternative literature.

Through these groups, readers created a space where their opinions could be articulated and find currency and legitimacy in the texts read. As Belinda Bozzoli points out, such a subculture found the space to be created as a result of the sequestration and isolation imposed by apartheid on South Africans in general and on black urban township dwellers in particular (2004, 329). The climate of isolation typical of the apartheid era and of censorship, Bozzoli notes, allowed these secretive sub-cultural spaces to protect and nurture the inflow of illegal ideas, contributing to the development of a locally brewed consciousness, political culture and spirit of protest (2004, 329). She further proposes that, alluding to the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg, but applicable on a national scale:

> The illicit ideas flowing into the country and the township were able to take hold on the society within mainly through the actions, ideological creativity, legitimacy and particular characteristics of the internal radical

> intelligentsia. Radical thinkers of varying degrees of sophistication existed within a variety of strata of township society – ranging from the semi-literate leaders of the comrades, through much more educated adult thinkers, to the key nationalist intellectuals of the time (2004, 332).

From Bozzoli's observations, one can note the range of individuals involved in resistance politics, who are in all likelihood some of the politicised readers identified in this thesis. Furthermore, Bozzoli discusses how readers engaged with illegal texts and ideas, and how these in turn served as a catalysts for local activism. Through her concept of "translation" of the illicit into the legal performed by thinkers and intellectuals, in other words, by the highly literate readers, illegal literature was processed and adapted to suit the general context prevailing in the readers' immediate environment, and to suit the readers' own individual circumstances:

> The key function performed by these intellectuals was that of "translation" – between the proscribed and the legal, the ANC ideology and the consciousness of the ordinary people, and the radicalism of the grassroots and the relative conservatism of the adults. It is this process of translation that allows forbidden ideas to become attached to local consciousness (Bozzoli 2004, 332).

This analysis suggests ways in which a heterogeneous group of readers, albeit rallied around a community of interest, interacted with texts at various degrees and adapted their readings to suit their levels of literacy, immediate needs and specific circumstances. Bozzoli, however, warns against an over generalisation of the extent and scope of these ideas as censorship deterred from a large-scale dissemination, explaining that:

> A myriad of 'dangerous' ideas flowed into South Africa during this period. This gave them an air of romance and a certain power among black township dwellers. But their very illicitness also weakened the capacity of such ideas to operate as mobilising devices on a broad scale (2004, 349).

Bozzoli exemplifies the translation concept by alluding to the ways in which African-American literature influenced Black Consciousness intellectuals in the development of a uniquely South African ideology, propagated through literature and speeches. Whilst inspired by highly intellectual concepts, the Black Consciousness movement strived at reaching an audience at a grassroots level, to inspire the "reawakening of black people in

South Africa" (Mothlabi 1984, 111). In its mission of integrating voices marginalised and silenced by the apartheid system, from the intellectuals to the grassroots readers, a literary trend inspired by Black Consciousness challenged the perceptions of poetry and literature as being elitist and exclusively for highly literate readers, while recognising the evocative power and reach of oral literature (Mzamane 1991, 189). Jeremy Cronin points out that poetry and mass struggle were thus closely linked, with oral poetry being included in students and workers demonstrations (Mzamane 1991, 189).

By reaching the margins of the literary and cultural spheres, the gap between literate and semi-literate readers, and written and oral literature, was somehow bridged. As Mbulelo Mzamane points out, from the mid-1970s onward it became a common sight to witness poetry being recited or chanted at funerals, trade-unions rallies, and political meetings: "Black Consciousness saw the folly of ignoring the resources of orature in raising consciousness, transmitting values and reintegrating the African majority with their culture and history" (1991, 191). Bozzoli, for instance, remembers how an Africanist poem was read at a meeting of 300 youth activists in Saint-Michael's church hall in Alexandra in March 1986 (2004, 334).

As Michael Chapman points out in *Soweto Poetry*, the links between BC and literature were strong. Foreign literature and political philosophy not only inspired the BC ideology, but the BC ideology also motivated the development of a new poetry trend in urban South Africa in the 1970s. Chapman, amongst others, considers this new poetry as the leading socio-literary phenomenon of the 1970s in South Africa (2007, 11). This poetry, which came to embody the literary appendage of a new form of political resistance, was over time known as "post-Sharpeville poetry", "township poetry", "new black poetry of the 1970s", "participatory poetry", "people's poetry" or "Soweto poetry" (Chapman 2007, 11). Whilst these appellations shed light on the nature of the poetry at stake, this poetry embraced new literary and aesthetic conventions, adopted "a stark English idiom" and "a ghetto-derived imagery", and embodied a "communal ethic" and a "black nationalist ideal" (Chapman 2007, 11-16). Chapman further explains the stylistic

characteristics of this poetry and its impact on readers as a mobilising factor around BC principles:

> This is a mobilising rhetoric utilizing epic forms […] and traditional African oral techniques of repetition, parallelism and ideophones. By these means the poet seeks to impart to a black communal audience, often in a context of performance, a message of consciousness-raising and race pride (2007, 12).

Nadine Gordimer discusses how this "new black poetry" came into being as a shift from prose, which had been vulnerable to censorship and caused the great gap:

> Out of this paralytic silence, suspended between fear of expression and the need to give expression to an ever greater pressure of grim experience, has come the black writer's subconscious search for a form less vulnerable than those that led a previous generation into bannings and exile (1973, 52).

For Gordimer, the new generation of writers' choice of poetry as the privileged mode of expression in the 1970s was instinctive and showed a need to express "their feelings in a way that may hope to get a hearing" (1973, 53). These poets wrote to be read, and readers could identify with and link their reading with "the individual struggle for physical and spiritual survival under oppression" (1973, 54).

The constant interaction between a literary and a socio-political focus was common to most readers groups, and often happened unplanned and spontaneously. Readers – and in some cases audiences – used literature as a channel for political activism and vice-versa, and literature was discussed and dissected through socio-politicised lenses and infused by it. Not all books discussed in reading groups were banned, but the ideas they conveyed and discussions they elicited were judged as being subversive.

Archie Dick notes this interaction between politics and literature, citing amongst others, the radical group called the Fifteen Group, which used libraries for political debates and discussions (2007b, 17). He also refers to some resource centres, which were established in black townships to complement poorly stocked libraries or replace destroyed libraries, as incubators of political resistance through the usage of illegal ideas and banned

material. While these resource centres served as documentary centres contributing to the development of the political consciousness of activists, "some activist groups also used municipal libraries in townships to plan protests, debate political strategy and exchange banned material" (2007b, 20).

Imported books and ideas were localised, as readers were using local reading aesthetics in order to adapt foreign texts to their reality. In this fashion, the practices of readings that developed around banned literature were characterised by transnationalism and hybridism in terms of interpretive strategies and uses of texts. This is reminiscent of Bozzoli's concept of translation referred to above, which emphasises the activeness of readers in creating meanings from texts and using them to consolidate a form of political resistance. As Bozzoli notes:

> The rebellion could only work because of a developing alliance between these ideas and the local cultural and ideological networks of rebelliousness within the country and the township and because radical ideas did not "flow" in a disembodied form – they were carried, sent, received, or blocked in ways that varied across time and place. Many of them underwent a process of conversion from being totally proscribed to possessing some legal currency (2004, 349).

Subversive literature and banned ideas often led to larger debates focusing on the South African situation. For instance, Brutus recalls a community hall which also served as a cultural centre in Port Elizabeth, where he would coordinate cultural evenings showcasing various events that invariably integrated literary and political discussions:

> [The owner] wanted me to organise a cultural club to make use of the hall. So I accepted the idea and talked to the others to discuss the opportunity and how we'd do it. I was able to bring someone from the ANC as a resident talker, and then I'd bring someone to give a talk on jazz, someone on political consciousness, etc. In one of these jazz talks we talked about New Orleans where they were not allowed to play drums except once a week because the drum was banned […]. My audience was white and black – anybody interested in cultural events (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

Brutus also remembers some "discussion groups" in the Eastern Cape in the 1950s, in the areas of Port Elizabeth and East London, where activist writers and teachers would meet and discuss foreign texts in relations to South African politics. Brutus further explains:

> We had a regular study group which met maybe once a month, and consisted mainly of activists and possibly their wives […]. The stuff we read we not so much standard classical political texts – I think one of the books we discussed the most during our surveillance, and we were very careful, very tense and had a lot of debates about it, was a contemporary novel, whether it was William Green or even something very light like Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind which discussed the South in the United States, and slavery and so on (Personal Interview. 25 May 2007).

Brutus was himself banned in the 1960s because of his political activism, as per the Suppression of Communism Act, and was therefore unable to participate to some of these gatherings. He explains:

> Unable to attend these meetings I enquired what they had discussed: a paper circulating discussed the topic of Négritude and the ideas of Césaire, Senghor and others. I realised they were using the covert discussion of literary theory as a way to discuss political ideas and actions (Correspondence with author. 10 October 2007).

Van Wyk also recalls such public reading events occurring in the 1970s, against the backdrop of independent publisher Ravan Press's activities:

> We never launched books in a formal way, like a cheese and wine affair. There was that of course, but there were also readings. […] I remember when Jeremy Cronin came out of prison, he wrote a collection of poems called Inside which was about his life in prison. We launched his book at Wits University. […] There were lots of poets in the audience, and just people who liked literature. Jeremy spoke about the prison's conditions, about the ANC, and read his poetry. Later Njabulo Ndebele released Fools and Other Stories, we organised a gathering in Soweto, and we launched the book there. So there were these kinds of launches (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

The cultural, social and political background of readers influenced the ways in which they perceived, read, understood and interpreted books and texts. Interviewee 1 recalls how students would gather in college residences where books, most of them banned, would be discussed, linking their messages to the South African political situation (Personal

Interview. 10 November 2004). Interviewee 2 for his part recalls, "we used to organise political meetings, not literary clubs, but banned books were almost always discussed there" (Personal Interview. 20 October 2007). Gerhard Maré also recalls such reading groups at the University of the Witwatersrand, where political issues were invariably raised because of the very nature of books under discussion (Personal Interview. 24 May 2007.)

Mamphela Ramphele also remembers similar discussion groups, where readings were directly linked to Black Consciousness activism on campus: "We organised many discussion sessions on campus, canvassed for active membership, and got involved in work camps as part of our commitment to active engagement in the problems which plagued oppressed communities" (1995, 61). She also recalls how some discussion groups often gathered informally in university residences and other venues on campus, highlighting the fusion of everyday concerns with literary and political preoccupations:

> We used to have parties on weekends at which we drank beer and sat around in the smoke-filled room of one of the members of the group, talking politics, listening to Malcom X's speeches on tape, as well as those of Martin Luther King, discussing banned books which were secretly circulated amongst friends, sharing jokes, and also singing and dancing (1995, 58).

The manipulation of ideas and selective reading were also observable reading strategies and useful tools for opinions makers, as pointed out by Daniel R. Magaziner:

> Readers manipulated ideas to their own ends – not the other way around. 'I always go to find something from a book', Biko said. Another activist confirmed this, noting that students 'read selectively, looking for particular quotes, ideas rather than entire philosophies'. Ideas were inanimate until and agent with a particular experience and perspective sought them out and deployed them (2010, 49).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Braamfontein, in downtown Johannesburg, was considered as one of the hubs of poetry and cultural life where literature and politics intermingled on a daily basis (Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). These gatherings were most of the time openly called "poetry readings", and this poetry generally had political

and social tenure. Police informants randomly attended these literary events, sitting undercover amongst the audience, as van Wyk recalls:

> Sometimes we did [cover the nature of these gatherings] but mostly we'd say it's a poetry reading. There is nothing wrong with having poetry readings. But the cops knew. In fact, sometimes there were so many of these events that happened all over the place that cops did not bother to attend all of them (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

As Interviewee 2 points out, referring to smaller and more exclusive study groups, there was a tendency to be wary of newcomers, as they could have been undercover policemen (Personal Interview. 20 October 2004). This suggests a close kinship amongst readers, whereas friendship and shared interests informed reading habits and genre inclinations, whilst the closeness of the group facilitated the exchange of information and development of new ideas.

As reflected from the examples cited above, public readings blending literature with everyday concerns occurred in private homes or in public spaces, such as community halls, churches, libraries, university campuses, etc. Writers, poets and readers were in attendance, and some banned authors were at times quietly sitting in the audience, clandestinely defying their ban. Van Wyk speaks of such a literary event at the United States Consulate, where Don Mattera, despite his banning order, sat amongst the audience (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

Quotations from, and references to, readings occurred at these literary meetings. Quoted passages provided legitimacy and authority to discussions and debates, adding weight to a speaker's presentation, and often extended the scope of debates beyond the actual text. For instance, Ahmed Kathrada, while a political prisoner on Robben Island, was made librarian in the "Segregation Section" where senior political prisoners were detained. Archie Dick points out how Kathrada used his position as librarian "to communicate information and have discussions with General Section political prisoners when he delivered, collected and took stock of library books" (2007a, 31-32). Dick also points out that reading aloud and quoting from the Bible, for instance, was not uncommon

during arrest and detention of political prisoners (2007a, 29). Biko, who operated at the university and community level, borrowed extensively from passages of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon's texts, amongst others, and used these quotations to articulate his speeches and public addresses (Ramphele 1995, 55). Through these oral manifestations in the literary sphere, books transcended their immediate literary imperatives as commodities to be read, as the messages and ideas they contained were actualised, translated, shared, discussed and used in everyday situations by readers. Reading for these readers went beyond the mere entertainment value of literature, as readings were used on a practical level.

**Readers: Creators of an Alternative Social Order**

Darnton poses the parameters informing the history of reading as follows: "[it] will have to take account of the ways in which texts constrain readers as well as the ways that readers take liberties with texts" (2002, 21). In the South African context, readers were constrained not only by texts, through issues related to relevance, immediacy, and language of the so-called authorised literary canons, but also by extra-textual constraints such as literacy levels, access and availability of texts. Nonetheless, readers "took liberties with texts", linked issues they raised with the South African reality, popularising them and making them more accessible. In this context, reading could be described as a holistic experience, "an experience which involves the entire human being, both his individual and collective aspects" (Escarpit 1971, 87). As Newell observed:

> The sense of public and private amongst African readers was not caught in the net of an 'either-or' dichotomy. Rather the public and private were combined in a 'both-and' situation, where readers interpreted texts and generated meanings which related both to their own personal lives and also to society at large (2002, 6).

Escarpit suggests that public readings could be considered as a means of the distribution of texts, even as a mode of publication as it promotes the discourse contained in a text to a new pool of readers (1971, 48). In the case of public readings such as those revolving around Soweto poetry, the new readership thus reached was an alternative counter-public,

to borrow Warner's terminology (2002). In such sessions, whether they were initially intended to be political meetings or literary events, some banned books were discussed and oral culture played a major role in the dissemination of these books' messages. Ideas contained in the texts were popularised by some readers and rendered accessible to other readers of various literacy levels through orality. This weaving between oral and written cultures underlies the variety and particularities of the observable reading strategies, and the multiplicity of practices noticeable within the readers' groups. Books fuelled arguments that interposed debates and discussions, by the same token actualising the meanings created out of these texts and generating more literature. Readings were dissected to befit daily life, and this public literary platform allowed readers to interact and discuss books in an otherwise repressive society, where their views had no space in the official public domain. As Dick Cloete points out, this trend of expressing political positions through poetry was also a way to circumvent censorship: "oral poetry was an ideal medium as it could not be banned and required minimum resources" (2000, 47). McDonald echoes this when noting that unpublished revolutionary poetry disseminated in manuscript form from hand to hand and through public performances was a way of bypassing censorship and white paternalism prevailing in the literary industry at the time (2009a, 133).

Politically engaged readers used banned publications – novels, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and newsletters – as an expression of a shared ideology, in a kind of pleasure of recognition (Fiske 1987). This usage transferred books from their purely literary aspect and physicality to enter the domain of ideology and practicality, as it created a platform for alternative thinking to be nurtured and disseminated. The ideological and symbolic value of books supplanted their economic value and characteristics as manufactured goods and commodities. The ways in which books were used as focal points in poetry readings and political meetings, amongst others, speaks of a translation of ideas into political activism. Banned books were not merely entering the literary circuit as commodities in the traditional sense, but rather existing in a parallel and customised network of production, distribution and consumption. Such books were not used as commodities to be displayed; they were used as tools and instruments conveying a

message. The physical and material aspect of books in this context was not essential, as the concealment and physical alteration of books by readers reveal. In a context of censorship, the importance of readers in the lifecycle of banned books could not be underestimated. Readers "socialise the work" (Escarpit 1971, 19), and it is through them that the text has meaning (Chartier 1992, 134). South African readers of political publications socialised these works by integrating them in the public sphere through oral networks and by discussing them.

Alternative literary platforms became spaces for the articulation of personal experiences, and to showcase alternative discourses. In this sense, in opposition to the censor's discourse, a "counter discourse" emerged (Warner 2002a). The relation between the alternative reading public and the discourses they consumed and produced operated both ways. When rejecting the ambient and dominant discourse, they by the same token made their own voices heard explicitly and implicitly. This readership was an audience ready to absorb, filter, and localise alternative discourses thus produced, participating in the edification of an alternative culture. This internal organisation, characteristic of any kind of public, is described by Warner as "the self-organisation of the public as a body of strangers united through the circulation of their discourse" (2002a, 59). However, as he reminds us, the unity felt amongst the individuals composing a public is ideological (Warner 2002a, 84).

By socialising literary works, readers allowed books to transcend the ideological to enter the realm of "reality". Censorship, as a political tool, aimed at preventing social change and evolution by creating a climate of ignorance and denial. However, many of the banned books circulated in underground networks were promoting new ideologies and an alternative social order. By entering the course of everyday actions and interactions amongst their readers, banned books were posited as determinants for political and social changes, and these alternative reading publics could be perceived as social entities, as "they acquire agency in relation to the state" (Warner 2002b, 89). Through their understanding of the messages contained in banned books, readers claimed a space in the public sphere, introducing discourses and ideas that challenged the status quo.

Books had a socio-political purpose, in addition to their literary character. This relates to Interviewee 1's experience whereby informed senior students would discuss banned texts with first year students, using books for political activism and mobilisation (Personal Interview. 10 November 2004). Reading banned texts was an integral cultural and political experience linking the reader to his milieu, to his environment and to the broader socio-political context. This is the process called "actualization" by Chartier (1992), where the meaning is performed by readers to suit their reality. Even if South African readers read foreign literature, like Fanon and Césaire, their comprehension was developed from a South African perspective, and the ensuing discussions encompassed this integration of foreign theories to local realities. Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 7, for instance, recall how African-American literature was discussed in reading groups around Durban, and linked to then current socio-political developments (Personal Interview. 10 September 2004; Personal Interview. 15 November 2004).

Through their use of books, readers became social agents, and books conversely became agents of change through the uses readers made of them, creating sub-cultural spaces. The utilitarian reader, to borrow Escarpit's expression, extracts from texts that befits his reality. This practice is reminiscent of de Certeau's notion of "poaching" (1984). The notion of "poaching", underpinned by concepts of reader's agency and resistance, implies that reading is the moment where, as Chartier describes it, the world of the reader meets that of the text (1989). In other words, reading could be understood as the point where the socialised individual meets the socially construed text in a particular social context. However, texts are not void of external connotations and values. In the case of South Africa, censors were often the "supreme" readers of texts, or de Certeau's "manipulative elite reader" (Chartier 1989), as they had the final word over the official status of books, and thus channelled readers towards a set of pre-determined and authorised meanings.

The censors' reading was upheld as the "authorised meaning", the one against which others would be judged. Readers differing from this authorised reading could be regarded

as a "counter public" (Warner 2002a). Margreet de Lange shed some light on the censors' reading inclination:

> One of the first readers of a literary text produced under censorship restrictions is the censor. The censor is in several respects a special kind of reader. He is a reader with the power to suppress a text and make it unavailable for other readers. He is also a reader who often does not honour the aesthetic conventions for the interpretation of literature. He reads a literary text as a statement about the world, as a message with only referential function, ignoring its poetic function. There is therefore, a discrepancy between the censorious reader and the literary reader (1997, 1).

Readers are posited at the centre stage of literary consumption and production, as they relentlessly negotiate between their personal understandings and perceptions of texts, the dominant value bestowed on texts, and the limitations contained in the texts and those imposed by their milieu. For instance, political literature deriving from the Black Consciousness movement, whilst deemed undesirable by authorities, in fact articulated the aspirations of many South Africans, such that through its propagation "cultural liberation [became] inseparable from political liberation" (Chapman 2003, 328).

Through "oppositional reading" and "inflected reading" (Fiske 1987, 64), readers challenged and questioned the preferred or authorised meaning attributed to texts by the dominant ideology. In this context, resistance could manifest through the act of reading so-called subversive material, and was expressed through the choice of reading material and the meanings construed out of texts. This constitutes the counter reading public Warner describes as the one which "incorporate the personal/impersonal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as the condition of their own common world" (2002a, 87).

The act of reading in this context could be perceived as being closely linked to socio-political issues. De Certeau emphasises this relation, explaining that "the creativity of the reader grows as the institution that controlled it declines" (1984, 172). This ability to circumvent the censors' imposed reading is precisely where the power of readers in a context like apartheid South Africa lay where censorship was synonymous with political

power and control. The plurality of possibilities contained in texts opened a space for a plurality of interpretations and uses, as de Certeau explains: "by its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve, the pretext for a law that legitimises as 'literal' the interpretation given by socially authorised professionals and intellectuals" (1984, 157).

Gradually, the exchange of ideas occurring in the literary space links up to the broader socio-political space. As Dick has it, "the history of reading can tell us about the history of ideas that shaped historical events in South Africa" (2006, 4). The ways in which readers use books, as seen above, speaks of the social environment towards which they gravitate. As Njabulo Ndebele emphasises, the struggle involves people, not abstraction (1991). By internalising and socialising meanings from texts, readers placed books as factors of social and political change in South Africa.

Literacy, of which literature and reading are an expression, could be said to have empowered communities, as it allowed readers to use these banned books for political gains. James Paul Gee suggests that "literacy only empowers people when it renders them active questioners of the social reality around them" (1996, 37). By debating and actualising texts, readers did precisely that, as texts encouraged reflection and analysis of the ambient social surroundings, creating alternative ideologies and modes of thinking. This interaction between texts and readers could be seen as highlighting the readers' agency, inventiveness and activeness. Dick echoes this value conferred on literacy when stating that "what people do *with* reading is even more surprising and imaginative than what reading does *to* people" (2004a, 43). As such, reading could be seen as a form of nation building (Dick 2004a). Alternative reading publics such as the one for banned literature in apartheid South Africa "enter the temporality of politics and adapt themselves to the performatives of rational-critical discourse. For many counter publics, to do so is to cede the original hope of transforming, not just policy but the space of public life itself" (Warner 2002a, 89).

By simultaneously being at the receiving end and being a driving force behind alternative literature, the counter public that was shaped through banned literature participated in creating another canon of "national literature", as understood by Fanon as the literature that does not merely react, criticise or denounce the oppressors, but rather as a literature whereby the "writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people" (1961, 47). Although much has been said about the protest and reactionary character of some alternative South African works of that period, some authors, through novels, plays, poetry, essays, etc. did not give censorious readers precedence over alternative readers as their intended readers, and as such defied the power relations existing between readers, authors and censors.

**Conclusion**

Readers of banned material were involved at different stages in the country's socio-political affairs. It was a relatively restricted readership. In addition to the limitations of censorship, accessibility and literacy further curtailed access. However, despite their small size, these readers were influential. Acquiring and distributing banned material could be interpreted as a political gesture and statement, so far as politically motivated bans are concerned. Some readers felt the need to read banned texts, and get them read by the largest number of readers possible, thus creating an informal yet close-knit and personalised readership in the books' path, and by the same token raising consciousness and facilitating debates and discussions in South Africa.

Following the blanket banning imposed on writers in the 1960s, a resurgence of writing occurred through the foundation or revival of various literary magazines and alternative publishing companies which facilitated the running of public reading groups. Van Wyk speaks of the 1970s as "a kind of burgeoning, an avalanche of art" (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Literary gatherings virtually became social movements. The 1970s saw a renewal in anti-apartheid strategies, mainly through the activism of students' organisations espousing Black Consciousness in urban communities (Chapman 2003, 328).

Participating in this effort, trade unionists mobilised resistance on the grassroots level, and the South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) were formed in the late 1970s-early 1980s (Johns & Davis 1991, 190). Through the work of the unions and Black Consciousness, demonstrations, boycotts, community-based activities and self-help projects were organised for and by the youth, workers and cultural groups (Johns & Davis 1991, 190), which contributed to the escalation of the crisis faced by the apartheid state (Thompson 2000, 215). All these combined efforts culminated in the fall of grand apartheid in the 1990s. This political climate fostered activism on various fronts, with cultural entities and individuals playing a role in the production, elaboration, importation, dissemination, and localisation of illegal ideas and messages in their book and oral forms.

Readers were themselves active distributors as they exchanged magazines, papers, books and other publications. Readers also took on the role of "printers" when photocopying books, given the restrictions in terms of accessibility and availability of banned books. As banned books were circulated by readers, either as photocopies, texts or extracts, their passage towards the next phases of the life cycle of books was facilitated.

Some progressive publishers and booksellers agreed to deal with banned books or books subject to ban, dissociating themselves from the popular adage claiming that "the best book is a book that sells" (Darnton 2002, 13). Because of these oppositional publishers and booksellers, some banned books entered the readers' circuits, which in turn facilitated the exchange of these books amongst readers, implying the readers' agency in the peculiarity of the life-circuit of banned books in apartheid South Africa.

Considerable activities occurred at the readers' stage, as readers had to be creative and polyvalent in their approach in order to obtain the prohibited reading material before one even thinks about how it was read. Traditional roles were therefore blurred and altered, due to the external systems impacting on the literary industry. The communication system functioned parallel to the other systems existing in the society, and books and readers linked the literary system to the others. Some readers took on an active role in the

communication circuit followed by banned books and reading material in general, as readers contributed to their existence at every stage of Darnton's circuit, and facilitated their passage between the various phases through their assertive role and strategies.

Readers and censors mutually influenced each other, and in this way readers played a role in the censorship apparatus itself. The readership for a given publication was a determining factor for censors when giving their decision, as the wider the readership of a potentially subversive book, the more chance it stood of being banned, as it would have greater influence. Conversely, censors impacted on readers in their choices of reading material, in the ways they perceived and dealt with books, and in their reading strategies.

Readers of banned texts appropriated these texts into their daily lives, and were ideologically unified around texts, creating literary platforms where readers were identified with each other through common beliefs and shared interpretive strategies. Books had most importantly an ideological rather than economic value, as they were used to further political and social beliefs and outputs. Consumption was conferred with political significance, and through the various utilities and uses readers made of their proscribed readings, they posited themselves as active agents in society.

## CHAPTER 6 | READING THROUGH THE CENSORS' LENSES: READERS AND READINGS IN THE CENSORS REPORTS

"The future of literature in our country is inseparable from
the future of democracy and the difficult tasks of working towards it."
(Njabulo Ndebele 1992, 25)

The censorship apparatus in South Africa underwent numerous changes, informed by the ideology adopted by the respective successive boards and chief censors, prevailing socio-political circumstances and legislations. As Peter D. McDonald (2009a) and Margreet de Lange (1997) note, the implementation of censorship varied in form and through times. In a nutshell, the application of censorship in South Africa incorporated literary considerations in the 1960s, before shifting to a more politicised reading of submitted publications in the 1970s, for finally returning to a more literary and relatively more politically tolerant approach – at least on the surface – in the 1980s.

Alongside these changes, personified by, amongst others, the leadership of literary inclined Gerrit Dekker, politically inclined J.J. Kruger, Abraham Coetzee and reformist J.C.W. Van Rooyen, various literary notions and conceptions of readers emerged, notably through the "likely reader" figure. As discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, the notion of likely reader was first introduced in the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 25 of 1963, discarded and replaced with the figure of the "average man" in the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974, and later reintroduced and refined with the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978. Various ideas of readers corresponded to this "likely reader" or "average man", as is observable from the reports that will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter will examine the concepts of readers developed by censors through an examination of the censors' reports, spanning the early censorship legislations to the application of the amended Publications Act in the 1980s. By carefully reading the censors' reports, the changing censors' discourse and concepts of readers that developed will be highlighted and discussed parallel to the successive legislations. Three case studies focusing on an analysis of the censors' reports on Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down*

*Second Avenue*, Dennis Brutus' poetry and *Staffrider* magazine will provide further examples and insights into the workings of the censorship system in terms of the censors' definitions and approaches to readerships in South Africa.

**The Reader in the Pre-1963 Legislations**

As seen in the third chapter, in the context of the Union of South Africa, early legislations directly or indirectly pertaining to publication control, such as the Obscene Publications Act No. 31 of 1892, the Customs Management Act No. 9 of 1913, the Entertainments Censorship Act No. 28 of 1931 and the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950 did not provide for the figure of the reader as explicitly as the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963 and subsequent censorship laws. These legislations were administered by the Minister of Interior, and initially targeted imported films and all forms of pictures and graphics, to eventually include imported books and periodicals as from 1934 (McDonald 2009a, 21).

The objective of the Customs Management Act of 1913 was to block undesirable imported publications, particularly targeting publications aimed at a general public. Over and above their discretionary powers, customs agents had a list of undesirable authors and titles that needed to be blocked at borders, drafted by the Minister of Interior. By blocking imported undesirable publications, customs agents, on authority from the Ministry of Interior, seemingly ensured that the South African public would not be contaminated by "undesirable" ideas from abroad.

The Entertainments Censorship Act of 1931 mainly targeted films and pictures. It provided for the general public who had access to "public exhibition and advertisement of cinematographic films and of pictures and of the performance of public entertainments" (Act No. 28 of 1931). A selection of prohibited themes was listed in the Entertainments Censorship Act of 1931, based on a list of taboo topics developed in 1916 by T.P. O'Connor for the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) (McDonald 2009a, 21). Whilst the public was alluded to as a general entity, the text also provided for a "class or

classes of persons specified by the board" (Act No. 28 of 1931), who could have conditional access to a given film, picture or other form of public entertainment. The 1931 text specifies in Section 5 (1) that:

> The board shall not approve any film which, in its opinion, depicts any matter that prejudicially affects the safety of the State, or is calculated to disturb peace or good order, or prejudice the general welfare or be offensive to decency (Act No. 28 of 1931).

The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 mainly targeted the South African Communist Party (SACP) and everything or anyone remotely communist, and had the power to ban any person or organisation allegedly promoting the ideology of communism, which was loosely defined and directly linked to the safety of the State and its citizens, the latter representing, in the context of apartheid, to the white population. Publications allegedly supporting communism were therefore declared illegal and banned, as were all publications and utterances produced by an alleged communist. The censors' report dated 1970 on Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country* evokes La Guma's status as a listed communist a factor to justify the ban, as the "About the Author" notice at the back of the book contravened the Suppression of Communism Act (210/70). The censor's report reveals how the communist status of an author at times superseded the censors' board considerations, as is observable in this passage of the report:

> The book is about prison life is RSA. While it presents a brutal picture of prison life, it is not sufficient for banning. However, (i) the author is on the banned list, I think, and (ii) 'About the author' (back inner dust jacket) and the text on the back cover condemn the book. In addition, the story gives an exaggerated picture of what is going on in the country's prisons. Ban (210/70, translation mine).

A book written by an alleged communist was considered a "communist publication". The readers of such publications were seemingly considered as potentially dangerous revolutionaries whose readings could trigger more subversion. According to the Act, the doctrine of communism, as propagated by communist publications and individuals:

> Aims at bringing about any political, industrial, social or economic changes within the Union by the promotion of disturbance or disorder, by unlawful acts or omissions or by the threat of such acts or omissions or by means

> which include the promotion of disturbance or disorder, or such acts or omissions or threat (Section 1 (1) (ii) (b) of the Act No. 44 of 1950).

While these earlier legislations operated on the basis of a generic and at times vague idea of a vulnerable South African public, the figure of the reader became more precise as apartheid legislations began to take hold. From the 1960s, with the consolidation of a formal censorship apparatus, a series of new meanings of notions of community standards, public morals, likely reader and probable readership began to emerge, although no official studies surveyed readers until Charles Malan and Martjie Bosman's commissioned *Sensuur, Literatuur en die Leser* in 1983.

**The Reader in the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963**

As McDonald (2009) has indicated, the involvement of Afrikaner literary intellectuals and more precisely of the "*volks avant-garde*" in debates on censorship in South Africa ensured that questions of literary judgement had a pronounced profile in the legislation. While prominent intellectuals like N.P. van Wyk Louw, "the unofficial conscience of Afrikaner nationalism" (McDonald 2009a, 27), first opposed the idea of censorship, when it became clear that the system would go ahead, he sought to populate its structures with Afrikaner literary intellectuals from his circles.

Van Wyk Louw was, as McDonald notes, a strong political and cultural nationalist who believed that culture was intrinsically apolitical (2009, 29). For Louw, literature constituted the essence of a nation's identity, a manifestation of the national spirit, which belonged to *avant-garde* writers, not politicians (McDonald 2009a, 30). Louw was a strong opponent to censorship as from early debates around the idea of a systemised form of publications control in 1947, eloquently writing in the *volk avant-garde*'s mouthpiece *Standpunte*:

> We must learn from history that it is almost always new mass-revolutionary or antiquated and insecure cultures that trust the power of censorship; that stable and powerful cultures do not need it (quoted in McDonald 2009a, 30).

As is apparent from this statement, Louw was fundamentally advocating for the development of a strong cultural Afrikaner identity through literature, which would evolve alongside a strong nationalist political culture of which politicians would be guardians. He conceptualised his cultural vision in the form of an Afrikaner "Republic of Letters", which, as McDonald points out, "he construed as an autonomous and contrary cultural space in which a new, modern Afrikaans literature and, indeed, Afrikaner identity could flourish" (2009a, 30).

Prior to the enactment of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963, the National Party government then led by H. F. Verwoerd responded to the Cronjé report by drafting repressive legislation advocating a centralised pre-publication censorship system that also applied to the press, which gave rise to wide opposition. Essentially, the Cronjé report advocated a "nationalistic cultural idealism", showed "hostility to the mass", and promoted the "idea of literature as the 'mirror' of the 'community'" (McDonald 2009a, 31). It invested a social responsibility upon the Afrikaner writer, and advocated "stricter censorship measures" and "a positive programme of uplift" (McDonald 2009a, 26). Anti-censorship protests emanating from within and outside the Afrikaans community were however ignored, and some procedures were revised into a new bill, and passed in 1963. As McDonald notes, the Act of 1963 was not as repressive as the draft bill or even the Cronjé Report, as it favoured post-publication censorship over pre-publication censorship and referred appeal to an independent judiciary not appointed by the censorship board (2009a, 33). As de Lange points out, the severe attack from prominent members of the Afrikaner establishment had little impact on the enactment of the Bill, politicians upholding the view that the censorship legislation would not have an impact on "serious literature", as this message from Abraham Jonker, published in *Die Burger*, reveals:

> This proposal has nothing to do with serious literature. The Bill is directed against filth, pornography, blasphemy, offensiveness and the distribution of communistic propaganda. Everyone who opposes the regulations is in favour of these wrongs (quoted in de Lange1997, 34).

Afrikaans writers and PEN SA members had by then signed a petition against censorship, which seemingly prompted the government to include in Section 2 (2) of the Act of 1963

pertaining to "Appointment of Publications Control Board", that the board, comprising nine members in total, should include at least six "persons having special knowledge of the art, language, literature or the administration of justice" (Act No. 26 of 1963). It appears clearly that censors were invested with a literary task, or rather that through Louw's persuasion and influence, literary experts were invested with a censorship task, as McDonald points out (2009a, 38). Indeed, Louw campaigned for Gerrit Dekker, a prominent Afrikaans literary critic, to chair the first board of censors, ensuring that neither NP politicians nor Writers' Circle's members exercised control of the censorship apparatus (McDonald 2009a, 38). As McDonald notes, by having an *avant-gardiste* at the helm of the censorship board, the question of literature took a central role in the application of censorship, with issues of intentionality, literariness and readership being at the forefront of the censors discourse (2009a, 40). Together, Louw and Dekker specifically selected literary experts and academics adopting a conciliatory approach towards nationalism and the *avant-garde* as members of the board, rallying three Afrikaans literary professors (T.T.Cloete, A.P. Grové and H. van der Merwe Scholtz), a professor of English (C.J.D. Harvey), a professor of political philosophy and expert on communism (A.H. Murray) and a professor of African languages (T.M.H. Endemann) as members (McDonald 2009a, 39).

Censors performed a selective reading of publications submitted, and their functions were defined in Section 7 (3) of the Act of 1963. These functions included the examination of publications submitted, further examining all forms of public entertainments if there were reasons to believe that it may be offensive on religious or moralistic grounds, advising the minister and, quite loosely, "perform[ing] any other function assigned to it by this Act of any other law" (Act No. 26 of 1963). The readers report template provides clues on the workings of the system and on the reading performed by censors. After "examining" the publication, censors cited the pages where undesirable passages occurred, after having summarised the synopsis of the publication. The list of themes needing to be identified in the report included "passages considered being indecent, obscene, or objectionable" in terms of crime and violence, sexual intercourse and loose morals, blasphemous language, offensive intermingling, subversive propaganda, and more vaguely, any "other

objectionable feature" (Act No. 26 of 1963). These templates were available in English and Afrikaans.

Under Dekker's leadership, censors seemingly took their role as experts seriously and diligently, some reports at times reading more as literary essays than bureaucratic formalities. Censors were performing a form of interpretation that could be labelled as "displaced reading" (McDonald 2009a, 191). Their goal was to read a publication through the eyes of the readers they imagined for each text – the likely reader – and as such they could be considered as "intrusive readers" (McDonald 2009a, 286). Moreover, the concept of likely reader, as introduced in the Section 6 (a) of the Act of 1963, led to inconsistencies, as pointed out by McDonald:

> In particular, the references to the 'likely reader', which contradicted the absolute criteria of Section 5 (2), introduced a complication in the legislation's construction of the reading public that would be directly addressed only in the early 1980s (2009a, 36).

Section 5 (2) refers to "public morals" and "any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic" as the units against which the thresholds of undesirability were to be measured (Act No. 26 of 1963). The references to "public morals" and "inhabitants of the Republic" are so vague and all encompassing that they tend to supersede the application of the concept of the likely reader, which was left to the discretion of censors. As such, the role of the censor could from then on be described as the "general arbiter of printed public discourse, responsible for deciding what was or was not 'undesirable', and the most powerful if least likely guardian of the literary" (McDonald 2009a, 39). Section 6 (2) specifies that these criteria are totally independent from the intention or purpose of "the person by whom that matter was printed, published, manufactured, made, produced, distributed, displayed, exhibited, sold or offered or kept for sale" (Act No. 26 of 1963). Besides moral subversion, the Act also alluded to political subversion in Section 5 (2) (e), where it is stipulated that "A publication or object shall be deemed to be undesirable if it or any part of it is prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order" (Act No. 26 of 1963).

The criteria of undesirability were defined in relation to the figure of the typical inhabitant of the Republic and at times to the reader likely to be exposed to a publication. Section 6 (1) of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963, particularly articles (a) and (b), complements Section 5 (2) and refines the various factors of undesirability relative to the probable readership and public morals, and emphasises the baseline definitions of indecency, obscenity and offensiveness against which the likely reader must be assessed:

> 6 (1) If in any legal proceedings under this Act the question arises whether any matter is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals, that matter shall be deemed to be –
>
> (a) indecent or obscene if, in the opinion of the court, is has a tendency to *deprave or to corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence* thereof; or
> (b) offensive to public morals if in the opinion of the court it is likely to be *outrageous or disgustful to persons who are likely to read or see it*; or...
> [emphasis added] (Act No. 26 of 1963)

The conceptions of those various readers were highly politicised and racialised, and tended to typecast readers in relation to their reading material. For instance, a "sophisticated" readership, whilst considered a minority, was assumed to be enjoying literature purely for its aesthetic qualities, and not likely to perform a politicised reading. Censors cast their "readers" in predetermined roles, along the lines of the intellectual appreciating literature on an aesthetic level devoid of politics (the *volks* enlightened reader), the disobedient reactionary reader in search of inspiration and motivation to challenge the status quo (the subversive reader), and the easily influenced, shocked or depraved reader part of the mass (the vulnerable reader), amongst others. These will be further exemplified in the case studies below.

A July 1963 report signed by W.A. Joubert strongly recommends, in a condescending tone to say the least, the banning of Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History*. *Drum*'s editorial staff member Modisane's seminal autobiography published in 1963 is, as formulated by the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, a "passionate documentation of the

degradation and oppression of blacks living under the laws of apartheid in South Africa". The synopsis section of the fairly short and concise censors' report highlights some of the grievances raised by Modisane against the apartheid state. Joubert, as a reader, performs a reading whereby the feelings and intentions of the author are assumed, and reads as a selection of potentially subversive topics:

> Bloke is embittered by the slums houses of the blacks and the discrimination against them because their skins are black. He joins the A.N.C. whose slogan is: 'Drive the whites into the sea', but strikes & passive resistance have no results. […] The Bantu are waiting for a Moses to lead them against the whites. Bloke resents his inferiority & the fact that he cannot be admitted to European theatres. Bloke hates the D.R. Church and their Christianity which says the Angels are white and the Devil is black. […] White domination must be destroyed and S.A. must be ruled by a democratic majority. He urges his people to be daring like the Tsotsis (2654/13/32).

Unsurprisingly advocating a ban giving the tone of the report, Joubert concludes that Modisane "rouses the Bantu to fight for their rights and to drive the whites into the sea. It is a most dangerous and objectionable publication and will have a very harmful effect on peace-loving Bantu. I consider it *unsuitable* for circulation" (2654/13/32). This conclusion clearly evokes the alleged subversive inspirational nature of Modisane's autobiography for its potential reader. In light of Section 5 (2) (e) of the Act of 1963 , which mainly deals with political subversion, this publication would represent, in the eyes of the censors, a threat to the safety of the State, welfare, peace and good order or the potentially harmful character of the publication to sections of the inhabitants of the Republic. Seemingly, Joubert conceives the probable readership of Modisane's autobiography as naïve "peace-loving" black readers, on which the book's alleged "propaganda against the government", "anti-white statements", "statements against the church", "violence" and "rousing native against the whites" passages could spark subversion and revolt amongst the readers (2654/13/32).

Joubert's report on Modisane's experience denies the existence of a black readership that would identify with the experiences of their contemporary black intellectuals without necessarily taking up arms against the system. The report seemingly assumes that the

"peace-loving Bantu", as he words it, does not share the feeling of resentment and frustration expressed by Modisane. It denies the notion of reading as offering a "pleasure of recognition" (Darnton 2002) with one's personal circumstances, whereby a reader identifies and relates to what he reads, finding gratification in seeing his experience articulated and shared in the public domain through literature. By simply mentioning the "peace loving Bantu" who could easily be influenced by Modisane's story and allegedly provocative opinions, the censor fails to recognise that the same environment which is the source of Modisane's frustrations is probably the same one in which his contemporary readers live, as they share a common history and experience, and therefore is not new or unknown to them.

Harvey's report of the reader dated 1964 on Breyten Breytenbach's *Die Ysterkoei moet Sweet* (841/64), for its part, argues in favour of letting the book pass, the latter being considered a serious author and his poetry collection serious literature. Harvey argues that "Serious poetry in Afrikaans is read by a very small group of highly intelligent and educated people. I do not think that any of these poems have 'a tendency to corrupt or deprave the minds' of such people" (841/64). The allusion to this allegedly very small group denotes an elitist, highly educated and literate readership, which, in Harvey's words, performs a literary reading on a higher level of understanding. Opposed to this reader is the "very young or uneducated person into whose hands the book might fall", who "would understand so little of it that he could not be affected by it" (841/64). This is the uneducated reader, who seemingly is not able to grasp higher intellectual and literary works such as Breytenbach's, and who forms part of the dismissive and vague category of the "mass readership". This reader seemingly poses no threat to the censor as far as "serious Afrikaans poetry" is concerned, as he is believed not to be able to understand poetic language, taking what is read at face value. However, the Afrikaans section of the report denounces the poem "*Breyten bid vir homself*", which literally translates as "Breyten's prayer for himself", and evokes an undesirable religious connotation, which will most likely offend "*die naïewe leser*", or the naïve reader (841/64). Public morals and religious convictions are brought into play and assessed via the three types of readers mentioned in the report, namely the "intelligent educated reader", the "very young or

uneducated reader" and the "naïve reader". Harvey concludes in his report, highlighting by the same token the desire to protect "serious" Afrikaans literature:

> To ban this collection on the grounds of its irreligious or irreverent attitudes would be to make an exception of it (because it is in Afrikaans?), for irreligious and irreverent poems in English and other languages by Blake, A.G. Swinburne, D.H. Lawrence and many other poets, both major and minor, are freely in circulation amongst the very small group who read poetry (941/64).

The reader of popular literature is also alluded to in some censors reports, amongst others in the report on Wilbur A. Smith's *When the Lion Feeds* (649/64). Seemingly, readers' morals had to be preserved and saved from a potential contamination by popular fiction, which was believed to promote low morals and values, as the book was unanimously banned, "although with some hesitation" (649/64), by the board of censors in 1964. As McDonald notes, "Specifically literary norms also informed the censors' hostility to mass market genre fiction" (2009, 51). The censors' elitist conception of literature is observable in this passage of the 1964 report, written by Harvey: "Though not strictly a work of literature, it is a purely episodic 'thriller', it is well enough written to be highly entertaining and would undoubtedly have a big sale amongst the general public. It is a very easy read" (649/64). The "easy reading" qualities and potential big sales figures entail a wide and popular readership, and combined with the book's alleged lack of literary merit played a role in the decision to ban the book in terms of Section 5 (2) (a) of the Act pertaining to public morals, and Section 5 (2) (c) pertaining to blasphemy and offensiveness to religious convictions. According to censors, *When the Lion Feeds*, which turned out to be the first major case of court appeal against a ban under the 1963 Act, contained sufficient scenes of sex and violence to justify a ban, allowing them to ignore issues revolving around aesthetic unity (McDonald 2009a, 51). While the report recognises that it is a difficult case, as Smith's book appeals to a large South African readership, censors are seemingly worried that some passages might deprave morals, which portrays a naïve, prude and conservative readership, as noted in Harvey's report:

> It has no real literary merit but in a clever way supplies popular reading with an open eye to the taste of a wide public and will undoubtedly succeed in appealing to the type of reader it caters for.

> Unfortunately the author indulges in offensive sex episodes and references to sex which in their drastic description do not convince as functional but in their would-be daringness belong to his apparatus for giving this novel the popular appeal of a 'tough book' (649/64).

Scholtz's section of the report also focuses on the negligible literary merit of the novel, which will in his opinion attract a specific readership: "The style in so far as one can use this term is flashy and shallow. All these features ensure that the book will appeal to a broad and differentiated reading public. Also, young people will eagerly consume the book" (649/64, translation mine). Furthermore, he points out that the book has a potential of being a best-seller in South Africa, as the simplistic and popular way in which it is written does not call for a profound reading, in other words for high reading skills (649/64). With references to all these considerations, revolving around literariness, offensiveness, morality and readership, the book was unanimously banned with five votes, as "several passages considered to be indecent, obscene or objectionable appear in terms of the Act", amongst others pertaining to: "white slavery and prostitution"; "passionate love scenes"; "sexual intercourse"; "loose morals"; "description of women's bodies"; "blasphemous and objectionable language"; and "violence and bloodshed" (649/64).

The case of the first publication to be banned under the Act of 1963, Des Troye's *An Act of Immorality*, also illustrates this contempt for mass fiction. *An Act of Immorality* was submitted by a policeman after his wife bought it in a bookstore, and was banned on the grounds of offensiveness to public morals (Van Wyk. Personal Interview. 12 October 2007; McDonald 2009a, 49). As McDonald points out, referring to Richard Rive's *Emergency*, censors at times discussed issues of morals in the same breath as the popular genre of a novel, for instance, as illustrated through this argument revoling around the novel's interracial "promiscuous relations":

> It belonged, as Dekker commented, to the genre of the 'topical novel' (*aktualiteitsroman*) (BCS 1084/64). Though Murray, the primary reader, thought it gave 'an exaggerated view of the "unrest"', he felt it satisfied the humanistic criteria because it did not 'go to extremes' or 'propagandize a doctrine'. Despite this, it had to be banned, he argued, because it portrayed 'promiscuous relations between the Coloured

> man [the central figure, Andrew Dreyer] and the white student [Ruth Talbot]'. Dekker agreed with Murray's literary judgment, but anxious about a possible appeal – he noted that the novel was dedicated to the leading Sestiger Jan Rabie and his wife, Marjorie Wallace – he questioned ('rhetorically', as he puts it) the legal basis for Murray's recommendation because he could not see where the Act specifically outlawed interracial sex. In his reply, Murray insisted that […] the novel was not worth protecting because it was just 'popular stuff' (2009a, 50-51).

Dekker's concerns revolving around the fact that the book was dedicated to *Sestiger* Jan Rabie and his wife speaks of the censors' desire to keep close ties with the Afrikaans intelligentsia. This did not prevent the book from being banned. Nevertheless, this publication attracted many curious readers, as recalled by Chris van Wyk:

> It was a clumsy plot and a badly thought story and at the end it had all these case studies: an Indian woman and a white man, a black man and a white woman, and how they met, etc. It was lurid and dirty. And people were just whispering: 'A black man with a white woman in a bed together?' People were reading it for that (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

Seemingly, sensationalism played a role in attracting some readers to this novel, as readers read to satisfy a sense of curiosity for an otherwise taboo subject regardless of their literacy and education level, once again blurring the readers' categorisations imagined by censors.

**The Reader in the Post-1974 Censors' Discourse**

As discussed in the previous chapters, some changes in the censorship system were introduced in 1974 with the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974. Amidst increasing political resistance and opposition in the land of apartheid, the directorate of publications, now under the chairmanship of J.J. Kruger who succeeded Dekker in 1968, aimed at tightening publications control through a more politicised censorship apparatus. The directorate's members were selected if suitably qualified and knowledgeable to assume such position, eradicating the literary expertise specifically required in order to be appointed to Dekker's board. Section 6 of the Act of 1963 pertaining to the likely reader

did not appear in the Act of 1974. Also, the introductory provision on the "recognition of Christian view of life" set the tone for the legal text spread over six chapters: "In the application of this Act the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian view of life shall be recognised" (Act No. 42 of 1974). This shift from a literary to a political and religious approach reveals a desire from the part of censors to focus on the religious and political elite rather than on the literary elite in its application of censorship (McDonald 2009a, 61).

With this new approach in mind, the likely reader no longer featured in the censors' discourse. The notions of "average man" or "man of balance" with a "Christian view of life" took precedence over the literary implications contained in the notion of the likely reader, and the average man became the benchmark for undesirability. As Louise Silver observes, "the test that was applied was whether a work would have the effect of turning the average, decent-minded man, who embodied the median opinion of the law-abiding citizens in South African society, to revolutionary or lawless conduct" (1984, 63). The average man was a standard, decent, law-abiding, enlightened citizen with Christian principles. As Margreet de Lange points out, the question at stake here is "who this average member of the South African community was for the censor" (1997, 18). Answering this not only sheds light on the ways in which censors read submitted publications and drafted their reports, but also indirectly paints a picture of a privileged category of readers whose interests took precedence over other readers. This would generally speaking be a white reader, but more specifically a reader rallied around the interests of the Afrikaner *volk* spirit, politically aligned to the National Party, of Christian confession and ideologically supporting the apartheid regime (de Lange 1997, 18). It would, in other words, be the ideal reader moulded upon the ideal citizen imagined by censors, and as such could be labelled as the "*volks* reader" who posed no threat, and supported the status-quo. As de Lange observes:

> In the eyes of the Afrikaners, the necessity for strict control resided in their perception that South Africa was a state in transition, working towards the completion of apartheid. Their Afrikaner utopia still seemed an attainable goal in the seventies. Literature was therefore

> called upon to comply in large measure with the vision of Afrikaner utopian society (1997, 29).

The report on *Poets to the People - South African Freedom Poems* dated November 1975 contains an interesting document divided into two sections, namely "Working programme" and "Directions", developed for the censors. These guidelines seemingly assisted censors in performing their increasingly bureaucratic task, providing more information on how they should read publications submitted and operate on a bureaucratic level, with the objective of deciding "whether the publications are undesirable or not within the meaning of Section 47 (2) of the said Act" (P75/11/119). The section "Working Procedure" specifies that: "The chairman of the committee shall hand out the publications to the members of the committee (including himself) and assign them to read the publications and to complete the relevant reader's reports on DP 1E" (P75/11/119). Filling out an accompanying form was not a new procedure in comparison to the paperwork involved under the Act of 1963, as the archival documents reveal. The instructions regarding the ways in which censors had to read the submitted publications were relatively vague, as they did not specify whether a publication had to be read in its entirety or could only be read partially or even scanned. However, the "Assignment" section clearly stated the objective of the exercise, which was "to decide whether the publications are undesirable or not within the meaning of Section 47 (2) of the said Act" (P75/11/119).

The Section 47 (2) of the Act of 1974 outlines the factors against which undesirability was evaluated: namely morality in (a); religious blasphemy or offensiveness in (b); ridicule or contempt in (c); race relations in (d); and safety of the State in (e). The procedures followed in applying the Act represented a shift from the highly literary considerations of the previous censorship dispensation in favour of an increasingly moralistic and political reading. In other words, censors were now reading with a bureaucratic state of mind, in search of damning evidences against a publication under review, as the report on *Poets to the People* dated 1975 reveals (P75/11/119). No references are made to the likely reader or even to the idea of a reader as vague as it may be. The report signed by E.G. Malan reads more as an assessment of the political nature

of the collection of poems over and above the fact that it is a collection of poetry and therefore is a work of literature. The poets are merely discussed in relation to their affiliation with the South African Communist Party (SACP) or other banned organisations (such as the ANC) throughout the report, and the poems' titles are discussed in terms of their undesirable nature. Malan recommends a ban, on the grounds of its prejudice to public morals, race relations and state security, without further mention of whose morals are under threat (P75/11/119).

The controversial banning of Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!* in the late 1970s proved to be yet another turning point in the censors' discourse, leading to an eventual amendment to the Act of 1974 (de Lange 1997). Leroux's case clearly illustrates how literary reflection was notably absent from the Publications Act of 1974, which ended up a source of contention within the Afrikaner community. A literary committee had initially passed Leroux's novel on literary grounds when the decision was overturned following the resubmission of the book by a Nationalist conservative vigilance association, as de Lange recalls:

> According to his own account in the newspaper *Hoofstad* of 24 November 1977, the leader of the AMS [*Aksie Morele Standaarde*], Eddie van Zyl, had read *Magersfontein* three times without understanding what the book was about. While reading Van Zyl made a list of all the words and expressions that he considered immoral or blasphemous. The AMS then sent this list to 2,500 Afrikaners, mostly farmers, housewives and church ministers, with the request to write to the Minister of Home Affairs if the recipient found the list to contain offensive material. On 14 September 1977, Minister Connie Mulder asked the Appeal Board to reconsider *Magersfontein* (1997, 39).

The Publications Appeal Board (PAB) overturned the decision and banned *Magersfontein* on moral and blasphemous grounds, as per Section 47 (2) (a) and (b) of the Act of 1974. The Afrikaner public opinion and media took side with Leroux, who was shocked to see his work "dissected in public by people without any literary inclination" (quoted in de Lange 1997, 40). The Supreme Court of South Africa, to whom Human and Rousseau appealed, found that the undesirability of the novel should have been evaluated against the "likely reader", and not the "average reader", as far as public morals were concerned.

It however agreed that the novel could be "offensive to the religious convictions" of the average South African citizen. The ban remained in effect, but this case reintroduced the notions of "likely reader" and "literary merit" in the censors' discourse. Some works of "literary merit" that would otherwise be undesirable as per the Act could be distributed with restriction in the light of their "likely readership", a discretionary provision that would inevitably privilege white writers, as observes de Lange (1997, 41).

With the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978, so-called serious literature was once again protected, and a committee of literary experts could be appointed by the PAB if deemed necessary, to assess the possibility of a book's conditional release (McDonald 2009a, 73). However, as McDonald points out, despite some few cases on which the new procedures were tested, it took a change of administration for the amendments to be applied more consistently (2009a, 74). In 1980, van Rooyen was appointed chairman of the PAB and Abraham Coetzee director of publications. Together they initiated reforms in the censorship system that would be effective in the 1980s, which would also be the last decade of apartheid in South Africa:

> This period was characterized by an awkward dissonance between the internal reforms of the censorship bureaucracy, which echoed P.W. Botha's wider strategies of political co-optation in the 1980s, and the government's aggressive suppression of political protest in more direct means (McDonald 2009a, 77).

Several mitigating factors could overturn a previous ban or favour a publication being passed. As Louise Silver points out, literary value was a prime mitigating factor against a ban, as without it a work could be considered as mere propaganda targeting a subversive readership (1984, 95). Similarly, the academic value of a publication would entail a sophisticated and informed likely readership, which would also lessen the undesirability of a publication (Silver 1984, 100). Another mitigating factor which contributed to the release of some publications is the historical period value, whereby "a work that was found undesirable at the time of its publication may, on resubmission at a later date, be regarded as a 'period piece' because the reader has a sense of perspective based upon insight" (Silver 1984, 102). Seemingly, the closer a reader was to the events depicted in a

book, the more these would have an impact on its readership. A limited distribution, the satirical nature of a text and the high price of a publication were also mitigating factors, as they would in turn limit the size of the prospective readership.

Typical of the patronising tolerant approach adopted by the censors in the 1980s, the board recognised a need for "South Africans [to] know what blacks think and write" and believed that "black's problems should be understood by whites" (Silver 1984, 109-110). This general stance was underpinned by the censors' concern that "tolerance should be displayed towards black writings as blacks do not have representation in Parliament" (Silver 1984, 112), exemplifying the "awkward dissonance" noted by McDonald (2009a, 77), as cited above. These mitigating factors were weighted against some aggravating factors, which included the nature of the publication (as for instance a pamphlet could attract a wider and more popular readership), its propagandist character, the sympathy displayed for a banned organisation, the cumulative effect and the possible prescription of a work in schools, where young vulnerable minds could be contaminated (Silver 1984, 113-119).

The intricacies of these lines of arguments, and the way these factors intersected with the social construct of the likely reader, can be better understood through an examination of its application in the censors' reports, which span the early 1960s to the early 1990s. The cases of Ezekiel Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, several of Dennis Brutus' poetry collections and Ravan's *Staffrider* and Staffrider series will be discussed below, three case studies analysing the censors' considerations of readers contained in the censorship board reports.

**Case study 1: *Down Second Avenue***

The case of Ezekiel Mphahlele's autobiography, *Down Second Avenue,* provides an interesting case shedding light on the workings of the censorship system in South Africa, having been scrutinised by the successive censorship boards. *Down Second Avenue*, now considered a classic of South African literature, was initially published in 1959 by Faber

in London, two years after Mphahlele left South Africa for a self-imposed exile. The same year, in 1959, *Down Second Avenue* was let through customs as an imported book, legally finding its way to a South African readership. Being published in London by Faber, in New York by Macmillan, by the Ministry of Education in Ibadan and by the East African Publishing House in Nairobi, amongst others, Mphahlele's work began to be published in South Africa by independent publishers Ravan and Skotaville once he returned to South Africa in 1977 (McDonald 2009a, 245).

In 1966, while in voluntary exile, Mphahlele was banned as per the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, which technically meant that he was listed as a communist and that all his writings were illegal in South Africa. As McDonald reports, the censors were however ambivalent about the ways in which to treat Mphahlele's work after 1966: they banned the short stories collection *In Corner B and Other Stories* and his essay *The African Image*, but approved his novels *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu*, the poem and short stories collection *The Unbroken Song* and, as seen above, *Down Second Avenue* 2009a, 245). In 1967, South African Police Commissioner P.J.B. van Wyk wrote a letter addressed to the chairman of the Publications Control Board, who was then Dekker, requesting that the status of *Down Second Avenue* be reviewed, in terms of Section 8 (1) (a) of the Act of 1963 which stipulates that the censorship board may examine and determine the undesirability of any publication "at the request of any person" (Act 26 of 1963). The commissioner's central line of arguments was, as per the letter dated 7 July 1967 and whose object read "Communist of subversive literature":

> The contents of the book are calculated to arouse a sense of ill feeling between whites and non-whites. The entire book speaks of hate for the whites and nowhere shows that the author is really expressing his feelings so as to study the hate within himself and to acknowledge his own shortcomings. His prejudices are solely due to his own ignorance and ineptitude yet he blames the whites (S.14/1/4/V.13, translation mine).

Furthermore, the commissioner suggested that should the book be ruled as indecent, obscene and offensive, and it should be declared illegal. This letter proved to be the starting point of a lengthy four-month debate within Dekker's board, involving Cloete,

Dekker, Endemann, Grové, Murray and Scholtz (McDonald 2009a, 250). As illustrated in the first censors' report dated July 1967, the outcome of the censors' first deliberation was in favour of banning with a vote of four against two (24/7/1967). While Murray, an expert on communism, and Endemann, an African language specialist, concluded that there was no propaganda, acrimony or communism in the book, that it was objective and contained nothing not already known to South African readers, Grové, who was a literary censor, expressed concerns as the book presented a negative portrayal of the police and of everything Afrikaans and therefore that the book should be prohibited amongst, in the words of the report, "South African natives" (McDonald 2009a, 251; 24/7/1967). Scholtz, who was in favour of banning, was for his part preoccupied with the likely impact of the book on the average reader:

> Have we not already decided that it is sometimes not wise to make certain truths available to any and everyone? After all, we have kept some books about, for example, sexuality because we want to protect an immature and youthful reading public (quoted in McDonald 2009a, 251).

On 20 September 1967, Murray wrote a letter to Dekker, requesting that *Down Second Avenue* be retained for further discussion before taking a decision. In his letter, Murray discusses the potential reaction of a black and white readership, respectively, by pointing out that the book will not incite black readers to subversion and will enable white readers to gain insight into the state of mind of the black population, as he puts it. Murray opens his argumentation by stating that "If we ban this work, it will be almost impossible to pass any work by a native that reflects the prevailing and spontaneous attitude of natives in this country" (522/67, translation mine). He further notes that none of the inciting remarks contained in the book are more serious than those made in meetings or in the press, and that "no literary approach to a statement of mind pretends to establish the empirical factual conditions". Alluding to a white readership, Murray continues by writing:

> The more the white population becomes familiar with and gains an insight into this state of mind, which is brought about by certain factors in the present social and economic situation, the more quickly will healthy race relations be created (522/67, translation mine).

He concludes by noting that "two of the three persons who voted in favour of a ban expressed reservation about their opinion" (522/67, translation mine).

In response to this request, Dekker initiated a second round of deliberations, pointing out that the question remains whether the picture depicted by Mphahlele would have "an inciting effect on the non-white" (McDonald 2009a, 251; 255/67). Grové's decision remained unchanged, as for him there were no doubts that the book would have an inciting effect on black readers, as his initial report clearly states: "And then the image of the police that is created, is that not intended to incite our non-Whites?" (522/67, translation mine). In a report dated 28 September 1967, Grové reiterates that "It is still obvious to me that the book – despite truths that it may contain – with its one-sidedness and distortion may have an inflammatory effect and thus should be banned in terms of the Act" (522/67, translation mine). Endemann, however, points out that since the events depicted in the book dated from before South Africa was a Republic, the effect on the reader would be limited: "The reader in this country will immediately realise that conditions are described that would have existed here a considerable time ago. I think even the non-Whites would see it in this light" (522/67, translation mine). Endemann further notes that a ban might actually attract more attention to the book than necessary as the book was freely available, having passed in 1959: "Will the banning of the book at this stage not draw attention unnecessarily to a book that would otherwise not have had a substantial market here?" (522/67, translation mine). Grové had also raised this issue in his second report, pointing out that perhaps the publication had already "played its trump card" (522/67, translation mine).

Dekker, in a letter dated 28 September 1967, acknowledges the "considerable difficulties" posed by this publication (522/67, translation mine). He supports Murray's concern that "it is a matter of principle whether we can deprive non-Whites of their right of expression" as it is a "question of conscience" (522/67, translation mine). Dekker formulates the bottom-line question in terms of the Act of 1963:

> Is the possible effect of this book: 'harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic (Act 26, Section 5 (2) (d) and

> ‘prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order (5 (2) (e)’ (522/67, translation mine).

By the same token, he acknowledges that some “atrocities supposedly perpetrated by the Boers on the Bantu” and some “actions of the police” did occur, but asks whether “we can allow the police to be systematically placed in such an unfavourable light?”, raising a problem of policy (522/67, translation mine). Harvey, in October 1967, declares feeling “very strongly about this matter” and being similarly “strongly opposed to banning the book”, giving great weight to Murray and Endemann’s “expert opinion” (522/67). The book was eventually passed with five votes against one, the latter being Grové’s unchanged vote (McDonald 2009a, 251).

This was however not the end of the matter. On 20 November 1967, the Deputy Secretary of Customs and Excise, who had been informed of the decision on 15 November 1967, hand-delivered a letter to Dekker, pointing out that in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950:

> The author was named as a person whose utterances etc. may not be published in the Republic. In the circumstances the Board may wish to reconsider its decision, but in any case I should be glad to learn the name and address of the person who submitted the book to the Board, so that I may take the necessary action to prevent its distribution (522-523/67).

A series of correspondence ensued between the Publications Control Board, the Department of Customs and Excise, the South African Police and the Security Police. On 10 January 1968, the Publications Control Board sent a letter to the Commissioner of Police in reference to the letter from the Deputy Secretary of Customs and Excise mentioned above, that Mphahlele was a listed communist, but that:

> Where a publication cannot be regarded as undesirable on its merits, as in this case, it would still be advisable to warn the person or firm that submitted the publication to the Board that the permission must still be obtained from the Minister of Justice before the publication may circulate (522-523/67, translation mine).

The letter goes on to point out that it is useless to submit a publication if the author is a listed communist because the onus falls onto the Minister of Justice. A.J. van Wyk, who

wrote on behalf of the Publications Control Board's chairman, concludes his letter to the police by requesting that he be advised of the "actual state of affairs" so that he can inform Customs "whether the order against Mphahlele is applicable or not" (522-523/67, translation mine). Seemingly, no further actions were taken and the book was passed again in 1967.

In 1974, under the Kruger censorship board where the new Publications Act of 1974 applied, *Down Second Avenue* was once again submitted by the Security Police. In his reply, Kruger, in his capacity as chairman of the Publications Control Board, points out that the book was passed in 1959 and again in 1967 despite the fact that the author is a listed person subject to the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act, but that "further action against the book, if any, must therefore come from the Department of Justice, irrespective of the decision of this board" (522-523/67, translation mine). It seems apparent from the later correspondence between the Publications Board and the Security Police and South African Police that a certain ambiguity persisted, and that the various Acts simultaneously impacting on censorship at times overlapped and proved to be difficult cases for the censors. In the end, Kruger refused to put the book through the system, and the case seemingly was closed, at least until a cartoon version of *Down Second Avenue* was submitted to the censorship board (McDonald 2009a, 252).

The case of *Down Second Avenue – The Comic*, a booklet written by Mzwakhe Nhabati, published by alternative publisher Ravan Press, and based on Mphahlele's autobiography, illustrates how the concept of the likely reader reintroduced in the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, as seen above, was at play in the censors' decision-making process, and provides an example of Van Rooyen's Publication Appeal Board workings. Upon submission of the publication by the South African Police in 1988, the Publications Board unanimously banned the book in terms of Section 47 (2) (e) of the Publications Act of 1974, which pertains to State security. As a letter dated July 1988 from the Director of Publications to Ravan Press justifying the ban indicates, the initial decision to declare the book undesirable was mainly based on issues of readership and on the popular character of the book (P88/06/162). The Director of Publications wrote that "this book is

directed at young scholars who obviously attach great importance to the written word and its presentation", further arguing:

> this publication can be used in a very subtle manner to condition the pupil's questioning thought pattern and to create a sympathy for violence, arson, hate for the police and the state in general; that blacks should be armed, because … 'A nation is no nation without arms … and … Doom to South African white rule and British Imperialism' (P88/06/162).

The effect of the book was therefore considered in light of the likely readership, which was assumed, according to this passage, to be gullible and naïve, easily influenced and impressed by role-models such as their teachers. Noting the alleged subversive nature of the book, the Director of Publication further denounces the fact that this book will "create a mental state in the young people that will be conducive to them participating in the violent onslaught against the present order" (P88/06/162), thus portraying a readership prone to subversion. The likely readership was not only defined in relation to the book being published as a textbook, but also in light of its popular characteristics, which would inevitably attract a wide and young – read easily influenced – readership: "With its popular content and its easily readable content, this book will be read by thousands of scholars" (P88/06/162). Ravan appealed the board's decision through their lawyers, in a ten-page letter addressed to the Publications Appeal Board, then chaired by Van Rooyen. Ravan claimed, amongst other things, that the decision was not in accordance with the guidelines of the PAB, that it was based on an uncontextual reading of the publication, and that it was vague and unsubstantiated (P88/06/162). Ravan's main thread of argumentation, which underpins the whole appeal document, is that the book is unlikely to incite its likely readers, successfully using the kind of rhetoric adopted by the PAB.

Contextualising its claim, Ravan points out that the twelve-page comic, which is part of the People's College Comics Series, was initially published in 1981 in the magazine *Upbeat*, emphasising the fact that it was already in circulation in South Africa for the past seven years and that the autobiography the comic is based on has been freely available in South Africa for several years. Moreover, Ravan, alluding to questions of authorship,

brings to the attention of the PAB the fact that Mphahlele is "respected by the black community as a moderate and uncontroversial figure" (P88/06/162).

The function of the text is also touched upon in Ravan's appeal, and the didactic qualities of the publication are clearly stated, perhaps in the hope it would serve as a mitigating factor, half of the publication containing grammatical and writing exercises "designed to improve linguistic and literary skills of its readers", specifying that "the political content in these pages is merely incidental and is used as a vehicle to stimulate interest in the exercises" (P88/06/162). On this point, Ravan seemingly contests the usage those alleged young readers will make of their reading as asserted by censors, pointing out that readers could use the book positively to improve their linguistic and literary skills, and that the conditioning of a "questioning thought pattern" is something towards which the education system should work (P88/06/162). According to Ravan, adults could also be part of the likely readership, as the book could be used to improve English literacy skills (P88/06/162).

Intratextual elements are also brought into the line of arguments, for instance the fact that the censors did not consider issues around characterisation in their decision when, for instance, quoting Zeph's utterances "A nation is not nation without arms" and "Doom to South African white rule and British imperialism". According to Ravan, Zeph is "the firebrand of the school", and considerations around the development of his character would have helped in contextualising his statements in an otherwise realistic and balanced depiction of the South African political scene of the 1950s:

> The form of the publication does not permit the development of his character beyond a mere humorous caricature. In addition, he is drawn in a grotesque and exaggerated manner. He is peripheral to the main story line, occupying only two frames of the publication, and does not exercise any influence on the political development of the main character. The words he utters, being mere political rhetoric, provide an insight into the atmosphere and thoughts of some of the school boys at the time. They are unlike to incite readers to contravene the interests protected in Section 47 (2) (e) (P88/06/162).

Contesting the one-sided view proposed by censors that the young likely readership will be incited to perpetrate violence, Ravan emphasises the complexities of this readership saying that the youth's political development and political actions are more complex than what is depicted in *Down Second Avenue – The Comic*, quoting from Robert Coles's *The Political Life of Children*: "one must shun the temptation to leap from the child's political awareness to the adult's political behaviour" (P88/06/162). By using this quote, not only does Ravan confer authority on its argument, but it also insinuates that the censors projected their own reading as adults onto children, who as Ravan points out, read on a different level. Ravan further points out that the effect of a publication on the likely reader should be measured in terms of the likelihood of violence in relation to the historical context, conveniently quoting van Rooyen's *Censorship in South Africa*:

> A real threat to the interests in Section 47 (2) (e) will be found to exist only if a substantial number of likely readers are likely to be more pre-disposed to violence than they would have been prior to having read the particular publication (P88/06/162).

The "light-hearted", "humorous", "easy" and "informal" tone and style of the publication, which for the censors represents an aggravating factor as it means a larger readership and wider diffusion, should be seen, according to Ravan, as an indicator that the publication is "by no means a serious political piece" (P88/06/162). For Ravan these easy reading qualities mean that the publication is unlikely to pose a threat to state security via its likely readers.

In a letter from the Director of Publications dated 20 December 1988, the Director of Publications overturned its decision and declared the publication to be not undesirable, on conditions that "it may only be distributed by bookshops, lending libraries and book distributors" (P88/06/162). These conditions and restrictions imposed by censors on "not undesirable" publications are typical of the post-1978 censorship dispensation, as detailed earlier in this chapter.

Amidst all this controversy and the fact that Mphahlele's was a listed communist, *Down Second Avenue*, in its narrative and comic forms, was read in South Africa. Interestingly,

and probably because of the "difficult case" posed by *Down Second Avenue* to the various censorship boards, the Police Department and the Ministry of Justice, readers lost track of whether the book was actually banned or not. Thinking it was banned, some readers wondered why that was the case, or why the book prompted the censors to scrutinise it. Chris van Wyk recalls the relevance he found in *Down Second Avenue*, linking Mphahlele's story to his own personal experience:

> It was a lovely book, an honestly told story about childhood and growing up. And I think in a sense it is the most powerful message in the book: he was not writing out of anger, he was writing quietly […] and the government did not want people to know what was happening so they banned the book. But that book still kept on selling. It still sells all over the world, it's a classic (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

The case of *Down Secnod Avenue*, in both its autobiography and comic editions, is a telling example of the censorship apparatus at work. The reports on Mphahlele's autobiography clearly demonstrate the literary considerations at play in the Dekker's censorship board. The effect of the publication on a black and white readership respectively were discussed in the light of its literary merit and potentially subversive character, the censors concluding that white readers would gain insights into the "black experience" while it was stated that black readers would not be enticed by it, as they were familiar with the reality depicted and Mphahlele's tone was not provocative. It is also interesting to note that although Mphahlele was a listed communist, his stature and the literariness of his autobiography served as mitigating factors to pass the publication, at least in terms of the censorship board's scope of duties, the censors seemingly aware that banning would attract unwanted publicity to the book. As the reports on the comic version reveal, the censors' discourse returned to a focus on the likely reader after being focused on political content in the mid-1970s, van Rooyen's PAB overturning an earlier ban in light of this likely readership. Van Rooyen's PAB reports also illustrate the "repressive tolerance" at play in the censors' discourse in the 1980s, whereby the "period value" of a publication played against a ban.

**Case study 2: Dennis Brutus**

Another South African journalist, educator, poet and political activist who preoccupied South African authorities throughout the apartheid years, is Dennis Brutus. From 1953, Brutus was the secretary of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), and from 1963 its president. Through SANROC, Brutus campaigned against racial discrimination and racism in sports. In 1962, Brutus was one of the 102 anti-apartheid activists silenced by the General Law Amendment Act, or Sabotage Act, which banned Brutus from teaching, publishing and being a member of any organisation, as McDonald explains:

> Following the terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, this new 'gagging clause' banned various writers and journalists as persons, removing their rights of association, among other things, but it also made it illegal for them to be quoted in public (2009a, 33).

Brutus was first arrested in 1963 having contravened the conditions of his ban by attending a meeting, and in 1964 he was given an eighteen-month sentence on Robben Island prison. In 1966 he left South Africa on a one-way exit permit and went to London, where he lived until 1970. In 1970, he moved to the United States until his return to South Africa in the early 1990s. During his years of exile abroad, Brutus continued to write poetry and pursued his anti-apartheid work while lecturing in various universities.

Brutus' first collection of poetry, *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots*, was published in 1964 by Nigerian Mbari Publications while he was serving his sentence on Robben Island. Considered a dangerous communist by the apartheid government, Brutus' corpus of work was published abroad and banned in South Africa throughout most of the apartheid era, which inevitably limited the size of his South African readership. As McDonald points out, together with Breyten Breytenbach, Peter Horn, Ingoapele Madingoane, Wopko Jensma, Daniel P. Kunene, Mazisi Kunene, and James Matthews, Brutus was one of the "poets the censors believed posed the greatest threat to the established order" (2009a, 288).

However, in the 1980s, the Department of Customs and Excise, the South African State Library and the University of Potchefstroom Library, amongst others, submitted some of Brutus' poetry collections to the Directorate of Publications for decision or review, as will be detailed below. Seemingly, some of Brutus's work was in possession of the South African State Library or was intercepted by customs agents, which prompted this series of applications to the censorship board, now operating as per the Publications Act of 1974 and Publications Amendment Act of 1978.

A Dutch translation of *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison*, translated as *Aan Martha – Brieven van Robbeneiland*, was sent to the publications board by the State Library in 1980. A.H. Murray drafted the reader's report, in which he points out that like its English original version, this is a collection of "serious" poetry and that "there are some beautiful poems", and that they do not allude to political events or occurrences but rather to the "writer's feelings and meditation at the time of his banning and imprisonment and as detainee in the prison" (P80/2/50, translation mine). Murray concludes that "the book has no propagandistic effect or inciting effect – at least not directly. I think I am in for its being passed but with hesitation" (P80/2/50, translation mine). The likely reader test, as detailed in the first chapter, seemingly played in favour of the Dutch version of Brutus' poetry collection being passed, as it seemingly was assumed that the publication being serious poetry written in Dutch and thus appealing to a Dutch-speaking readership, there would be no "direct" propagandistic or inciting effect on the reader. The publication was, without further comments or arguments, considered "not undesirable" and returned to the Director of the State Library.

Interestingly, the original English version of *Letters to Martha*, published in 1968 in Heinemann's African Writers Series, was also submitted to the publications board by the Department of Customs and Excise later in 1980. The report opens with a brief overview of the writer, where it is noted that "Brutus is known to the committee and on the back cover mention is made of the fact that he is responsible for South Africa's exclusion from the Olympic Games" (P80/2/143, translation mine). The report continues with an analysis of the content and ensuing comments. The report concludes that "although most poems

have some connection with the prison, there are only some which are problematic and should receive attention", it is found to be not undesirable (P80/2/143, translation mine). The following page of the report provides the reasons for this conclusion, alluding specifically to these "problematic" poems. As the censor's report points out: "Judging by the remarks on the back cover of the publication, the reader would expect to find a strong political message. However, it is not the case" (P80/2/143, translation mine). It is noted that the word "apartheid" is used only once with reference to sports, and that "as far as the poem is concerned, it cannot be claimed that its content is subversive or offensive within the meaning of Section (47) (2)" (P80/2/143, translation mine). The censors' analysis continues, singling out the poems *Blood River* and *Their Behaviour*, both dealing with celebration of Heroes' Day, and *On the Island*, which deals with life in prison. As the censor observes, in these poems, Brutus addresses these issues otherwise potentially undesirable in a language "that is not such that the poems can be considered undesirable" and "to which offence cannot be taken" (P80/2/143, translation mine). Pointing towards a potential cause for moralistic concern, the report highlights a "homosexual note" in the poem *Letters to Martha* but it is specified, "it is too weak (subtle) to make the poem offensive" (P80/2/143, translation mine). These arguments mainly touch on aspects of the literary merit of the publication, as it is considered that the tone with which the potentially subversive or immoral issues addressed in the poems are dealt with are unlikely to cause incitement, probably in the light of an educated and highly literate readership. Moreover, this report demonstrates how a publication with literary merit could be scrutinised on a literary level, despite the background and intention of the author, at least since the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, as discussed above.

*Stubborn Hope* was submitted in 1980, also by the Department of Customs and Excise. This collection published in the African Writers Series was however banned, a decision based on readers' reports drafted by R.E. Lighton, who incidentally was a signatory of the 1963 anti-censorship petition, and Murray. Lighton points out that the collection has literary merit and that the poems touch on varied subjects, including apartheid and Robben Island. While he points out that in some instances these topics are treated in a way that is not undesirable, some poems "require close reading" (P80/1/147). These

poems, which justify the undesirability of the publication, contain undesirable references to conditions in prison, explicitly undesirable allusion to sexuality, undesirable attacks on the Security Police, and an undesirable allusion to the Sharpeville massacre (P80/1/147). Lighton therefore recommends a ban as per Section (47) (2) (e) of the Act of 1974, in other words in terms of the poems' possible threat to State security, general welfare and peace and good order. As he writes, the references to "the Robben Island prison warden 'laughing' with his foot on cheek of convict with head under water", "the sadism of officers", "the detention without trial for four months by the Secret Police", the events of Sharpeville "bullet-in-the-back day", which implies that "they were deliberately shot in the back while retreating", all constitute "half truths presented as the essential truth" (P80/1/147).

Murray, the second reader, reiterates the "problems" posed by the poems falling under the Robben Island sequence alluded to above (P80/1/147). The Director of Publication concludes the report and confirms the decision to ban the publication based on Lighton and Murray's observations regarding the Robben Island poems, even if great consideration is given to the non vindictive poetic, literary and even contemplative nature of Brutus' poetry:

> In general, they are of good quality, some even of a high standard. On the other hand some other poems are banal and composed in a facile manner. All poems are from his experience: there is no description of episodes or things: all reflect his emotional state regarding the subject matter, concerning his experiences as a banned person, or banning as such, or the political situation in the RSA, there are only about twelve references in passing, mostly of a contemplative nature, although all good natured (P80/1/147, translation mine).

J.P. Jansen's report on *Poems from Algiers*, submitted by the library of the University of Potchefstroom, declares the collection not undesirable, as "Dennis Brutus is a well-known poet. Some of his poems have been allowed in anthologies. There is no objection to the poems which appear in the booklet, which is not undesirable within the meaning of the Act, Section 47 (2)" (P80/9/31, translation mine), a decision endorsed without further comments from the Director of Publications, M.J. v.d. Westhuizen. In this case, one can

only suppose that the literary qualities of the poems and high level of language in which they are written, when considered against the likely readership – a limited and sophisticated academic and student readership – played a role in the ruling.

The South African Library submitted *A Simple Lust* to van Rooyen's PAB for review in 1988, as the collection of poems had previously been found undesirable in terms of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963. Referring to Brutus's poetry's personal political and social tone, M. Bosman, one of the readers, points out that given Brutus' political past, "one could be sceptical about quotations such as 'a common hate enriched on love and us'; 'victims of a sickly state'; 'oppression's power is charred to dust'; 'let them die in thousands'" (P87/08/48, translation mine). However, Bosman later emphasises the importance of considering the likely reader and not merely the intention of the author, quoting from the PAB's chairman van Rooyen's *Censorship in South Africa*:

> It is the book and its effect on the likely reader that must be judged and not the motives of the readers thereof. The motives of the writer may not be taken into account (P87/08/48).

Bosman continues his line of thoughts by pointing out, in the light of van Rooyen's advice that "the expected likely readership is limited since we are dealing with poetry. The subtle nature and degree of suggestion in poetry make it less accessible to the masses (to whom inciting reading material is directed)" (P87/08/48, translation mine). The inciting and offensive nature of poetry versus prose is then briefly discussed, and in light of these arguments, Bosman concludes that "the publication will not lead to a situation where 'a substantial number of likely readers are likely to be more predisposed to violence than they would have been prior to having read the publication" (P87/08/48). Scholtz, also sitting on the reader's committee, reiterated Bosman's decision, pointing out that the collection of poetry expresses "sentiments frequently expressed in the media which are mitigated by the vehicle of poetry" (P87/08/48). The ban on *Simple Lust* was thus lifted by a unanimous decision from the committee, in a telling example of the manner in which van Rooyen's reformist approach revolving around the likely reader and literary merit was applied in the censorship procedures in the 1980s.

*China Poems*, after being banned as per the provisions of the Publications Act of 1974, was reviewed upon submission by the South African Library. The ban was unanimously lifted by the PAB, as detailed in a report signed by E.H. Scholtz, chairman of the committee (P88/03/12). It is pointed out in the report that in the preface, "Brutus does mention that he reported to Oliver Tambo the Chinese support for 'your struggle for freedom in South Africa'", and that "it not longer qualifies it [as undesirable] in terms of [Section 47 (2)] (d) and (e)" (P88/03/12). As Scholtz notes, "this remark is not prejudicial to the safety of the State and is not enough for a finding of undesirability" (P88/03/12). This decision illustrates some important changes brought about by the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, namely the necessity to weigh the potential political subversive nature of a publication against its literary value and likely readership. Also the "historical value" or "period piece" factors seemingly played a role, as the distance between the events and the report was more than twenty years, *China Poems* having been published in 1975.

*Zeit-Gedichte*, a German translation of Brutus' poetry published in Germany, was scrutinised by the security committee in 1990 after being submitted by the acquisitions department of the South African Library (P90/04/69). The poetry collection is judged not undesirable on the ground of its limited readership:

> The poems are in German, which already means that it will have a very small readership in South Africa; there must be very few people who speak German and also read poetry. The book's readership will consist, literarily and figuratively, of just a small select group (P90/04/69, translation mine).

Moreover, it is pointed out that some of these poems are already available in other publications in South Africa, and that while they are protest poetry in essence, they are not inciting or subversive: "They are protest poems but are characterised by a remarkable lack of bitterness and vengefulness" (P90/04/69, translation mine). This line of argument is typical of the relative tolerance displayed in the censors' speech towards the end of

apartheid, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and the likely readership factor is, as discussed above, served in this case as a mitigating factor against a ban.

The censors' reformist and at times even slightly appreciative approach to Brutus' work represents a radical shift from the authorities' nonnegotiable condemnation of Brutus' work, both literary and politically, that occurred in the 1960s, where seemingly most of his work was banned in respect of the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963 or by virtue of Brutus being a listed communist. The overall approach adopted by censors towards Brutus' poetry is a good illustration of the application of the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, as applied and implemented by van Rooyen from 1980. Whilst not being overtly subversive and using a highly poetic language, as pointed out by the various censors' reports discussed above, Brutus' poetry nevertheless contained some elements of protest poetry, which were now tolerated by the censors in the 1980s, seemingly in line with van Rooyen's advice that "it is often in the interests of state security to permit the expression of pent-up feelings and grievances" (1987, 16).

As far as unbanning of previously banned material is concerned, an examination of van Rooyen's discussion on "the question of changing attitudes" provides insights on the changing censorship apparatus and ideology adopted by censors, which is, according to van Rooyen, in line with the progressive opening of South Africa to the rest of the world through an increased access to media and foreign ideas and influences (1987, 17). Rhetorically asking if a decision to overturn a ban signals a change in morality, van Rooyen answers that what changes is not morality or religious precepts, but is in fact "individual perspective, and this has an influence on tolerance. For example, ten years ago there was little room for political dialogue with blacks, while such dialogue is at present an everyday occurrence" (1987, 17).

**Case study 3: *Staffrider* magazine & Staffrider series**

The Johannesburg-based publication *Staffrider*, which enjoyed considerable popularity from its first issue published in March 1978 and throughout the 1980s, contributed to the

revival of so-called black poetry in South Africa, as discussed in the previous chapter. The first editorial entitled "About *Staffrider*" sets the tone adopted by the magazine and clearly identifies the objective of *Staffrider*, addressing in passing the censors, with whom *Staffrider* would have regular encounters:

> A skilful entertainer, a bringer of messages, a useful person but… slightly disreputable. Our censors may not like him, but they should consider putting up with him. A whole new literature is knocking at the door, and if our society is to change without falling apart it needs all the messages it can get – the bad as well as the good.
>
> […]
>
> The magazine which bears this name has been established by Ravan Press in an attempt to respond, as publishers, to the great surge of creative activity which has been one of the more hopeful signs of recent times.
>
> The new writing has altered the scope and function of literature in South Africa in ways we have still to discover. The aim of this magazine is not to impose standards but to provide a regular meeting place for the new writers and their readers, a forum which will help to shape the future of our literature.
>
> A feature of much of the new writing is its 'direct line' to the community in which the writer lives. This is a two-way line. The writer is attempting to voice the community's experience ('This is how it is') and his immediate audience is the community ('Am I right?'). Community drama, 'say' poetry, an oral literature backed and often inspired by music: this is the heart of the new writing, and the signs are the prose forms are re-emerging in the new mould. [Sic]
>
> It is for this reason that the work appearing in Staffrider flies the flag of its community (Quoted in Chapman 2007, 125).

The very first issue of *Staffrider* was deemed undesirable as per Section 47 (2) (a), (d) and (e) of the Act of 1974, after being submitted by Colonel C.J.W. de Plooy of the South African police in April 1978 (P78/4/50). The committee of publications' report states that while some material is of the "same undesirable nature as that published in Donga", a prohibited publication, some material "has decided literary merit" (P78/4/50). According to the final decision, signed by Lighton, the undesirability is based on the following reading of the publication against the Section 47 (2) (a), (d) and (e) of the Act of 1974,

respectively: “the undesirable parts of the publication are those in which the authority and image of the police, as the persons entrusted by the State with maintaining law, internal peace order, are undermined”; “offensive language – such as the use of ‘fuck’ and its derivative, ‘poes’ and ‘shitty’ – is found in the article ‘Van’”; “material calculated to harm Black/White relations appears in the poem ‘Change’ and the article ‘Soweto’” (P78/04/50). This decision to ban *Staffrider*’s launch issue was gazetted in the *Government Gazette* of 14 April 1978, after the censorship board notified the Ministry of the Interior of the decision (P78/04/50). As is observable from the arguments in favour of banning, no consideration around the issue of the likely reader was made, as this case is prior to the adoption of the Publications Amendment Act of 1978, which was enacted in June 1978 and effectively implemented as from 1980. Therefore, the political protest tone alone sufficed to justify a ban. The ban was appealed and overturned in February 1990, based on the fact that:

> The probable reader of this publication will not be offended by most of the description contained therein. The literary nature of most works in the publication makes it seem unlikely that the publication will have a wide circulation or many young impressionable readers. Most works contained in the publication have literary merit (P89/12/05).

The tone and issues being considered in 1989 contrast with the arguments proposed in the 1978 censors’ report, and clearly illustrate how a political tone was gradually replaced with literary considerations revolving around literary merit and likely readership, as exemplified in the subsequent censors’ reports on *Staffrider*.

*Staffrider*’s subsequent issue, Volume 1 Number 2, was also scrutinised by censors in June 1978, after once again being sent by Colonel du Plooy. This time, the likely readership was taken into account in the censors’ justification. It was concluded that, given the fact that the educated reader would not be shocked or phased by the information contained in the publication and that the “average-black-man-in-the-street” would not grasp the poems and their subtleties, “the publication was preferable above ground than underground” (P78/6/101, translation mine). These censors’ references to the “educated reader” and the “average black man” in terms of the second issue of *Staffrider*

would be the beginning of the censors' constant considerations for the likely readership present in most subsequent censors' reports on *Staffrider*.

A case of appeal against the banning of *Staffrider* Volume 3 Number 2 of June 1980 was lodged in September 1980 by the Directorate of Publications to the PAB, then chaired by van Rooyen. This case provides a good representation of van Rooyen's philosophy and rationale applied to a publication that was initially considered undesirable within the meaning of Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) of the Publications Act of 1974. Van Rooyen opens his report with a summary of his main arguments, namely that this is a "sophisticated publication with derogatory politic comment not undesirable", that "the likely readership is limited", that "it includes items with literary merit or, at least, worthy of literary consideration" and that "the publication is for the literate by the literate and for the converted by the converted" (P80/7/31). Van Rooyen considers whether the publication, through its readers, would violate or contribute to the violation of State security, as detailed in Section 47 (2) (e) of the Act of 1974:

> Would the likely reader of this publication react in a manner which would violate or contribute to a violation of the interests which are protected in the said paragraph? In regard to Section 47 (2) (d) the same test applied. Would the publication have the effect of leading to or contributing to animosity between black and white? Once again the likely readership is of cardinal importance (P80/7/31).

In identifying his likely readership, van Rooyen refers to extra textual elements of the publication, namely the editorial quality and price of the publication, which he seems to judge as being high. According to him, the likely readership would be "the more sophisticated black man and the white man who is interested in reading literary material by blacks" (P80/7/31). Van Rooyen further points out that:

> As may be expected in a review that published whatever can be covered by the umbrella of protest, there is a general derogation of whites and their government, but there are contributions that serve as a corrective to this, for instance John Gambanga's *Orphaned for Birth*, in which a child is orphaned by 'triggerhappy' blacks, and *Chapmans Home Territory*, in which a white man's sense of compassion is the theme (P80/7/31).

Van Rooyen is arguing that these examples "serve to mitigate the Publications Committee's decision that whites are presented in a bad light" (P80/7/31). He also evokes the fact that some potentially subversive passages are already known to the potentially easily enticed black readership, and that it is necessary for the probable white readership to "understand black problems", both considerations serving as mitigating factors:

> The fact is that the black masses, even the illiterate, have heard at gatherings, like funerals, the things that have been re-uttered here, and finding *Staffrider* undesirable on such grounds, would be like locking the stable door after the horse has bolted. Whites are likely to gain more than to lose by being given access to black thinking through this kind of medium (P80/7/31).

The report goes on to advocate the development of "black culture", in a kind of rhetoric typical of van Rooyen's reformist approach, pointing out that "Even though *Staffrider* itself may regard literary standards as 'elitist', the fact that it includes items of literary merit and validity serves to advance black culture, and that is, indeed, a mitigating and even commendable consideration" (P80/7/31). It is therefore concluded that the Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) are not violated by this publication, and that "the appeal succeeds and the decision of the Publications Committee that the publication is undesirable is set aside" (P80/7/31).

Interestingly, the likely readership imagined by censors seemingly contrasts with the image depicted by the editorial quoted above and Chris van Wyk's account of a "people's magazine", where writers and readers of all levels of literacy and walks of life would interact in the space opened up by the publication (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). However, as illustrated by van Wyk's comment above and Belinda Bozzoli's notion of "translation" (2004) discussed in the previous chapter, the readership of a publication such as *Staffrider* went well beyond the select group of intellectuals and literate readers typically associated with poetry. Van Wyk points out that *Staffrider*, which generally published both so-called serious and popular literature, was distributed amongst writers, intellectuals, and readers in trains and on streets pavements to reach a wider audience (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007). Tom Lodge reiterates the inclusiveness of the

readership rallied around Black Consciousness publications in urban South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s in these terms:

> If its influence was limited to the urban intelligentsia this would have guaranteed its imprint on almost any African political assertion of the time. Distilled to a basic set of catchphrases, Black Consciousness percolated down to a broader and socially amorphous group than African intellectuals (1983, 325).

In another report dated December 1980, in which *Staffrider* Volume 3 Number 3 is under review by the PAB, the Directorate of Publications who submitted the claim for appeal, argues that this issue of *Staffrider*, "although at times hostile, irritating and provocative, falls within the permissible limits of Black protest literature" (P80/10/146). It further points toward the fact that "some articles are not without literary merit" and that "the probable readership is confined to persons Black and White, who take an interest in Black literature; and that the degree of tolerance shown by the South African community is higher when applied to Black than the other writers" (P80/10/146). In its detailed decision, the PAB proposed the same arguments as those raised in report P80/7/31 on Volume 3 Number 2 discussed above, namely that the political tone of the publication is overall not undesirable nor inflammatory and that the likely readership is limited and literate (P80/10/146). The PAB however goes a step further towards the tolerant approach that came to characterise van Rooyen's reformist discourse:

> In its well formulated appeal the Directorate submits that *Staffrider* fulfils the need for a publication devoted to the advance of black literature, however uneven the product may at times be. It also favours the growth of black culture and education, in themselves desirable attainments. The Directorate also points out that black literature cannot at all times avoid voicing a protest, justified or not, against allegedly discriminatory actions or conditions. It is common cause between white and black that unnecessary and unfair discrimination should be progressively eliminated. This cause can only be furthered if blacks are given the opportunity of indicating what they regard as unfair treatment, as is done, on more than one occasion in this *Staffrider* (P80/10/146).

Based on these premises, the ban on *Staffrider* Volume 3 Number 3 is overturned, "although the publication is often bitter in its statement of grievances" (P80/10/146).

Reader E.H. Scholtz, in a report dated 2 March 1981 also rules against a ban on the *Staffrider* issue of December/January 1981, arguing that:

> The quality is such that it would probably find its public amongst the more discerning and even sophisticated black (and white) readers. This is not a vehicle for blatant and vociferous propaganda, but for sentiments and convictions already channelled into articulate and even aesthetic form (P81/2/16).

The series of reports on *Staffrider* Volume 5 Number 3 also provides an example of the dynamic character of the notion of likely readership at play, which was in this particular report thought of as being constantly evolving and changing, on par with the socio-political events unfolding in South Africa in the 1980s (P83/11/122). This particular issue of *Staffrider* was initially the object of disagreement amongst censors, but was in the end found to be "not undesirable" on the grounds of its likely "sophisticated readership" by a vote of three to two (P83/11/122). An appeal of this decision was lodged to the chairman of the PAB by the Director of Publications, then Abraham Coetzee, who argues that the publication contravened Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) of the Publications Act of 1974. Coetzee's request for appeal, lodged in December 1983, is underpinned by the realisation that some of the mitigating factors previously brought into a decision or a review are at times no longer valid in the light of a changing South African reality. Coetzee's line of argument is based on the premise that the readership for *Staffrider* is, as established in previous reports, "limited" and "sophisticated" but might have evolved over the years, which shows a thorough reflection on the notion of likely readership:

> The likely readership of the publication would normally have expanded since the 1980 decisions of the Appeal Board. The present circulation is of the order of 3 000, of which many copies are sent abroad. This circulation gives a not insignificant readership of more than 10 000 (P83/11/122).

In his request for appeal, Coetzee unpacks the arguments formulated by van Rooyen in the two previous PAB cases, emphasising that the "Appellant's general submission is that the reasoning in those cases, which Appellant accepts, does not always apply, or applies to a lesser extent, to the present third issue of 1983" (P83/11/122).

Coetzee further argues that:

> The likely readership would include sophisticated revolutionary Whites and Blacks who will use some of the content for fuelling and encouraging alleged grievances; for fostering hatred of the system of law and order; for undermining the country's war effort (in extreme cases a treasonable offence) and for praising criminals who had fallen foul of the country's security legislations. The magazine seeks, in part, to convert others for the furthering of the aims mentioned and, insofar as it is by the converted for the converted, the latter will be able to use it as an instrument for furthering those aims and "convert" others (P83/11/122).

The spiralling effect of the publication on its readership is noted, and the traditionally mitigating "literary" factor is now seen as playing against the censors, as can be observed when Coetzee affirms that "the effect of such literary value can indeed be counter-productive and expand the readership, and strengthen the undesirable impact of dangerous material" (P83/11/122). Moreover, Coetzee believes that "in this issue of *Staffrider* there are, as will be shown, utterances which, in their vileness and hatred, exceed what has been publicly stated by Black agitators" (P83/11/122).

In a very detailed analysis of the "subversive" and "revolutionary" character of the *Staffrider* issue at stake, the report quotes several passages believed to contribute to the undesirable character of the publication. This is then followed with an entire paragraph assessing the potential consequences of the publication on several identified potential readerships. It is pointed out that the publication may incite the likely reader in the light of the fact that:

> (a) The publication also circulates in Black schools. The vicious poems could be read to *young receptive minds* by teachers themselves influenced by the content;
> (b) The publication could be used by *banned organisations abroad* to *incite hostility* to South Africa and *seek sympathy* for Communist and allied causes;
> (c) It could be used as a means of getting funds from *anti-South African organisations abroad*;
> (d) It could contribute to *student unrest*. It is made readily available at outlets near to universities. On page 49 such outlets as the Campus Bookshop in Braamfontein, Open Books in Mowbray, Logan's

University Bookshop in Durban and the University of Zululand Bookshop are mentioned;

(e) *Students and other young persons* will be incited to oppose the war effort, to reject military service and to give comfort to the enemy through the contents. It inevitably leads to the death of loyal young South Africans on the border;

(f) The attacks on the police *generate contempt for the law, and encourage and incite to criminal acts*, including physical assaults on policemen, resulting in injury and death;

(g) The *sympathy shown for communism is calculated to further the aims of that dangerous system*. To do so can make a person guilty of a very serious crime; and

(h) An effect not often realised is that scurrilous language of the nature mentioned, if its existence became known, would do lasting damage to the goodwill created in recent years by enlightened Government action. There are *Whites, many Whites, including enlightened ones who will refuse to tolerate such insults to their dignity and culture*. Polarisation will grow, resulting in retaliatory action, first in words, later in deeds. Confrontation will become inevitable. Is that what *Staffrider* is aiming at? [emphasis added] (P83/11/122)

Seemingly, in the eyes of the Director of Publications, this issue of *Staffrider* had important consequences on a broad spectrum of potential likely readers, ranging from the learners and students in South African institutions to the anti-apartheid organisations abroad, via the political activists operating in the country. These arguments, he points out, warrant a review of the initial decision not to ban the publication.

A committee of readers, chaired by Dr. R. Wiehahn, subsequently drafted a report which was received by the PAB in February 1984. According to the report, "none of the poetry or prose in this particular edition of *Staffrider* can be seriously regarded as being dangerous subversive literature", as "no new statements about black experience" are made, as the type of writing is "ineffective" and "airs grievances", as "the 'creative' writing displays no literary merit whatsoever" (P83/11/122). Wiehahn also exhibits an elitist notion of poetry, claiming that "the contributors to this edition of *Staffrider* seem to have a mistaken notion of what constitutes poetry", later commenting, in reference to some particular poems, that "these strident and formless cries have nothing to do with real poetry" (P83/11/122). Because of this lack of literary merit, the committee concluded that this issue of *Staffrider* "cannot possibly be an effective political weapon in the

promotion of revolution in South Africa" (P83/11/122). Linking the literary merit of publication to the literary reader, the report concludes that both a sophisticated and uneducated readership will not show interest in this publication, as Wiehahn emphasises, even using the words "sophisticated" and "revolutionary" in the same breath:

> Who is the likely reader of such inferior literature? The sophisticated revolutionary can only reject it as drivel that reduces and trivializes the cause he believes in. And those semi-literates that may be inflamed by emotional outbursts will quite probably reject it too because of the 'literary' guise in which it is cast (P83/11/122).

Having received and read the committee of experts' report, van Rooyen, as chairman of the PAB, then proceeds to draft his own report which he concludes in favour of dismissing the appeal, thus declaring the publication not undesirable. Addressing Coetzee's concerns regarding the likely readership, as formulated in the initial request for appeal discussed above, van Rooyen commends Wiehahn's report's references to previous PAB decisions and the extensive development of the argumentation in favour of a pass, quoting from the committee's report:

> Though some poems may be calculated to arouse ill feelings between races, more can be tolerated in such a literary magazine of quality with a sophisticated readership. Nothing new is said which had not appeared in the newspapers over and over. The Appeal Board has stressed the 'sophisticated' reader in the case – *The Classic*, Volume 1 No.1 (P83/11/122).

Van Rooyen then proceeds to draw his conclusions regarding the likely readership, before dismissing the appeal:

> A revolutionary will find nothing in this publication that he has not heard before in the line of grievances and complaints and nothing to inspire him to action or to indicate that action, not already suggested, is to be taken. An unsophisticated reader is not likely to acquire the publication, and if he does, he is not likely to find anything in it to hold his interest. Sophisticated readers will recognise the poor quality of much of the writing and find it simply boring and irritating (P83/11/122).

In reports on subsequent issues of *Staffrider*, the appreciation of the literary merit seems to have drastically changed, which perhaps coincides with new editorial policies at

*Staffrider*, where community editorial groups were replaced with a professional editor, as detailed in the previous chapter. A report signed by A.M. Theron dated February 1987, for instance, points out that "this is a literary magazine of merit for Black people", adding that "This magazine is directed at a very limited sophisticated readership. Such a publication should be available to the intelligent reader" (P87/02/17). In light of this "sophisticated" and "intelligent", "black" likely readership, the committee of readers unanimously found *Staffrider* Volume 5 Number 3 to be not undesirable, concluding that "The articles and poems give expression to 'black' suffering, frustrations, experiences, ideals and aspirations. All these are expressed without any tendency to incite violence or undermine the safety of the state" (P87/02/17).

In a subsequent report also dated February 1987, Theron examines *Staffrider* Volume 6 Number 1, which was published in 1984 (P87/02/18). The issue of getting insight into other racial groups and readerships is raised, for instance when it is stated that the book review section "gives good insight of literary works important to this readership" (P87/02/18). The likely readership is also alluded to, Theron pointing out that "this magazine is directed at a very limited, sophisticated readership. There is need for a publication devoted to the advancement of black literature and culture, it is essential that the creative section should have a mouthpiece" (P87/02/18). These remarks bear witness to the "new" spirit of tolerance towards protest literature in particular and so-called black literature in general.

A report on *Staffrider* Volume 6 Number 4 signed by D.M. Morrell identifies "a moneyed above average intellectually minded person" as the likely readership (P87/04/107). After identifying some passages where "high level intellectual commentary" and "distinct literary merit" are observable, the report points out that "the target market is certainly more than averagely literate", the report however observes that some "repetitive, wearisome mediocrity of well known situations and viewpoints (reflecting chaos rather than construction) which must jade rather than incite or stimulate the average reasonable reader" (P87/04/107). Contrary to some previous decisions, whereby a less educated reader would be blindly incited by so-called protest poetry, the censors conclude that

"Overall the effect is unlikely to provoke and for this reason in particular this volume of *Staffrider*, in terms of the Publications Act, cannot be considered undesirable" (P87/04/107). This decision is attributable to the sophisticated therefore limited size of the readership, and to the fact that the publication is, as emphasised by Scholtz "of uneven quality and is not likely to make a marked impact on its readers" (P87/04/107), and to the fact that what could be considered as protest is already known to this readership. In its letter to the South African police, who had submitted the publication for decision, the Director of Publications formulates the decision to pass this issue of *Staffrider* in this manner, adopting the rhetoric introduced by van Rooyen earlier in the 1980s:

> The Committee feels that a revolutionary will find nothing in this publication that he has not heard before in the line of grievances and complaints. An unsophisticated reader is not likely to acquire the publication, and if he does, he is not likely to find anything in it to hold his interest. As had often been stated by the Appeal Board grievances do exist and cannot be ignored. […] Publications of this nature serve a useful purpose in that they keep population groups abreast of the feelings and aspirations of others (P87/04/107).

An even more radical change in discourse is observable in a report dated June 1989 on *Staffrider* Volume 8 Number 1, where the political activist reader, previously considered as a subversive and undesirable reader, is elevated to the ranks of "discerning" and "progressive":

> The standard of the material is fairly high and obviously intended for the more discerning reader, i.e. the progressive cultural fraternity, all those concerned with establishing a new cultural environment free of ethnic and class prejudices and the abominations of Apartheid (P89/06/36).

The reference to the "abominations of Apartheid" is also a considerable shift from the conservative and pro-apartheid discourse embraced by censors in most previous reports, and is a reflection of the new discourse emerging in South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. J.M. Els, who drafted the report, justifies his decision to pass this issue of *Staffrider* based on the sophisticated and limited readership, and that "in these leftist circles a deleterious effect of the publication will be, if any, negligible" as there is "no

call to violence, revolution or Marxism" (P89/06/36). Furthermore, Els seemingly guides the reader in reading the poetry section, advocating a "descriptive" rather than "emotive" reading of the poems that could otherwise be considered inflammatory if read out of context (P89/06/36). The other readers sitting on the committee reiterates Els' analysis of the likely readership, pointing out that "the density of the text is likely to discourage casual readers" and that "the likely (regular) readers would find nothing new to provoke them" (P89/06/36). This distinction between the "casual" and "regular" reader occurs frequently alongside the recognition that much of the publication is already known to the literate and seasoned readers. These observations introduce a new categorisation of readers in terms of the likely readership of the *Staffrider* magazine.

The ban on *Staffrider* Volume 4 Number 1 was appealed by Ravan in December 1989. The committee of readers unanimously signed in favour of overturning the ban, once again raising the fact that "the stories are to be read in context" since a couple of years have elapsed since their publication and initial banning in 1981 (P89/12/06). The report concludes that the likely readership is unlikely to be "inclined to undesirable activities as a result of reading" the magazines, furthermore arguing that *Staffrider* is "intended for a more sophisticated readership and in these (leftist) circles, no detrimental effects caused by its reading are likely" (P89/12/06).

As observable from these reports, which are only some of the many reports on *Staffrider* contained in the archives, *Staffrider* magazine was well known to censors. Censors initially based their decisions on the undesirable subversive nature of some poems or stories in the late 1970s, to eventually give greater importance to its allegedly sophisticated and limited likely readership and literary merit in a spirit of relative tolerance towards "black writing". This shift was prompted by the Publications Amendment Act of 1978 that came into effect and applied to literature by all writers as from 1980, and not just in favour of literature by white writers as was the case between 1978 and 1980, as discussed above.

Besides the *Staffrider* magazine, Ravan also published books under its Staffrider series. As McDonald points out, the Staffrider series was "conceived as an ambitious publishing experiment intended to bypass the white-controlled book trade, which focused on bookshop sales in the white city and the apartheid education market, by reaching out directly to a mass, black readership in the townships" (2009a, 323). As the Black Consciousness ideology underpinned this publishing venture as it did the *Staffrider* magazine, the titles published in the Staffrider series were prone to censorship. McDonald notes that the series, launched in 1979, was severely affected by censorship in its four first years of existence, before the years of "repressive tolerance", with eleven of its first fifteen titles being submitted by police to the censorship board, and out of a total of twenty-eight titles, seven being banned (2009a, 323).

Miriam Tlali's second novel, *Amandla*, was published and banned in 1981. The story is set against the immediate aftermath of the June 1976 Soweto youth uprising. In the words of S.S. Steekamp who sat on the committee of readers, it "deals with emotional, very sensitive, even explosive political and racial issues" (P85/1/94). Adopting a defiant and openly political tone, as pointed out by de Lange (1997, 143) the novel was submitted to the Directorate of Publications by the South African police in December 1981, and was unanimously found undesirable as per Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) of the Act of 1974, as it was considered harmful to race relations and State security (P81/1/108). It was concluded, "'this little book' furthers racist and anti-state attitudes. The book will be read in order to promote anti-state action and the revolutionaries", in other words by a subversive readership, and that the title itself (*Amandla* meaning power is isiXhosa and isiZulu and being chanted at public demonstrations) had an inciting effect (P81/1/108, translation mine).

The likely readership of the novel was therefore considered as highly subversive, and given the nature and tone of the novel, *Amandla* was declared undesirable. However, in "black" literary circles, *Amandla* was considered as a seminal novel on the Soweto events, as observed by McDonald:

> Tlali's *Amandla* was, in [Njabulo Ndebele's] view, 'the best novels written on the events of June 16' because in recounting the fortunes of two young lovers during the upheavals she was 'not just reporting, she was telling a story'. Questions about the specifically literary status of these stories and novels in the Staffrider Series also arose during the censors' deliberations, though their judgements were unsurprisingly less consistent and less nuanced than Ndebele's. They were also, in some cases, just crudely opportunistic (2009a, 330).

In 1985 *Amandla* was submitted for review to the PAB and was found not undesirable (P85/1/94), which reflects the changes in the censors' discourse brought about by the implementation of the Publications Amendment Act of 1978. Theron based his decision on S.S. Steenkamp's report, and essentially cites the period-value factor, likely readership and tolerance towards protest literature that came to characterise the 1980s' censorship board as justifying the unbanning of the publication:

> The socio-political climate has changed radically. What this publication purports to propagate is well-known to all blacks, young and old. The publication contains nothing that has not appeared in the press on numerous occasions in the past and latitude must be allowed for political criticism (P85/1/94).

The report signed by Steenkamp offers a detailed analysis of the novel's narrative, characters and plot against its alleged undesirability in terms of Section 42 (2) (d) and (e) of the Publications Act. It is considered a "border line case" as *Amandla*, whilst not undesirable is "not desirable" either (P85/1/94). The report, alluding to the polysemic and compelling narrative technique, notes that "even the omniscient narrator occasionally overtly interrupts the narrative by directly addressing the reader" (P85/1/94). The intrusion of the reader within the narrative, and the fine line between the writer and the narrator, are alluded to when the reports states that "everything is explicitly stated; what Tlali is trying to say, is hurled at the reader, hammered into his consciousness" (P85/1/94). This notion of the author "hammering" messages into the readers' conscience depicts an image of a vulnerable reader, who absorbs everything that is read, and that can be easily influenced. This easily enticed reader is problematic, and the question is thus asked:

> Whether this book in the light of its likely readership and its probable effect on those readers, will contribute to a violation of state security, general welfare, peace and good order by contributing directly or indirectly to an overthrowing of the existing government and the system by extra-constitutional means: subversion, sabotage, public violence, civil disobedience, communist-inspired means and ideals (P85/1/94).

The impact of the book on its readership was therefore crucial in the deliberation process, and opened the way for the next section of the report, discoursing on the likely readership.

The size of the readership is assessed in relation to questions of authorship, and special consideration is given to the effect a ban could have in terms of publicity:

> The fact that she is a well-known author, and a banned one at that, will create special attention for this novel. *Amandla* will be a popular novel. Sophisticated, educated black readers and those whites identifying with their cause as well as students of literature will probably be included in the likely readership. […] The *Staffrider* series aims at bringing new books at popular prices direct to the readers of the magazine (P85/1/94).

In this passage, three likely readerships are identified, i.e. "the educated black reader", "the white liberal reader" and "students of literature", which differs greatly from the "popular mass readership" considered in the initial decision.

Qualifying the novel as propagandistic, the report goes on enumerating the techniques used by Tlali, namely "misrepresentation", "slanted facts", "exaggeration", "distortion", which will be, in the opinion of Steenkamp, "decoded" by "enlightened" and "erudite" readers who are abreast of literary conventions (P85/1/94). Steenkamp further stipulates that because of the fact that the novel is "no great, powerful and gripping literary work", the readers will hardly identify with the characters and heroes of the novel, and therefore they will not be considered as symbols as, in the words of the report "Tlali has not succeeded in making her characterisation 'a device for the pointing of vision or meaning'" (P85/1/94).

As for the alleged attack on the police contained in the book, the report once again focuses on the "enlightened readers", seemingly the preferred likely reader with whom the censors identify themselves, who "will most probably judge the references to police atrocities within their own framework and regard the criticism and accusations as emotionally and politically inspired" (P85/1/94). Steenkamp concedes that "It is granted that the likely readership of *Staffrider* may include revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries. But these people will find their inspiration and incentive in publications of a more direct and inciting nature" (P85/1/94). Apart from this "revolutionary reader", the prospective reaction of an illiterate and immature readership is weighted carefully relative to the clenched fist depicted on the cover of the book, prompting a recommendation in favour of restrictions of circulation:

> The problem is that if this book were to be displayed at cafés, illiterate Blacks, immature Blacks may interpret this sign as a call to violence and a display of their power by means of subversion, sabotage, etc. It is recommended that the display of this book in public spaces be prohibited and that it be sold in bookshops only (P85/1/94).

The report also asks whether it is "practical to suggest a different cover design?" (P85/1/94). Once again, the alleged reactionary nature of an "immature" mass readership is highlighted.

Steenkamp concludes his report by speculating on the reactions of the various readerships at stake:

> Many readers will probably be upset, annoyed and angered by this book (which sometimes gives the impression of being deliberately challenging and daring) – like I was – but in the light of impending reform of Black Education and the creation of a political forum for Blacks, the need for interracial debate, communication and compromise, as well as of the arguments expounded in the previous pages (likely readership, correctives, etc.), I do not think that it is absolutely necessary that this book should be banned. Although not a desirable book, I consider this book not undesirable in the meaning of section 47 (2) (e). […] This book will most probably be internationally distributed whatever the decision of the Publications Board. The tag: 'Banned in South Africa' will amount to an effective advertisement and free publicity. This, however, is not a

> relevant factor when the novel's undesirability or not is being considered (P85/1/94).

The nature and expected reactions of the likely readership combined with the qualities of the novel thus combined provided enough justification for the overturning of the ban on the book. Moreover, the mention of the political reforms underway seemingly supports the reformist approach adopted by the PAB in the late 1980s, whereby a relatively "lenient" attitude was adopted towards protest literature.

As is apparent from reports on *Staffrider* series and magazine, the recognition of a different set of aesthetics and themes in "black literature" is another change from earlier censors' discourse, whereby the literary was narrowly defined and exclusive in terms of elitist standards and norms. Moreover, the relative latitude granted to black South African implies an acknowledgment that the readership for literature articulating such political grievances is not automatically incited as it can process its reading and is therefore more complex than initially portrayed to be in earlier reports. Moreover it indicates that such a readership is familiar with and recognises the issues articulated in works by authors with a similar background. The shift from a white likely readership interested in black literature to a black sophisticated readership, observable for instance in a comparison between the report on the first issue of *Staffrider* and later reports from the late 1980s, is also striking, and indicates the censors' appreciation of the fact that a black readership is multifaceted and heterogeneous. It also resonates with Chris van Wyk's account of the heterogeneity of the readerships united around Ravan, whereby intellectuals, authors and readers from all walks of life would find common ground in the literary experience brought by a magazine such as *Staffrider* (Personal Interview. 12 October 2007).

**Conclusion**

Through the examples discussed above, the general trends adopted by the censorship boards clearly emerge. From a situation where the mere mention of the word "communism" could warrant a ban, as per the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950 applied by the Ministry of Interior, the censorship discourse refined itself with the

Publications and Entertainments Act No. 25 of 1963. The Act of 1963 provided a space for literary considerations to be articulated against the backdrop of a developing hegemonic apartheid ideology imposed in the social sphere in general and on the literary field in particular. While aiming at protecting the interests of those closer to the centres of power, the Act of 1963 was eventually put to the test when dissensions on its fundamental principles emerged, leading to a reform of the system with the stricter Publications Act No. 42 of 1974.

Adopting a more direct political approach, the Act of 1974 extracted the censors' literary considerations to the profit of an increasingly political reading of publication submitted, which once again led to major divisions within the Afrikaans intelligentsia's ranks. In a bid to appease protests from within, the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978 proposed a reformist approach advocating the evaluation of the undesirability of a publication in light of its likely readership, reintroducing a certain measure of literary reflection to the censorship discourse. Although these amendments were passed in 1978, they initially mainly served white writers, and they were fully implemented in the 1980s, as the cases dating from 1980 witness.

Censors aimed at alienating writers and readers, and readers from each other, but they did not entirely succeed in doing so, as their intricate discussions and deliberations on the likely readership, for instance, were for the most part hypothetical and built on suppositions. Readers were often not conforming to the likely reader typecast imagined by censors, and were most certainly not always supporting the national project promoted by censors through their readings (Dick 2006a, 10). These alternative reading patterns created a public "with common visibility and common action", where an alternative discourse could be articulated (Warner 2002, 50). As André Brink points out:

> Censorship in South Africa has created for the reader a new sense of adventure in literature, a new sense of being 'in touch'. This is illustrated by the increased demand for banned books amongst white readers and the way in which new publications by blacks are sold on the streets of Soweto (1983, 52).

Despite the censors' attempts to regulate reading, some readers seemingly developed their own reading patterns, which were not necessarily aligned to the censors' "good reading" campaign. Censors tried to create a book apartheid, so to speak, whereby some books were good for some readers while other were not, and in doing so tried to limit the readers' exposure to some alleged subversive ideas. However, readers inevitably transcended the racial divisions imposed by censors, and managed to get some books that were thought of as being undesirable for their category of reader. The variety of banned books read by the various alternative readers identified through primary and secondary sources in this thesis bears testimony to this complexity, and shows how readers defied the censors in many ways.

## CHAPTER 7 | CONCLUSION

### Summary of Findings

The sphere of cultural production in South Africa has been greatly influenced by the censorship apparatus that developed parallel to, or even within, the apartheid system. In the specific case of literature, readers were confronted by various diktats created by the socio-political context in which they interacted with books and other readers. Laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, the Publications Act No. 42 of 1974 and the Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978 had profound effects on the literary industry and great impacts on the agents involved in the literary circuit. Censorship was generally-speaking designed and used as a political tool, aimed at silencing opposition and alternative opinions that may shatter the status quo. The role and functions of booksellers, librarians, publishers, academics, authors and readers involved in the mainstream industry were hindered and altered by these censorship laws. It resulted in a mainstream literary industry largely quiescent to the apartheid government and its policies, in part due to ideological and commercial concerns.

However, an alternative – and at times underground – literary movement soon emerged, whereby publications likely to be banned were produced, or in the case of already banned publications, exchanged and read by progressive individuals in a space underpinned by specific characteristics and motives. This alternative literary space was articulated by individuals from the various sectors of the industry, creating the conditions that enabled such alternative books and publications to run the full circuit typically followed by books, in terms of Robert Darnton's communication circuit involving authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers, and readers (2002, 10). Through the interactions and relations between these various agents, readers of banned literature were, in the South African context, invested with functions beyond the act of reading as such, and they negotiated their way into this literary space to read, share, and discuss some banned books even under the severe publications control prevailing. Apart from being

"borrowers" and "purchasers", readers were also "lenders" and "distributors" of books, as they took on the role of disseminators and marketers of banned texts, albeit at times in a marginal and underground fashion.

The broader context behind these banned books reveals a creativeness and assertiveness from the part of alternative readers, who came from various segments of the population. These readers constituted various kinds of readerships, which were informed by specific reading strategies and habits and levels of literacy, and used banned publications in various ways to befit their situations. Readers of banned publications showed great creativity in the ways they sourced, distributed, read, used and stored their reading material, and as such contributed to the creation of an alternative literary circuit where banned publications could exist. Public readings and private readings were observable reading strategies, and readings were used to initiate change in socio-political affairs and ideologies.

By doing so readers exemplified and at times challenged some key concepts and notions of the history of the book and of sociology of literature, by performing engaged reading, proposing alternative discourses and using books as a social tool in the broader political context. The dichotomy between the public and the private space was blurred, as a secret reading public is in itself ambiguous. The study of readers in the context of censorship in apartheid South Africa calls for a re-examination of some traditional theories, and points towards the necessity of taking into account marginalised and common readers as subjects of studies, especially in Africa where the margins and the centre, the elite and the popular, and the private and the public spheres tend to intersect, at times blending into each other.

**Conclusions**

By investigating the mutual influences between readers and society, reading strategies take on importance and relevance in terms of the readers' agency and creativity. When probing how progressive readers and their reading strategies were shaped by socio-

political circumstances, and conversely if these same readers played a role in South Africa's literary and socio-political order, one can revisit theories from the fields of the history of the book and sociology of literature. The assertiveness and activeness of readers of banned literature in South Africa during apartheid tends to confirm the agency of readers as advocated by the field of reader studies, amongst others. It emerges that readers influenced the literary industry by creating a space for alternative literature to exist, and also had an impact on larger socio-political affairs by articulating and sharing ideologies, discourses, concepts, and experiences which in turn informed various oppositional movements and alternative modes of thinking to apartheid. Moreover, they represented a central point in the elaboration of the censors' discourse and interpretive protocol, as is observable with the successive censorship boards' quasi constant preoccupation with issues of readership and readers.

Alternative or engaged readers had an influence on the society of the time, and through them books and ideas facilitated change and the promotion of new ideologies and ways of thinking. Through the printed word, a culture of resistance was strengthened and disseminated throughout the country, inspired by the ideas contained in banned publications but also translated by readers and disseminated to a wider public. In this context, the tripartite nature of books, as technology, ideology and social products, is made apparent by understanding the dynamics of reading within a socio-political frame.

National cultures and national identities, plural given the complexities and heterogeneity of the society in question, were central to the control of publications, and to the resistance against censorship and the broader apartheid regime. As Amilcar Cabral puts it, it is "generally within the culture that we find the seeds of opposition, which lead to the structuring and development of the liberation movement" (1994, 56). Indeed, although literature was one of the many factors that lead to the demise of the apartheid regime, it played its role in mobilising and consolidating activism within the opposition movements mobilised against apartheid, by carrying and disseminating ideas and ideologies in the resistance ranks.

By facilitating the entry and dissemination of banned books in the country, readers took on several roles traditionally performed by publishers, booksellers and other actors in the field. In doing so, readers ensured that some messages and ideas contained in banned publications entered and circulated in South Africa, despite the massive bans sanctioned by the elaborate censorship apparatus. Through these endeavours, readers of banned publications participated in the creation of an alternative, or underground, literary scene, whereby readers' responses to texts had a place to be articulated parallel to the ambient socio-political situation, in a communication circuit with its own conventions and modalities.

Progressive readers of banned literature in South Africa thus went out of their way to source relevant reading material and make banned publications and the ideas they contained available to a broader readership and public. As books were exchanged and discussed in reading groups or read on an individual basis, the messages they carried spread well beyond the reading space as such, through underground distribution schemes. It could therefore be said that readers participated in the alternative literary scene, on par with alternative writers and publishers, as they motivated the production, availability and distribution of these alternative publications in the first place, as the readers rendered these books their usefulness and literariness by virtue of being read.

**Summary of Contributions**

By inserting history of the book and socio-literary theories into the analysis of the readership for banned literature in apartheid South Africa, this thesis provides an opportunity to revisit some key foundational theories and texts, understanding them in relation to the South African context.

The fact of positing readers as agents in the literary cycle, with multiple functions and roles, creates the space for a reinterpretation of Robert Darnton's communication circuit. Readers can be understood to hold different roles in the life-circuit typically followed by books, intervening at various stages as distributors, photocopiers, lenders, marketers, and

of course readers. These progressive readers' agency is brought to the front, and blurs the traditional divisions between the various roles held by the actors involved in the production, distribution and consumption of books. By exploring the interrelation between books, readers and the social context in which they interact, seminal theories are exemplified through this South African case study, opening by the same token new avenues for the field of the history of the book in South Africa. The mutual influence between the literary and the social, advocated by Roger Chartier amongst others, is understood to be possible through the readers' agency and creativity, as they consciously negotiated the books' passage from one reader to another and from one stage of the circuit to the other, defying the ambient social and political circumstances.

By applying these international theories in the South African context and understanding them against the backdrop of African and South African scholarships in the field of book history, the specificities of the South African literary history are made apparent, whereby censorship and the alternative literary activities it created in its midst become central factors that cannot be ignored. Some reading practices are made observable and one can actually speak of several literary histories existing parallel to one another during the apartheid censorship era. The mainstream literary industry, where authorised literature was produced, distributed and read in the traditional commercial channels, existed parallel to an oppositional or alternative literary sphere, where illegal books were smuggled into the country or published by courageous alternative publishers, who ran into troubles with authorities on many occasions. As Njabulo Ndebele points out, discussing the existence during apartheid of several streams of literature running concurrently (black, white, English, vernacular, Afrikaans): "South African literature will be seen to be made up of a variety of intellectual trends in history" (1992, 25).

Theses reading patterns point towards the agency of some South African readers engaged in political activism, who through all means available ensured the diffusion of new ideas and ideologies in the South African public space. This thesis therefore demonstrates that there was a substantial progressive literary activity even in the worst days of censorship, despite the general assumption that banned books are not read and circulated. Many

mainstream literary histories underestimate the censorship system as a factor having influenced and shaped literary history and discourses in South Africa.

This study challenges the traditional dichotomies between oral and written literature, popular and elite, and so on. Readers went from one reading strategy to another in a creative and assertive manner. Readers of banned literature were recast in a central position – and not just at the receiving end – of the cycle followed by books.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This thesis is by no means exhaustive as far as the portrait of South African literary activities is concerned, as various and multiple literary activities occurred throughout the country and over time. However, with substantive information gathered from various sources, this thesis can clearly address the modalities of the alternative literary industry that was shaped during apartheid around publications banned on political grounds. One could however focus in more detail on the various reading groups that existed in the underground networks, as well as on case studies of the alternative literary magazines, which played a significant role in maintaining progressive literary activity despite the obstacles imposed by the elaborate system of publications control. The presence of literary activity in South African prisons and emanating from South African exiles could also constitute potential research leads, as initiated by Archie Dick (2007a). Finally, conducting a wider quantitative and qualitative survey of readers during apartheid could contribute to depict a fuller profile of readers of banned literature, analysed through various variables such as gender, race, class, and so on.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the history of the book, from which angle this thesis was written, one can clearly confirm the fact that literature and politics are – wittingly or not – mutually influencing one another. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o points out, "often the writer and the politician have been the same person. In the very process of articulating a people's collective consciousness, the writer is led into active political struggles" (1997, 69) This statement could be understood in relation to readers, as some readers of banned

literature in South Africa became involved in politics while influencing the elaboration of censorship policies, and as such the literary and political fields fed into each other on various levels.

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**SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHIVES**

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P80/2/143
P80/1/147
P80/9/31
P87/08/48
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Censors reports on *Staffrider* (reference number):
P78/04/50
P81/08/134
P78/6/101
P79/6/4
P80/7/31
P80/10/146
P83/11/122
P87/02/17
P87/02/18
P87/04/107
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P85/1/94
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2654/13/32
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**SOUTH AFRICAN ACTS**

Obscene Publications Act No. 31 of 1892

Customs Management Act No. 9 of 1913

Entertainments Censorship Act No. 28 of 1931

Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950

Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963

Publications Act No. 42 of 1974

Publications Amendment Act No. 109 of 1978

## ANNEX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE – LIBRARIANS

1. Who were the majority of library users? What books did they read?

2. Which books were mostly taken off libraries' shelves due to censorship?

3. What happened to books that were taken off the shelves?

4. Which books replaced these spaces in libraries' shelves, if any at all?

5. Which titles, topics or authors were regularly asked for but unavailable due to censorship? Who were the readers asking for banned material? How were they received?

6. Were banned books discussed at all?

7. Did officials, to ensure no 'offensive' literature was available, routinely inspect libraries?

8. What was, I your opinion, the general stance of librarians on censorship in the 60s-70s-80s?

9. Was there such a thing as 'dissident librarians'? To which extent? How were they perceived/received amongst their colleagues?

10. Did the ways in which libraries and librarians operated influenced what people read?

## ANNEX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE – PUBLISHERS

1. What was the most deterring obstacle in publishing under censorship? In what ways did it interfered with your role as a publisher? Did censorship interfere on many levels?

2. Did many books you published enjoy a wide distribution before they were banned? What happened once these books were banned? Can you give an example?

3. Which books represented the bulk of banned literature in your publishing company (genres, authors, languages, etc)?

4. What was, in your opinion, the ambient stance of South African publishers on censorship, or on the political situation in general?

5. Did a special relation or bond was created between publishers-authors-readers due to the prevailing (political, economic, social, etc) conditions affecting the industry?

6. Marketing strategies had to be adapted to the context in order to ensure a book's circulation and launch. Any example in mind?

7. Can you relate an incident where a book you were working on got banned, and what happened to this book afterwards (as far as distribution, circulation, consumption, etc. is concerned)?

8. Do you believe that some South African readers successfully got hold of books and read them despite the intensive bans and censorship laws? Would you attribute this phenomenon mainly to readers or to a coordination of efforts and work from different agents involved in the industry?

9. According to your experience/knowledge, who were these readers for banned literature?

10. To which extent imported books and South African authors published overseas had an impact on the South African literary scene in SA during apartheid?

11. As a reader during the darkest years for literary industry in South Africa (60s-70s-80s), how did you get hold of books that were banned but that you nonetheless wanted to read?

12. How would you describe the underground literary circuit/industry that developed during censorship?

13. What do you think of readership statistics based on book-buying data in South Africa? In your opinion, what could be an effective way of evaluating a realistic readership data in South Africa?

14. When you re-published un-banned books, which obstacles did you chiefly have to deal with?

15. Role of literature in SA: in your opinion, has literature played a predominant role in the liberation struggle?

16. In your opinion, is the ‘un-banning’ process completed?

## ANNEX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE – READERS

1. What titles were commonly read in the underground circuit and that most South African readers read despite the censorship laws?

2. How did you get hold of banned books? Where?

3. How were books read and where?

4. Were libraries a source of reading material? Yes/no, to which extend?

5. Were bookshops a source of reading material? Yes/no, to which extend?

6. If applicable – was there more books available in the academic space than other resources?

7. What were the different points of distribution for banned literature?

8. How were books exchanged between readers?

9. Did you consciously feel you participated in an underground literary culture when reading, discussing and exchanging banned material?

10. Could you affirm that reading those banned books had an influence on who you are today?

11. Similarly, would you say that banned books played a role in the course of political events in South Africa?

12. Do you observe a change in your reading habits – i.e. what they were in the 70s-80s and how/what you read today?

13. Could it be said that particular reading strategies developed due to the political circumstances? Examples?

14. Storage of books. Any anecdotes on how books were stored?

15. Would you draw a parallel between politics/literature?

16. Why did you read?

17. How did you get aware of the circulation/existence of banned books?

18. In which form did you mostly encountered banned books?

19. On photocopies: Did you photocopy books? Where did you do photocopies? Is it still a practice of yours?

20. How would you describe the readers for banned books? Would you say they were numerous?

21. Was reading banned material a political statement?

22. In your opinion, how did censorship impact on today reading cultures in South Africa?

23. What impacts these books had in your everyday life? How did you interpret them?

## ANNEX 4: VERBATIM REPORT - INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS BRUTUS (EXTRACT)

**Centre for Civil Society, Howard College Campus, UKZN**
**25 May 2007**

Dennis Brutus: This is Dennis Brutus talking to Rachel Matteau. She's given me her email so we can stay in touch. And she did her master's at Wits where I was a student once and her B.A. at the University of Quebec in Montreal, which as I was saying I visited in 1976. I also suggested she takes a look at my fairly recent book called *Poetry & Protest*. It's half poetry and half protest. Protest is essentially speeches, lectures and discussions on apartheid, some of them in Canada, Toronto, Montreal, and also New York and the UN, Washington and other places. We'll be discussing different aspects of the apartheid system and the fair amount of writing under the apartheid regime and some specific conditions related to being a banned person, the availability of banned books and circulation and so on.

Let me just repeat a comment I made earlier, widely in response to your initial enquiry, when you wrote that you'd like to discuss the matter with me. I think I should point out that one cannot talk of combined actions by banned writers or even from the community that was reading banned material. It is because the conditions were so difficult that most writers tended to be isolated. I can't think of any place in South Africa where the action was community organised, other than writing material that would be banned or even to read what was also banned.

I will spend a little time perhaps to talk about a group in Port Elizabeth that is something of an exception because you did actually have a group that was getting together, a study group, but they would not called themselves as such and it would not have been wise to do it anyways, saying "we are getting together to read banned material". So we had that kind of complication, as I mentioned earlier. Generally writers were functioning in isolation in Cape Town and Johannesburg and wherever. I was not in communication with other writers that were writing material. We did not strive for it as banned material because we would not know whether it would be banned or not until subsequent government actions' against it.

Perhaps you should separate the literature which is coming in, particularly Marxist material, Maoism material, coming into South Africa, generally in English - so you really are dealing with two different facets – and material already published and which is described by the government as subversive.

And there was actually a list of banned literature – on a separate list literature by South Africans with people like Nadine Gordimer, whose book *The Late Bourgeois World* was banned, and a few others perhaps, […] Ngubane, or […] writing about peasants revolt against apartheid regime. So you're dealing with two categories that established Marxist literature, or Trotskyism and radical literature banned. Then you get the new literature that becomes banned as it appears so you have to separate those two.

Writers are separated – there really is no community of writers. There is not even a community of students of writing, so both of them of course, partly dictated by economical reasons. You live in the ghetto, or in the slums, you don't have much money, so not many book sources near by. The urban area has, as opposed to ghetto or townships, but the books are not easily accessible just physically. In addition of course, booksellers were very nervous about stocking literature which might be banned.

There is one question I saw in your list "Where did you get banned literature?" There could be a single copy brought in the country by someone and then circulated by hand, but even then you were not targeting who you were going to circulate to – you would circulate it to whoever was nearby, your friends or colleagues.

I'll give you just one example to make it more practical. When I was a student at Wits, the Law School, someone I don't know had a copy of a short novella by Alex La Guma, which was published in Nigeria by a press called Mbari Press. Mbari is a word in an African language, probably Ibo, meaning creativity. This press started accidentally by two chairmen who made a very important contribution to African literature by starting this press. One was subsequently meant to be in London, and then here […] together they made an excellent collection called *Introduction to African Literature* – I must not diverge much but an excellent collection - in which I appear, to my surprise. I was not aware in fact that one of my pieces – in a poetry collection - had gone out of the country. I did not know I had published anything. When I finally bought it in London at a very good bookstore called Dillons, quite famous for its wide range of literature and African literature, near London University, I took the book out of the shelf and saw the title. I thought to myself, "well I really need to need to know more about African literature".

So here I am in a law class at Wits, someone passes the book to me, and I'm quite surprised that at that time I did not know the existence of Alex La Guma and of Mbari Press. There was really a climate of isolation and ignorance, of course deliberately created by the government to control the importation of books. They were not on display anywhere, and subsequently the man is banned, so we must differentiate between the banning of a title and of individuals. […] It was by accident, or opportunity, that I got the La Guma book, discovering there is an author called Alex La Guma, and that he's published outside of the country. It's very important to know that you may have an outlet outside the country, because later Mbari published me […]. Much later, 1960 October, to be precise, and I get a letter saying, "you are a banned person". When you're a banned person everything you wrote is banned. And then later on I come out of Robben Island I get a new ban and the letter says, "the old ban is lifted but you now have a new ban which includes not only what is published but any drafts or stuff that might be published". So initially writers write manuscripts that too become banned plus include any editor who publishes me will go to prison as well. So it's very much more severe, not even being able to stand trial and getting punished for someone else you published.

Another point I was making was the kind of surveillance we were subjected to once you became politically active. The concerns of the police were so much more broad than your actual activity. We met, we talked, you remember the […]. I was belonging to teachers'

organisation and this organisation was opposing the government policy like […]. As you know they actually set up three separate entities, the white one, the black one, and then the brown one in the middle. So it was very clearly defined. In each case you had people in opposition. Regrettably amongst the white people, as far as I know, there was not much opposition. The system was designed to keep the white privilege, so who wants to object to that. All Africanism was separated clearly, and were told you are permanently in a subordinate position and you will be trained for that subordinate position and most importantly you will enjoy being in fact subordinate, you will accept it, you will not dispute it, will not challenge it. […] The education process will educate all subordinates, Coloured, Asians, Chinese, and Indians. They are neither totally subordinate but certainly not allowed to enjoy privileges. What that means is that there is a group being watched by Security Police […]. Usually we call them SB – Special Branch – so […]. So not only were you under surveillance but your contacts were subjected to being watched as well. And they would be interrogated about you even if you were not yourself interrogated. The sense of fear was there, that you were watched and possibly somebody else is being watched as well. So you had friends who actually started to stay away from you, no longer in contact because of the intimidation endured. They were not themselves being subjected to […]. So my last point in this is to remind you that it is difficult to generalize either about a community of writers or a community of readers. Because in both cases you were really isolated because of the circumstances, and actually encountered increased isolation.

One of the interesting points you made and I mentioned in the introduction – the copying. Why? Because we did not have the technology we have now, nor did we have then the best technology available, nor did we not have the money to be able to buy it. So we actually had to source […] I suppose clandestinely. We copied in bulk, for an organisation discussion or an activity, as I said teachers' organisations for instance. There were the trade union offices where there was someone who was there and […] so you could actually get some hundred copies as opposed to a few single ones. […] They had bulk material and they were producing bulk copies of material. […] what they could do or should do […]. So we worked very closely with the municipal workers' union which was the workers' equivalent councilor. […] but if you preserved the single copies or not too many, we then would distribute in schools as the schools had also the equipment, […] and then occasionally there would be a doctor who'd come to make copies and allowed us to use the copy machine. All of this by the way is more about organising the literature – these are not copies of books but copies of announcements.

The book we generally had a single copy. Except in the case of Port Elizabeth where we had a regular study group, which met maybe once a month, and consisted mainly of activists and possibly their wives if they were not themselves involved in other activities. […] The stuff we read was not so much standard classical political texts – I think one of the books we discussed the most during our surveillance, and we were very careful, very tense and had lots of debates about it, it was a contemporary novel, whether it was by William Green or […] or even something very light like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, which discussed the South in the U.S. and slavery and so on. So you find that

we were using some very light popular fiction, but using it more to examine social and political issues.

Subsequently, I learned that there were groups that I was not connected with and when I enquired what they were doing I was already a banned person. They would be discussing something literary like Negritude and discussing work by Senghor in Senegal or Aimé Césaire from Martinique, but using it for very serious political discussions, so beginning with the literary and it turned out political. I don't know enough about this, but it seems that Steve Biko and Black Consciousness made use of the literary discussions to develop the political discussions. When I enquired on their reading material, and saw what they got me, I was bemused; not Senghor, Césaire, Marx, Lenin or Trotsky, things you'd thought for political discussions but in fact they were using literary material for political discussions. And I think a lot of the depth of the BC movement starts from a literary point of view.

There's one in paperback that came out at the time […] One of them in particular had a character called Rubashor – in Soviet Union. […] While we were looking at the West we were also looking at Soviet Union, China, Stalinism, Communism, and political collapse.

When I look through your questions, there is a point which is difficult for me to answer because it is almost as if you were approaching the problem from the assumption that there were underground organised groups, systematic discussion groups, systematic study groups, systematic writers groups, etc. It's a contrast of the reality I think; most of us were very individual, very isolated, and so you would have to talk about how did the writer function rather than the how did the group function, except as I say with the rare groups like the one in Port Elizabeth that I knew of where we'd talk about the contemporary world we knew about. […] Some man who fairly […] non-white, colored Asian, bought a hall and turned it into a night hall so he could make money out of it. It was his gamble. He came to me and said, "look the hall is empty all of the time". He wanted me to organise a cultural club to make use of the hall. So I accepted the idea and talked to the others to discuss the opportunity and how we'd do it. There was a cinema called First Century. […] Fortunately I was able to bring someone from the ANC as a resident talker, and then I'd bring someone on jazz, someone on political consciousness. And one of these jazz talks we talked about New Orleans where they were not allowed to play drums except once a week because the drum was banned and they actually had a square called the Congo Square. […] My audience was white and black. Anybody is interested in cultural events. And there were whites who were in the audience who walked out protesting my references to the blues, oppression and slavery. Even then some people did not want to know about it. So here we have a century club where I organise these discussions – and again it's fairly exceptional – they might have in other cities but to be fair there were almost certainly such clubs in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, but I think the emphasis was on culture with the politics sneaking into it […].

If the non-white community, black, Indian, coloured, a lot of them, intellectual activists, come out of the schools. Teachers were in anything, stimulating each other and stimulating others in the community. […] communities are attacked by the apartheid

system and it became much more repressive. […] Prior to that you had segregation, which is racism but by convention. There is racism by law, and racism through policies […] But what this does is of course instill political consciousness in the people who are being attacked, they're getting aware of what's happening […].

## ANNEX 5: VERBATIM REPORT - INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS VAN WYK (EXTRACT)

**Northcliff, Johannesburg**
**12 October 2007**

Rachel Matteau: This is Rachel Matteau. I am here with Chris van Wyk in Northcliff, Johannesburg. It's October 12th, and we are going to discuss his experience with banned literature, as an editor, publisher, writer, and author.

There have been many accounts of people who stored their books in unusual ways, because of raids and prevailing circumstances. Have you got any examples pertaining to your experience?

Chris van Wyk: I'm not so sure about storing in unusual ways. When I read that question, when you sent it to me, I thought immediately about the fact that we never used to store them but hide them away. I was a little kid when I started reading banned books – well, about 16 or 17 years old – and I was becoming interested in reading and writing South African literature. I think one of the first books I read that impressed me a great deal was Eski'a Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*. And one of my teachers gave it to me – most of my teachers were not really interested with what was going on in this country. But all of us have exceptional teachers, he was one of those teachers who saw I had the talent, he saw that I was interested in literature and passed *Down Second Avenue* to me. I used to read it in my room and hide it under the mattress or in a cupboard somewhere away from other books, even though I was not somebody that the police would focus their energies on then. At that time I was not known, I had written one or two silly little poems, so there was not that kind of attention on me. But the fact is that one stored one's books away, I hid those books away as well. Even when I started to buy banned literature myself, I kept it in secret places away from other books so that people could not see – because you never knew who would come to your house.

When I read your question I remembered this: when I was becoming interested in books, and I was living in Riverlea, sometimes we would hear someone telling us that the police would raid us, because over the years I did become interested in Black Consciousness and things political, and suddenly before you know it the police have got an eye on you, you know. Somebody in the neighborhood or somebody walking down the road would say there is a policeman three streets away; he wants to know about Chris van Wyk. Once, actually somebody said to me that the police were going to raid my house and I took all my banned books, and I took them to another person's house, a person who was not in the public eye, a kind neighbor, who once upon a time said to me: "if ever you have got banned books that you want to hide away I don't mind it, I'll take the risk". So it was that kind of thing, hiding them away, and in fact one day they did take some of my books away. In fact I still have the little note about all these things that they took away from me, somewhere in my files. I kept it to make short stories or something. But it was sometimes in the eighties, during those turbulent eighties; I think it was just before the state of emergency. My wife and I were in a caravan, we did not have a house to sleep in, and we were sleeping in a caravan in my mother's yard. And at two o'clock in the

morning they raided the caravan. They actually took some of my books away and never returned them to me.

RM: When they took these books, did they say they would return them? What would they do with them?

CVW: No, they did not say they'll return them. In fact their intention is never to return them. But they did write down on a piece of paper what they took. It's a funny piece of paper because the caravan is about as small as the place we are sitting in here. And they took this book on the northern side of the caravan, took that book near the window, and that one there, etc.

RM: You spoke about buying banned books. Where would you get them?

CVW: Usually, I could not buy banned books – we could not buy banned books actually… There was a shop – you know where Booker is, an Afrikaans bookshop near here. You should actually go and speak to her also, because she runs this small bookshop, but she's very good and very passionate about books. Now, her uncle ran a bookshop called van Schaik, it's a Dutch name. It was a university bookshop, and as soon as he got to know me, I used to go there with a friend, Fhazel Johennesse, who was also a poet. Fhazel and I used to go in there and browse around, and sometimes we'd ask him if he had banned books. Now obviously he would not tell anybody: "Yes, I've got banned books". I could have been a policeman. But as soon as he started to trust us, he'd say I've got something, it's under the counter or in the other room, come and look. And we'd go, and he gives us what we want. I remember once – I did not buy a banned book – but I went in there and bought Berthol Brecht and he sold me that. But I do remember asking for something that was banned. He also had newspapers that were banned, or magazines. And as it got banned, he actually never destroyed it. He actually kept it, because he decided he was not going to obey these silly rules. So there were students and there were readers who had his confidence. And you could ask him for banned books, and he would give them to you. But otherwise I also happened to work at a publishing house at that time, and some literature was banned from time to time. And I'd bring these books home and I kept them for myself. And also you borrowed books from someone, somebody would give you a book saying this is banned, read it and bring it back or pass it on.

RM: In the publishing house, for instance, if a book got banned and you had already printed a lot, i.e. the books were ready to go on bookshelves, what would you do with them?

CVW: You know what we did? *Staffrider* was often banned, just to give you a concrete example. *Staffrider* was a quarterly magazine, and I think that out of I don't know how many issues we published, but let's say there were about 30 or 40 issues over the years, and maybe out of those ten or eight got banned for one reason or the other; banned because of some short story in there and somebody said something like, "I hate whites" and so on, and then accused of starting racial hatred. In fact they are the ones who started racial hatred, but we were told that we were inciting racial hatred. But I remember this,

and this is an interesting thing about these banned books; *Staffrider* for instance, there were lots of people who came to buy books directly at the prints, and *Staffrider* started a process where there were literally creative writing groups. There were people all over the country writing and submitting their material. This material often was submitted by the group rather than by the individual. So *Staffrider* became a people's magazine. A magazine that had an overt political message… I don't know if you want me to tell you about the origins of *Staffrider*?

*Staffrider* was one aspect of a publishing house. This publishing house was known as the Christian Institute, that Beyer Naudé used to run. They started something like SPRO-CAS. SPRO-CAS was an acronym, it was an investigation of the effects of apartheid, and these SPRO-CAS papers were published by the Christian Institute. Then somebody decided to continue publishing work, and to publish not only academic work but also to publish a magazine like *Staffrider* and publish books by academics, Marxist academics especially, books about communism in South Africa, or books about race relations in South Africa, and a lot about history: Zulu culture, South African history, etc. Nice books that were non-controversial, but were necessary. And so it turned into a publishing house called Ravan Press. And Ravan Press was named after three people; there is a bird as the emblem of the press, a Raven. They used R-A-V-A-N and not R-A-V-E-N. The R stood for somebody surname, the V for someone else's surname and the N stood for Beyer Naudé's surname.

Mike Kirkwood was a lecturer at the University of Natal, a lecturer in English. He had a nice sense of what was going on in the country, and it was just after 1976 when so much turbulence occurred in this country. Mike was kind of a left-wing guy, with really creative ideas about the dissemination of literature and what needed to be published. Before *Staffrider* came on the scene, literature was published, but there was not a lot of black literature being written, because literature – as in countries all over the world – when people start writing, it is published in small magazines before it gets published in books. Whether you're Doris Lessing, who won a Nobel Prize yesterday, your literature got published in a small magazine sometime or the other. So it was a showcase for South African literature.

There were magazines like *New Coin*, *Classics*, and others. The thing about these magazines is that they were edited by white people, and whites had an idea about what black people should write about. Even left-wing people, even white people who meant well, they had a preconceived idea about what black people should be writing about. If a hundred black people submitted a hundred poems each, they would publish only one or two of those. The others they did not understand, they were too radical, etc. And when Mike Kirkwood started *Staffrider*, he said this magazine should be run by blacks, and they should decide what goes on in this magazine. A lot of poetry and short stories were horrible. [laugh] They were not all great, but it was fun. It was great and it was wonderful. It was a very cathartic release that people were able to say what they felt, about themselves, the government, the political situation in this country, they just spoke about it. Out of those many, many people who wrote about this, some of them were horrible poets, horrible short story writers, but many survived and became writers over

the years. Now *Staffrider* stands for this -- on the train, when you get on the train there is a long pipe that you can hold onto before you get in the carriages, and that's called a staff. And there are some people who get on the train but don't go into the train, they stand on the staff, because the train is packed, but they decide that this train is not going to go without them. Even though there is a space inside the train, they are going to stand and hold on to this train, they will get to their destination. So these people were popularly known as '*Staffrider*s' in the townships. Mike Kirkwood thought it was an appropriate name for the magazine. This magazine was going to get there. This magazine was a kind of *tsotsi*. The magazine did not obey the rules, and it held on to the staff for its dear life and will get to its destination no matter what. So that's how the magazine got its name.

At this time, 1976, '77, '78, the magazine was starting. There were a lot of things that happened in Soweto and that happened throughout the country, and people were beginning to write, to paint, and people were beginning to form writers' groups, and art's associations and art's groups. There was a kind of burgeoning, an avalanche of art in this country in the seventies, because between 1960 and 1976, it had gone quiet. In 1960 a lot of books had been banned, a lot of the black writers had been banned, and their books had been banned. And all of them had gone into exile. All of them except one or two, Richard Rive was here, Nadine Gordimer was here, Nat Nakasa had gone overseas, Casey Motsitsi was also staying here. But lots of them had gone overseas, mostly in England, Swaziland, Europe, but they all left. So for 16-17 years there was nothing. Then we had Oswald Mtshali who brought out his collection of poems, and suddenly in 1977-78 there were literally thousands of people writing poems. There was a lot to say, and there was a lot of anger.

So these writers groups would come and submit their poems and short stories, and then we'd phone them, when *Staffrider* came from the printers. And they take copies, hundreds of copies here, twenty copies there, sixty copies there, and take them to their various writers' groups. And that's how it got disseminated around the country. I remember when I was working at *Staffrider*, there were vendors, they were actually like hawkers, who came to buy books and *Staffrider* magazines in our office, and then went and stood on the pavement, put them on a blanket on the pavement or in cardboard boxes on the pavement, and sold these books from there. Some would sell them in the train, walk up and down in the train selling them.

RM: They must have had problems with the authorities?

CVW: Yes, they would come back and they would owe us maybe R890 or R1,460 for the books they took last month and they would tell us: "I can't pay you because the police confiscated my books", and we never knew if it was true or a trick. But I think most times it was the truth, because the police would come and harass them. This country was so bad. It was so bad that if a police saw a book with a black face on the cover it was somehow wrong. "Why is there a black face on this book? There should be a white face on this cover".

RM: You speak of *Staffrider* and the communication between editors and writers, amongst other things. Did you also have a lot of feedback from readers?

CVW: There would be feedback through letters, but we never really published them in the magazine. There was no letters' page. There should have been one actually. But I remember about the publishing of *Staffrider*, when I was appointed to edit *Staffrider* in about 1980, actually exactly in 1980 I became the editor of *Staffrider*. The offices were in Braamfontein, and about two months after I joined *Staffrider* we moved to Berea, 22 Raleigh Road, Berea. It was a big house with wooden floors. It was a old house that somebody had sold – I am not sure about the implications and whom the house belonged to – but somebody's bedroom was now my office, and another South African writer was also working there. Mike Kirkwood was working there, and Kevin French. We were all editors there. The thing I remember about Ravan Press, which was unusual for a publishing house, was that there were always people coming there. It was filled – it was almost like a party atmosphere every second day. People would come and talk about what they were writing, and have a cigarette. I would sometimes go in on a Saturday and speak to people, writers would come and we talked about in the next issue and so on. So it was very much a people's place, a people's magazine, a place where people gathered.

RM: Were there organised poetry evenings and the likes happening then?

CVW: I'll tell you what was organised. There were lots of literary events organised, and that was when we launched books. We never launched books in a kind of normal way, like a cheese and wine affair. There was that of course, but there were also readings. When a poet published his book, we had a reading somewhere. I remember Jeremy Cronin when he came out of prison, when he was freed, he wrote a collection of poems called *Inside* which was his life in prison. I remember that we launched his book at Wits University, and we invited […], I was there as a poet but also because I worked for Ravan Press, […], and there were lots of other poets in the audience, and just people who like literature. Jeremy spoke about the prison, spoke about the ANC, and read his poetry. Then Njabulo Ndebele released, when he published *Fools and Other Stories*, we organised a gathering in Soweto, and we launched the book there. So there were these kinds of launches.

I went to a lot of public readings at the time. After 1976 you'd go in somebody's home or in more public spaces like church. We'd read there. It was a very exciting time; there was lots and lots of poetry readings. Another important place, a venue for poetry readings, was the United States Information Services. They'd invite us there. I remember that they were quite generous about providing a venue for us, and I remember seeing people like Don Mattera for instance, who was banned at that time. Most of the other places would have asked him not to come near them, but the United States Information Services just pretended they did not know who he was. And he would just be sitting there, and listening to us reading our poetry. I remember also when he was banned, and he was banned for five years, which meant he could not be published, but he published work in *Staffrider* under a pseudonym.

RM: The United States Information Services, did they provide you with literature from the United States for instance?

CVW: No, they did not. But we could consult the library there which was full of books.

RM: So you would agree to say that there was some sense of solidarity amongst writers?

CVW: Very much so. There was a brotherhood and sisterhood, we all got together and we all recognized each other, and we read. It was a very exciting time. We read dramatically on stage, and it was very overtly political writing at that time. Ingoapele Madingoane was a predecessor of Mzwakhe [Mbuli] and Mzwakhe became famous. But Madingoane used to do what Mzwakhe did later on, much, much earlier. He'd get on stage with his boots, and so on. I remember we were at a poetry reading in Lanesia once, and I got onstage and read my poetry, then Fhazel Johennesse got onstage and read his poetry. And when it was Ingoapele's time to get onstage he started to read his poetry from out the door, you could hear him, and he came down the aisle, shouting at people: "I have come, and I am an African". Everybody turned around and wondered what is going on, with his booming voice, and I remember his boots were never tied, shoelaces were loose, he was making a noise, he was being loud and he was being proud, you know.

But there were lots of readings organised for the sake of poetry readings. One of the hubs of poetry reading was Braamfontein. There were lots of places in Braamfontein, you would hear there is a poetry reading on Saturday, will you come, etc. There's another one there and so on. Wits University also organized poetry readings.

RM: Since these poetry sessions were almost automatically involving politics – as you said they were in fact overtly political – did you have to cover the nature of these events in order to be on the safe side with authorities?

CVW: Sometimes we did do that, but mostly we'd say it's a poetry reading. There is nothing wrong with having a poetry reading. But the cops knew when we had poetry readings. In fact sometimes there were so many of these events that happened all over the place that the cops did not bother to attend all of them. But I remember the raid of the caravan I was talking to you about earlier on. I remember a funny moment. There were three policemen who came to wake us up, my wife, child – my one son then – and myself. And there was a senior policeman and two younger policemen. There is a well-known poem of mine that became famous. It's called "In Detention". While they were searching through the caravan I was standing outside, and these two young policemen came up to me and said to me: "By the way Chris, we are tired of that poem of yours, we have to listen to it every weekend. When are you going to write new poems?" We all three laughed about it. They were making a joke, they were not threatening me or anything, they were teasing me. But then I realised that they were actually informers, or at least there were informers sitting in the [poetry readings] audiences.

RM: Did you have to alter the traditional ways of marketing books?

CVW: We used a kind of a dual method: we marketed books in the conventional way; they got reviewed in newspapers, and strangely enough a lot of the books that got reviewed never got banned, and there was never any attention on those books. Out of ten books that Ravan Press published one or two was banned, or even less, maybe one out of ten was banned.

We could not say things about Steve Biko for instance, we could not publish his image, and all of those things, but there were history books for instance. Some of these history books were much more powerful than some of the poetry but were never banned. They were important. They were academics works by professors and teachers at universities. And so those books were distributed in bookshops and whoever wanted them – the universities took them, the bookshops took them – some of these books were prescribed. We were the first to publish J.M. Coetzee before he got famous, and those books were sent to Exclusive Books and all over the place. We had a person there, she was our marketing person, and she would get in our car every Friday and go to this bookshop and this one, and to CNA and whatever, and talk about discounts with them, etc. It was the normal way. There were also people who came to the publishing house and bought books there. We allowed people to come, professors were coming to buy books, and people interested in reading in general came to buy books.

A book that I must tell you about because it's very interesting, I can't remember what year it was. I think it was 1983 or 1984. Sebokeng turned into flames, because the people in the townships in Sebokeng, a black township, they protested against the stooges, the government appointees at councils, and people were burning down their houses, a huge wave of unrest in the country. But when the events of Sebokeng happened, there was a young boy, I can't remember his name, but he would be going around on his bicycle looking at what was happening and writing it down. And he sent it in longhand directly to us and it got published. We met him one night under a tree, he gave us his manuscript and Ravan published "The Third Day of September". It was distributed from hand-to-hand, through word-of-mouth.

[…]

The renaissance of poetry in this country in the seventies, in the mid seventies, had a lot to do with Black Consciousness. It was a lot because of BC. BC was a philosophy started by Steve Biko, started in 1969. He was then a member of NUSA, and left NUSA to form SASO, so black students could fight their own battles. SASO was a university students' organisation, universities like University of Natal, and the universities of the Western Cape, Cape Town. All the black students on these campuses participated in a big walk out as a result of a protest against Bantu Education. As Biko's philosophy was taking ground in the country, it started in 1969, '71, and as you know in 1976 it had penetrated the high schools. A lot of these young people were not even at university yet, they protested against Afrikaans. So it had a lot to do with Black Consciousness. And the ANC was not happy about this, because the activities in the country were not a result of their actions but a result of Black Consciousness, and so the ANC was very interested in capturing some of that, to better the aims of the ANC rather than BC. So it was overtly

political, even though it was through literature, the ANC was using it as a support culture to fight against apartheid.

RM: Can you recall what books were some sort of "banned bestsellers" if we can call it that? Banned books that everyone read, that were popular, etc.

CVW: I'm not sure if it was banned, but the book that caught a lot of people's attention was Muthobi Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man*. It's a collection short stories and some of these short stories appeared in *Staffrider*. Ravan Press published this collection. I think that this collection sold more than other titles. […]

RM: Do you think this gap created in the sixties will ever – or was ever – filled? Is there a certain role that writers have to play towards that, as far as insuring continuity in literature?

CVW: Writing is a personal experience. I don't belong to writers' groups nor do I want to belong to writers' groups. I get people asking me if I want to join such and such a group, but I don't want to do this because than you end up doing more talking than writing and on my own I can write. I just write my books. I think it is the writer's duty to close that gap. I go out there, all these books are unbanned now, and not only books, but also people were banned. You could not speak of Nelson Mandela; you could not even speak about Walter Sizulu. When I see those books now I go and read about these people. I go and read about them because I want to know about them. I'm filling that gap myself. I read about colonialism because these things are available to me now and I enrich my own writing. But I don't think somebody owes it to me to fill the gap for me. I remember when I was a young writer I would go out and ask the people who came before me, whether they were writers or readers. I'd say to them, "lend me *Down Second Avenue* by Eskia Mphahlele I want to read it". I did not wait for them as a group to do it for me. I did it because my instincts want to do that. As a writer I want to know what's happening in this country. One of the biggest desires of writers, and that they must have naturally is to know what went on before, in order to enrich and inform your writing. So I read about the writing of the thirties, I read about Eskia Mphahlele, but lots of these young writers don't know who he is. But they should, they must. Go and read what he wrote because its part of our history, our literary history.

RM: So you see it as an individual responsibility rather than a collective one?

CVW: It is an individual responsibility. Those books are available – I found them when they were banned – they are available now. So the least you can do is read them. I remember when I was looking at Ravan Press, a writer sent me a short story one day, and he wanted me to publish it in *Staffrider*. So I said, "Okay, I'll look at your short story and I'll tell you in three days time – I've got a whole pile of things to look at – whether I'll publish it or not. In three days time he phoned me and said 'Hello I'm so and so from Soweto, I want to know if you read my short stories?'" So I said, "You know what my brother, I've got so much work to do. But phone me again on Tuesday, for sure I'll read it". And then I went off the phone, I took it out of the pile, it was not his turn but I took it

from under the pile, and read his short story. And I think it was the worst short story I've ever read. It was horrible. And I was waiting patiently – or impatiently – for his phone call. And he phoned one day and he said, "Have you read my short story?" and I said, "Yes". He said to me "Are you going to publish it or not?" Before I answered, I asked him "Who is your favorite writer?" And he said, "No I don't read, I write". And I said "You know what? You are wasting my time. You are an insult to writing. I don't want you to ever write again, because you are not really interested." If you are not reading other people's work, than you are not really interested in what is going on.

RM: Do you think writer's had a social responsibility?

CWV: I think when I started writing I was happy to be a writer at that time because those were challenging times. I started writing in the seventies into the turbulent eighties. And I always told myself that I was happy to be a writer to be part of it, this moment of history in our country. I think, when I look back, I was an activist and a writer. And I think they are separate roles. I think the writer's role is to tell stories. And I think those turbulent time in our history detracted us from that. You probably read the debates, Njabulo Ndebele's famous essay ("The Rediscovery of the Ordinary"). When I read that it was such a beautiful experience because it was so refreshing. It told me something that I felt myself but I had difficulty in saying. I could not articulate as well as he did at that time. And it's basically that when you are writing you have to tell stories. And sometimes I remember telling a group of students in Cape Town somewhere, I said to them, "I think if you wrote – that is now 1992 or 1993 – if we are writing about how much we hate white people, how much we hate apartheid, and people consider this to be powerful poetry because you read it in some ways and so on…" But I said to them if I write a story about my mother, and about how we go to church, and about what we eat, about clothes we wear and the jokes we make and about my mother's cooking, those statements are far more powerful than an anti-apartheid statement without even using the word 'apartheid' or 'white'. When we write about protest literature, it is so one-dimensional; there are no other dimensions in it. When *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* was published and Janis Heinemann turned it into a play, she said to me that's the most powerful anti-apartheid piece of work she's ever read in her life. And I said well I just wanted to write a story about my life. So that is the role of a writer. You can't write and change the world; I think you're fooling yourself if you think that you can change the world. Look at what's going on and write about it. But you can't change the world with your writing; you're just one functional individual in the whole tapestry of the culture.

RM: What is you stance on biographies sometimes being perceived as history books? Do you think they could be seen as history books in some ways?

CVW: I think it does. It's a strange thing. A lot of people after I wrote *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* liked it. I think that I've been very frank, candid and honest in *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*. But obviously if somebody else wrote a story about Chris van Wyk, it is not how they would remember me. I was not as settled as I say I was, and so on. I tried to be as honest as possible. But I know when I speak to my peers and people I grew up with, they have a different idea of who Chris van Wyk was. They remember that

yes, I was a good writer when I was a little kid, but I was also not very clever at maths. I did not mention that in the book. So it's like selective memory. And despite that, the thing I like about having written a biography, and I think people should write their own autobiographies, is that it uncovers a world a lot of people don't know existed and it makes you realise that ordinary people – I did not realize that so many people from a so-called colored township would read that book. I used the actual names, thinking they would never read the book. Because people in Denmark read my work, Sweden, Germany, but not people next door to me. And after that book went out, people at the taxi rank telling me I read that book which you wrote, it's about us. And the nice thing about this is that they never read a book about themselves. They never knew that they could exist in literature. It made ordinary life special. Somebody asked me the other day, they were interviewing me about the play which is an adaptation of the book, and a journalist said: "Are there any special people who came to see the show?" The theatre was packed by the way. Nobody had seen so many colored people at the Market Theatre in all of their life. People were asking, what is going on? Because maybe there was a sale of shoes or something! But people came to see themselves on the stage. It was *their* story. Twenty years ago they thought you have to be white to be going to the theatre. Five years ago they thought you have to be famous like Nelson Mandela to be on stage. And now they see that's how I speak, that's how we ate, that's how we played soccer, that's how we smoked. And it's all there on stage. So when asked if somebody special came to see the play I said yes, the people that I grew up with, like the shopkeeper, the *shebeen* owner, the boy that I was in Standard 6 with. They are special. They came to see it. And she understood what I was saying. So in that regard, it is so important to capture the moment, the ordinary moment, to show ordinary people that they were also history. People in this country believe that other people make history; that history is made by somebody else, that you have to be a Nelson Mandela and black, or otherwise you have to be white. What about ordinary people? You can just be struggling to buy a loaf of bread everyday and you could be part of history. They thought they were onlookers to history, that they were watching it. And now they see that they were participant in history, and that this history is their life. So in that regard I think autobiographies are special. People must write. That's what Canadians and Europeans and Americans and whoever have been writing for years and years do. Whether its fiction or non-fiction, people have been creating literature for a long time.

RM: With regards to the unbanning of books towards the nineties and beyond, would you say that there is still some censorship today?

CVW: I don't think so. I don't think there is censorship. But I think if you blink for one moment the government will allow it, there is a freedom of expression institute and they fight, and the government wants to create its own board on the SABC, they want to protect their own interests. The other day they refused to air a documentary on Thabo Mbeki. It was not a very controversial documentary but they did not want to show it, and there was pressure to dock it. So I think it is one thing to think that you have got freedom, and therefore you got freedom to speak. If I wrote a million books about F.W. de Klerk, Thabo Mbeki would be very happy for the world to see it. But as soon as I start writing

books about him, as soon as I become critical about him, it's another story. I don't think he likes the *Sunday Times* too much… But there isn't censorship as I said.

RM: Do you think self-censorship was a reality affecting writers?

CVW: I think there was self-censorship. Some writers would write something to avoid controversy and get other controversial issues published. They would say, "Why would I say that – I already said something controversial and it got published". We want to reach our readers. So there was that kind of censorship. J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, it's a kind of censorship because it's a metaphor for what was happening in this country. And there is no mention of black or white in the novel. But it's a clever novel. You can see exactly what is going on. So you had this kind of censorship, where you had to be either clever or creative in the way you presented your text, or you have to leave some things out of your text, things that would unnecessarily catch the attention of the censors.

RM: How did the un-banning process happen? Did you, as an editor at Ravan, publish texts that you knew were recently un-banned, for instance?

CVW: I remember some of that happening. Like a book I read, I read a banned copy of *Blame me on History*. Between 1987 and 1991, the books became un-banned for some reason. I think people just applied, and I remember that David Philip applied to have some of these books un-banned, books from the 70s, 60s and 50s. He applied to have them un-banned, and re-publish them with a new cover and under a new series and so on. You actually applied to the Publications Control. These things are not done automatically sometimes. Sometimes a book is banned and later they forget about it, but if I'd ask them "Could you just read this book because it's not as controversial as you think it is", and then they say "Yes, it's not so controversial anymore". So that's how these things happened. I remember when I was a little kid, well I was about 16 or 17 years old, I read a book called *An Act of Immorality*, it's a horrible book, a badly written book, it was so broken. Anyways, it arrived in our home. We were readers, I was a reader, my mother was a reader and my father was a reader, so somebody lent it to us, *An Act of Immorality*, and we read it. It was basically, I think a lawyer who wrote under a pseudonym in the 50s when the Immorality Act came into effect. And it was about black people and white people in love or having sex or something, sex across the color line as they said it. It was a clumsy plot and a badly thought out story. And at the end it had all these cases studies; an Indian woman and a white man, a black man and a white woman, with how they met – it was like lurid and dirty. And people were just whispering: "A black man and a white woman in a bed together?" People were reading it for that. And then, in 1994 I got this phone call from this woman who said to me, "my uncle wrote that book and it's been un-banned, for some reason the government un-banned it". I was not sure of the grounds on which this book was banned, but you were not supposed to be caught with that book. So she said "my uncle wrote that book and he was a lawyer and he's now dead, or he's living in Canada or something". Whoever wrote that book said to her: "you can publish it". And she said to me, is Ravan interested? And I said no! And she was shocked: "how can you not be interested, this is going to be the best-seller of the century you know". But

I said no, and she said "well I'll publish it on my own". And she thought she would make a million hundred rand. And then she said to me "can I ask you something? How do I go about publishing it?" I said to her, "you find a copy of the book, you typeset it, word for word because you are not going to find the plates now, you typeset it, headings everything. Then you proofread it, edit it, find a printer and print it". And she did it. She did it well. It came out nicely, and she sent me a copy. She really thought she was going to sell a hundred thousand copies. Then she phoned me about a year later, and said I sold about 60 copies or 200, because that moment had passed. People are no longer interested in that, now we see people, black people and white people, going down the street together. Apartheid was reaching its end.

RM: Do you think that the ban itself put a certain connotation on books, created expectation in the readers, stimulated sales and so on?

CVW: Yes, I think that this happened. When I read *Down Second Avenue* for instance, I wondered why it was banned. Not because it was a bad book, I thought it was a great book actually; it was great for literary value. It was a lovely book, an honestly told story about childhood and growing up. And I think in a sense that was the most powerful message in the book. He was not writing out of hanger, he was writing quietly: we lived in Marabaspang, and the government did not want people to know what was happening, so they banned the book. But that book still kept on selling. It still sells all over the world, it's a classic. But there were books for which there were expectations; people often said that if the government had not banned some books, we would have never read them, it would never have sold a hundred thousand copies. Sometimes a book would be on the shelves for ten weeks, selling very slowly. Then the government said this book is banned, and suddenly it sells a thousand copies. I remember when I was a little boy, this time I really was, there was a movie I can't remember the name, an African-American movie, and there was a kiss between a black man and a white woman, and only white people could see the movie. And I don't know if this was urban legend or what, but my mother said to me there were ushers to show you to your seat, and during this movie the ushers could not look at the screen, because these were colored and black ushers. They worked in the cinema but they could not watch the screen, they had to work with their back to the screen. It was apartheid craziest rules. I think they once banned *Black Beauty*. And I think even F.W. de Klerk and all the Nats are thinking "Thank God its over, because we did some really crazy things".

RM: You talked about books that were passed from hand to hand – I am interested to hear more about circulation amongst readers. For instance, in your social circles, how did you exchange books? Did you come across a book by chance – well obviously being a publisher you had more access to books than others – but did you recommend books, pass them on? And in what forms, photocopies or originals, etc.?

CVW: We always passed books on to each other. But I'm so greedy for books, and I love my books so much that I never pass them on. Often people give me books and say read and pass it on, I'd read and keep (laugh). But books were passed on to me, sometimes banned books, and I don't remember passing on books, except when people would come

in my study – there are over 2,000 books in my study – and take books and bring them back. So they got the revenge. I know that some of my books, books with my name in it, are all over the place. But it was happening. I remember some friends of mine from Soweto passed books to me and take things off my shelves.

RM: This is so interesting, we could talk about this forever but unfortunately we have to finish this interview at one point. But one more question: we talked about the role of literary magazines such as *Staffrider*, *Contrast*, *Work in Progress*, could you expand a bit on that, you mentioned they were outlets?

CVW: Yes, that's what I saw *Staffrider* as, and *Contrast*, and all these magazines. They were showcasing new writings. Young people who were starting off as writers could send their poems. I remember when I was starting off as a young writer, I was still in school and it was the most magnificent thing to see your work in print. To find a book and it says "Chris van Wyk", with your short story in the book, it was a wonderful thing to realise that other people were reading your work. And you also got to compare you work against other people's writing, and think to yourself I'm glad my poem is in there or on the contrary saying I should not have done it, it's the worst poem in this book! "Oh no! What have I done!" But they showcased new talent, and people got to know your work, and eventually led to a collection of poems, collection of short stories, that were in some cases published later on. It was essential and necessary.

RM: This brings the interview to an end. I thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

## ANNEX 6: VERBATIM REPORT - INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER MERRETT (EXTRACT)

**Pietermaritzburg, *The Witness* offices**
**23 October 2007**

Rachel Matteau: This is Rachel Matteau speaking to Christopher Merrett at *The Witness* in Pietermaritzburg, on October 23rd 2007, in his capacity as a librarian.

Censorship altered the relations between readers, librarians, and writers. Could you comment on that?

Christopher Merrett: As librarians, we became agents of a repressive state. The law required from us certain things which were unsympathetic to the professional role of a librarian. And that is where individual librarians had to decide where they stood. It was a very uncomfortable place to be. And of course many librarians, many white librarians supported the government and put these laws, two laws in particular: the Publications Act and the Security Act [inaudible] so the way they voted was inconsistent with the profession and the international sector. So yes, it put the profession into a very difficult relationship with the people it was supposed to be serving.

RM: What do you think the general stance of librarians was about censorship? Can you elaborate on this?

CM: Most librarians I worked with in those days were white. And most of them either supported the system or tolerated the system. White South Africans tended to quietly mind their own business, or as I as say they collaborated with the system anyways, although they perhaps did not tell everyone about that. South Africa was always right, the government was always right, and the rest of the world was wrong, everyone else was out of step.

RM: Do you think librarians kept quiet for moral or personal creed, or did they simply fear reprisals?

CM: There was a fear, as being seen to be opposed to the government. I think people were very compliant. From the 1970s right through to 1994, people were educated and socialised to obey the law, and that is true for blacks and whites, it might be unfair to single-out whites.

RM: You worked at the Legal Deposit Library?

CM: I worked at the Natal Society Library for two years, from 1974 to 1977, and I was a copyright librarian, so I mainly dealt with periodicals, not the monographs. A lot of specific issues of periodicals were banned. There was a big walk-in storeroom and all on the sides, shelves were full of banned books, banned periodicals. [Inaudible] At the university library we had a more modest cupboard, it used to stand in the passage right by the head librarian's office, and it was full of banned books. The two libraries I worked in

did not destroy banned books; they kept them, for two reasons. One was some of them could be used, secondly we believed that there would come a time when these books would be unbanned and put back on the shelves. And of course even through the apartheid years some books were unbanned; trends did change over the years. Every now and again there would be a list in the Government Gazette with books that were, for one reason or another, banned.

RM: Regarding library users. What books did they read and what were the obstacles they met when needing a book that was banned and so on? Did they come to you for advice?

CM: Yes. In the copyright library, I don't know. As far as I know these books were just put away, there was no public access to them. In the university libraries it was mainly for honours, masters and PhD students, and there was a system. There were banned books banned from circulation and those books that were banned for possession. The ones that were banned for circulation we made reasonably available to our users. They were simply not on open shelves, but they were available on request. The ones that were banned for possession were more problematic. In that case, as far as I recall, we used to get a letter of recommendation from the student's supervisor or lecturer, and then we used to have to apply to the directorate of publications or to the director of security legislations, depending on which set of legislations the banning fell under – the Publications Act or the Internal Security Act. And in those cases we used to try to get permission for that student to use the material. […] It was quite a lengthy process, a bit like modern-day government departments; they tended not to respond so you were left in a limbo. In those cases we used to say, well we followed the process; we have applied, assuming that no answer is a positive answer, so the student gets the book. We tried to be accommodative in the interest of the student and education in general. But we had to draw a thin line. The problem was when we used to break the law too obviously. There were lots of informers in universities; it was just part of the whole ambiance of the time. We could not assume that everybody at the university was on our side, on the side of democracy; there were people who had links with authorities and might report. So the danger was this lot (of banned books) could be confiscated if we were to be free in the way we lent these books. So that was the dilemma for a librarian, it was more than a matter of belief or commitment, it was practical as well.

RM: Did it happen that they confiscated books from the library?

CM: No, in my own time at the university here (in Pietermaritzburg), they came to inspect only once. Two gentlemen in trousers and sports jackets – this was the typical outfit and one could see miles around they were government officials, especially on campus where everyone was differently dressed – and they came. They asked a few questions, they asked to see the cupboard, and to see our records. My boss told me to go away in case I said something that might offend the officials. I can't tell you what happened, but we knew they were coming, they actually made an appointment.

RM: These books that were taken off the shelves because of censorship, was it mainly imported or local literature?

CM: In our case, in the university libraries, it was mainly imported. Mainly because, the writers of the books themselves were exiled or banned people, they could only get published overseas. There was a certain amount of creative literature that was banned, but most of it was political. And most of it was banned not title by title but because of the writer himself, or the organisation. That formed the majority of banned material in the university libraries at that time.

RM: What happened to these books that were taken off the cupboards? Any book burning or destruction you are aware of?

CM: I believe this may have happened at the provincial library services in Pietermaritzburg in the late 1950s or 1960s. Archie [Dick] would know about that. I think he refers to it in his articles. I heard when I first came to Pietermaritzburg that the head of the provincial library services, Mr. Fourrie, had actually destroyed some books.

RM: These books that were taken off the shelves, did you have to replace them with authorised literature?

CM: No, there were just empty spaces, closed up.

RM: Are there any particular titles that were regularly asked for but not available because banned?

CM: The first title to come to my mind is Govan Mbeki's *Peasant Revolt*. It was about the history of the Pondo uprising, and the history of the Transkei. Books like that, books about South African history, about political history that were written by obvious ANC or PAC writers were much in demand. And some of South African novelists like Alex La Guma, etc.

RM: And amongst librarians, how would you describe the climate?

CM: There was a general silence. As far as I know this issue was never discussed at a professional conference. However I too qualify that by saying that I went to the 1976 state of library association conference in Port Elizabeth with my wife who was also a librarian, and we said we'll never go to another one and we never did. I was so appalled by the standard of things. But looking at the conference proceedings and whatever came up, as far as I know, no one ever presented a paper or initiated a discussion about censorship. Banning was obviously discussed amongst colleagues in the libraries I worked in, and we took the issues often to the library committee on the campus here. The library committee was mainly representative of the academic faculties and we discussed the ways and means of certain […]. We wanted to bring to their attention that we were taking this quite seriously. So just for making books that were banned for circulation but not for possession pretty easily available – by unlocking the cupboards – we had their backing for that. That is where the most meaningful discussions occurred, with academics, not with the library profession. We reckon that if we were going to make a

[…] in terms of making the system a little less […] it would be with academic colleagues, not with librarian colleagues.

South Africa was a bizarre society, very strange society. I think that was actually the title of a book that was banned. It was hard to believe that a police agent or government official would actually come in to a library and arrest librarians or confiscate all the banned books and so on. They could have done so but even as isolated as South Africa was those days, the government worried about what the rest of the world thought about them. There is kind of a self-confident air about it. It was a strange society, and also an open society in all sorts of strange ways, it was doing bizarre and unreasonable and reckless things. But it still wanted to be seen by the Western world, so there was always a lingering worry at the back of their mind, with how these things could be interpreted elsewhere. It was a very bureaucratic repression, especially in white areas.