



Reading and the Making of Student Activists in Soweto, c. 1968 – 1976.

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in History at
the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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Dedication

To:

Irene Anne Jillson.

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Abstract

This research report explores the reading practices among politically aware high school students living in Soweto between 1968 and 1976. The research report uses original oral interviews as well as archival work to construct a social history of reading. After outlining the social characteristics of schooling in Soweto during these years, the dissertation uncovers networks of reading. The analysis of reading practice draws from the literature of history and sociology of the book in Africa. While black student protest movements in 1970s South Africa have been studied in some depth, the aspect of reading has not been covered systematically. The report builds upon the work of Archie Dick whose book *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* uncovers the reading history of common readers in South Africa, ranging from slaves in the Cape Colony to political exiles in the closing years of apartheid. Inspired by *The Hidden History's* broad sweep of South African reading history among common readers, the research report focuses on a subset of these - student activists.

During this time, the African National Congress and Pan African Congress were banned and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), along with their ideology, was hegemonic in the townships. The dissertation uses Dan Magaziner's and Ian Macqueen's work on the development of the BCM, primarily as an intellectual movement, and how these ideas were spread in society, to trace the change in reading practices among students in the early 1970s. The research report reveals that Black Consciousness, while not causing the 1976 student uprising, had a decisive effect on the interpretive modes that students employed in their reading, thus opening up a new way of interacting with print. The dissertation also uses Lefebvrian theory to explain how the subversive use of certain spaces such as libraries and community centres, provided by the state, helped forge this new radical perspective on text among students.

The major findings of this research report are that (a) most of the reading that student activists did in Soweto in the early 1970s was not overtly political but they had developed counter-hegemonic interpretive modes that subverted texts provided by the state, (b) the BCM successfully penetrated schools with their message and had an important influence on reading practices, (c) students and other community members appropriated spaces such as state-provided community centres and libraries to further their goals and values and that (d) a social history of reading among common readers such as students can tell us a lot about a time that has otherwise been understood as politically quiescent.

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Acronyms

ANC – African National Congress
ASM – African Students’ Movement
AWS – African Writers Series
BAAB – Bantu Affairs Administration Board
BC – Black Consciousness
BCM – Black Consciousness Movement
BPC – Black People’s Convention
DBE – Department of Bantu Education
DOCC – Donaldson Orlando Community Centre
JCC – Johannesburg City Council
JNEAD – Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department
MIHS – Morris Isaacson High School
NEUM – Non-European Unity Movement
NP – National Party
OHS – Orlando High School
PAC – Pan African Congress
SASM- South African Students’ Movement
SASO – South African Students’ Organization
SSRC – Soweto Student’s Representative Council
UCM- University Christian Movement
WRAB – West Rand Administration Board

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INTRODUCTION

“The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.”

– James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers,” October 1963.

The events of 16 June 1976 in Soweto, which soon spread to the rest of South Africa, are well documented. On that day, students skipped class to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in some courses and the generally poor quality of Bantu Education. It was also a protest about the system of apartheid, which had become increasingly repressive. The Soweto uprising is a historical moment that not only made Soweto famous all over the world but turned the tide in the fight against apartheid. Many scholars have written on this topic. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, for example, argues that the uprising was a response to Afrikaans being introduced as a medium of instruction in junior secondary schools in early 1976, and reflects on the longer history of cultural imperialism through language in South Africa.¹ Julian Brown looks at the Soweto uprising as part of broader changes in protest, ideology, and politics in the country during apartheid, and how these affected the political order.² Noor Nieftagodien has written a short but detailed overview of the entire uprising, drawing from a rich tradition of social history in Soweto and showing the role that student groups played.³ Helena Pohlandt-McCormick also uses oral history interviews to add nuance to the official accounts of the uprising, while reflecting on how the violence that participants experienced has shaped how they remember the event.⁴

Soweto was created by the South African state as part of the ideology of segregation and later apartheid. Its foundations lie in settlements in the area, which was initially farming ground, as early as 1905 when the location of Klipspruit was created (Klipspruit is now Pimville). But it was only in the late 1930s that the state started developing Orlando West as a “modern township.” Orlando West was quickly followed by Central Western Jabavu in 1946 and Moroka in 1947. As the demand for accommodation for black South Africans coming to

¹ Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-Memories of June 1976*, Updated edition with new material added (Northlands, Johannesburg : Picador Africa, 2017).

² J Brown, *The Road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of June 1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2016).

³ Noor Nieftagodien, *The Soweto Uprising* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2015).

⁴ Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *I Saw a Nightmare - Doing Violence to Memory.: The Soweto Uprising, June 16 1976*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013).

work in mines and industry grew, more townships were added to what would become Soweto in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1963, the name Soweto, an acronym of “South Western Townships”, was given to the area by the Johannesburg City Council. Management of the area moved to the central government’s Bantu Affairs Department in the early 1970s and then to local councils in the 1980s. Today, 25 years into democracy, Soweto is a vibrant city within a city. Again administered by the Johannesburg City Council, it boasts all the latest amenities and trappings of capitalism as well as still showing structural inequalities and the legacies of apartheid planning.⁵

This research report is about the texts and ideas that contributed to the political awakening of the Soweto students of the Class of 1976. It addresses the everyday lives of the high school students who were leaders in the uprising, prior to this historical moment. By focusing on what students read, and how and where they read, this report contributes to the scholarship on Soweto in that it brings to the fore the cultural context in which this inspirational group arose. The political moment also seemed apt to return to the topic of student protest. In 2015 and 2016, South African university students inspired their peers elsewhere when they protested for the removal of symbols of oppression like the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the campus of the University of Cape Town. They also protested financial exclusion at universities, which were seen as perpetuating apartheid inequalities. The current generation of students were inspired by and linked their protests to the 16 June 1976 generation. It seemed appropriate to look back at previous movements to, if not learn from them, cast a different light on today’s movements.

I set out on this research project with a number of questions related to reading in times of social upheaval. My major questions were: To what extent did reading contribute to conscientization of politically aware high school students in 1970s Soweto? What role did reading play in the struggles of the 1970s among Sowetan high school students? From these, a number of subsidiary questions arose; What was the impact of censorship on the reading practices of Soweto high schoolers? Where did students read? How did students read? With whom did students read? Where did student activists access reading material from? Were there any gender differences in reading practices among student activists and, if so, what were they? And, finally, what was the impact of poetry and debating societies on reading practices?

⁵ See P. L. Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Maskew Miller Longman, 1998) for a good pictorial history of Soweto.

Key Issues in This Research Report

In his memoir *Native Nostalgia*, Jacob Dlamini reminisces on growing up in 1980s Katlehong. In one passage, he writes of curling up with books in a cosy corner of the house, be it atlases or English grammar books.⁶ Most of the literature on reading by black youth during apartheid has suggested a utilitarian approach to the practice or has looked at schools as sites of contesting apartheid power. However, this image shows that reading – at least for some – was a pleasurable activity, an escape from the boredom or repression of everyday life. One of my key findings is that high school students in Soweto in the late 1960s and early 1970s participated in a vibrant reading culture for pleasure. I show that students’ social and cultural context led to the development of counter-hegemonic reading practices that students for instance used while reading assigned texts for school. Of particular note is their turn to what they termed “relevant” literature – exemplified by increasing popularity of the African Writers Series after 1972. Many of the books in this series were not censored and were available in public libraries provided by the state. However, students read and interpreted them in political ways.

Another important theme that is explored across the chapters of this dissertation is the role of Soweto’s high school students and other community members in “subverting” state institutions such as schools, public libraries and community centres. The report explores the contradictions of apartheid that enabled young student activists to use those very institutions – such as schools and public libraries – that were designed to enforce apartheid to turn the system on its head. I explore the extent to which high school teachers subverted curricula by quietly inserting political messages in lessons as early as the late 1960s, a process that became more pronounced when teachers who were affiliated with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) went into some Soweto schools after 1972. Furthermore, community centres had for a long time been used for meetings, performances and youth club meetings. These spaces, as well as public libraries, facilitated the politicization of young activists by serving as a meeting place.

According to Bhekizizwe Peterson, among black South African artists, “the preferred genres of the 1970s were poetry and theatre instead of the dominant prose of the 1950s and 1960s.” However, by the mid 1970s prose had again become a preferred genre among black

⁶ Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009).

artists.⁷ These trends affected the way the 1976 generation of students consumed literature and throughout this study, I was aware of the importance of other genres apart from print. Soweto poetry rose out of the BCM. In this movement, poems were used to spread political messages and broke down the distinction between orality and literacy, making the move from one to the other fluid.⁸ Alberto Manguel's *History of Reading* notes that reading aloud to groups of people has been a common practice for the dissemination of ideas in western history.⁹ While sticking to investigating reading practices, the research report shows that poetry, speeches from older political activists, discussions at political meetings and debates and other forms of oral dissemination of information shaped the reading practices of high school students in the 1970s.

Book and Reading History – Some Concepts

The field of book history has evolved from focusing on the materiality of the book as an object to encompass the social and cultural aspects of books and reading. A key scholar is Robert Darnton who locates readers within a book “communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader.”¹⁰ It should be noted that this model mainly looks at books and other printed publications. Rachel Matteau-Matsha has adapted this concept to the South African context for common readers who read in the context of apartheid censorship, and I have adopted it as part of my study.¹¹ According to Darnton, book historians usually take up one part of this circuit to study while keeping the holistic process in mind. My research project focused on the readership, as well as social infrastructure that supported this readership.

The literature on reading cultures in Africa is vast and there has also been some important work specific to South Africa since Archie Dick's seminal book, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*. Dick's book argues that South African common readers often read in opposition to the repressive hegemony and he traces the different ways that the book was used to further the interests of oppressed classes.¹² This literature review considers

⁷ Bhekizizwe Peterson, “Culture, Resistance and Representation,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007), 170.

⁸ Rachel Matteau, “Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading under Apartheid” (PhD diss., Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 2012), 34.

⁹ Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2014).

¹⁰ Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd ed (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹¹ Matteau, “Real and Imagined Readers.” See Chapter 3, p.82-89 (The Alternative Literary Circuit Among Soweto's High School Students), of this thesis for a discussion of how Soweto students accessed and read banned books in the early 1970s.

¹² Archie L Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

work that is most relevant to understanding black readers in South Africa. In the broader African context, the work of two scholars needs mentioning in any attempt at a history of reading on the continent. Karin Barber remains the authority on print culture in Africa. Barber's work has defined a "middle zone" between the manual labourer who reluctantly used literacy, and the educated elite. The literacy practiced in this middle zone is referred to as "tin trunk literacy" which involves "a fervent regard for the capacity of reading and writing to enhance personal and social existence and create a particular kind of civilized and civic community."¹³ In her introduction to the important edited volume *Africa's Hidden Histories Everyday Literacy and the Making of the Self*, Barber points out that South Africa was an exception in this regard because of the racialized environment. One of the earliest examples of reading circles for urban Africans is the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg which

was established and controlled by liberal whites with a library supplied by a major American philanthropist. It was a large, long-lasting, and heavily regulated institution. With deepening racial segregation foreshadowing the policy of 'separate development,' both indigenous culture and 'civilization' itself were open to question.¹⁴

My study examined some of the infrastructure of reading during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including schools, libraries, community centres, and peculiar ways in which black readers in high school appropriated these spaces.

Stephanie Newell's *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* traces the development of reading groups in colonial Ghana and includes a useful gendered analysis. It is an instructive example of a scholar probing how the interpretive mode of a common readership emerges. Newell's readers are young men with some primary education who formed literary clubs in the Gold Coast. The clubs served to reinforce gender identity while allowing for the promotion of certain "modern" values. Notably, some of the earliest writers in Ghana come from these very clubs, bringing with them a sense of aesthetic and genre. Newell determines the cultural context of reading in a colonial context and shows how the interpretive strategies of the Ghanaian scholars were contingently developed.¹⁵ Following Newell's method, I first show how the experiences

¹³ Karin Barber, "Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa," in *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber, African Expressive Cultures (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁴ Barber, "Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa," 15.

¹⁵ Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: How to Play the Game of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

of high school students growing up in Soweto during high apartheid in South Africa shaped their interpretation of the texts they encountered and then proceed to trace their reading practices.

In South Africa, the field of book history is relatively new. Archie Dick and Rachel Mattheu-Matsha's work has already been discussed. There are several other notable scholars, such as Isabel Hofmeyr and Lize Kriel, who have written on book history in South Africa.¹⁶ One of the chapters in *Africa's Hidden Histories* edited by Karin Barber and mentioned above is Bhekizizwe Peterson who traces the role that literacy played in the early African intelligentsia in Johannesburg.¹⁷ As Barber has noted, black South African readers had to contend with the racist environment in which they acquired literacy. Moreover, in a subtly different way than other places in Africa, in the early library movement and debate recorded in the pages of *The Bantu World*, there is a "conflation of the personal and the political, the desire to 'live more abundantly' within the 'self,' the domestic sphere, and in the 'larger home', the South African state."¹⁸ Peterson's readers are the black elite in the early twentieth century, who in some ways foreshadow some of the habits and patterns of the high school students I write about in this research report. However, there are many important differences between these two generations of black readers. One interesting distinction between them is that unlike these early readers who, at least in the record they left, disdained "unsuitable" reading like the detective novels that would become so popular in the 1960s, the later generation derived pleasure from reading such works.¹⁹

Corrine Sandwith's work situates cultural production among "an emergent South African opposition" in early apartheid South Africa. She uses black magazines and newspapers to trace a "broad configuration of leftist/African nationalist critique, which addressed the inequities of successive segregationist and apartheid regimes from the stance of democratic humanism."²⁰ Sandwith further expands her work to include a consideration of space, the "where of reading"

¹⁶ See Isabel Hofmeyr and Lize Kriel, "Book History in Southern Africa: What Is It and Why Should It Interest Historians?," *South African Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470609464927> for a foundational article about the emergence of the field in the region.

¹⁷ Bhekizizwe Peterson, "The Bantu World and the World of the Book : Reading, Writing, and 'Enlightenment,'" in *Africa's Hidden Histories : Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber, African Expressive Cultures (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Peterson, 242.

¹⁹ Ibid., 245.

²⁰ Corinne Sandwith, *World of Letters: Reading Communities and Cultural Debates in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu- Natal Press, 2014), 3.

for black readers during the same period. What emerges from her study of this period is a “poor library,” a general sense of scarcity faced by African readers.²¹

To a great extent, the experience of scarcity in the reading lives of the high school students in this study continued into the rest of the apartheid period, with the notable exception of the explosion in availability of newspapers in townships. The later generation of readers who formed my research participants had some free time and spaces where they could read, marking a departure from what Sandwith calls “fugitive reading.” Belinda Bozzoli’s study of how political activists in Alexandra performed translation of ideas from “illicit” to “legal” and from “elite” to “popular” locates political reading in the context of 1980s apartheid repression and censorship. Bozzoli’s research is premised on the notion that while the apartheid state created boundaries to prevent information flow, these were bridged by activists and intellectuals in township communities, and this made possible the articulation of revolutionary ideas. The work of South African Students Organization (SASO) and South African Students Movement (SASM) intellectuals probably prefigured this.²² Sarah Nuttall’s study of young black South African women in Johannesburg during the early 1990s showed that they had a preference for reading romances and popular fiction, showing “this kind of reading to be a two-pronged activity proclaiming a free space and as symptomatic of a desire to escape often difficult lives.”²³ This research report provides some evidence for escapist reading, though evidence of highly gendered reading practices has not been found.

Archie Dick introduces an important concept in which he calls places where unauthorized reading occurs “zones of influence.” In these places, “common readers confront elites and authority.”²⁴ Knowledge is not neutral, and this was particularly evident during apartheid when the state proscribed what could and could not be read. “Zones of influence” could be schools, reading groups or libraries. This research report explores other zones of influence pertinent to student activists such as community centres. It is concerned with both banned and ‘legal’ literature, both of which were read in public spaces and in the home. Another important aspect of reading among student activists during this period is the importance of orality in conveying the ideas found in books or newspapers to other people who may not have had access to copies. According to Noor Niefagodien, in the 1970s “all over Soweto young activists were busy

²¹ Corinne Sandwith, “The Appearance of the Book: Towards a History of the Reading Lives and Worlds of Black South African Readers,” *English in Africa* 45, no. 1 (April 2018): 12–23, <https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v45i1.1>.

²² Belinda Bozzoli, “The Taming of the Illicit: Bounded Rebellion in South Africa, 1986,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 326–53.

²³ Nuttall, “Reading in the Lives and Writing of Black South African Women,” 97.

²⁴ Dick, *The Hidden History*, 5.

forming small groups – discussion circles, reading groups, debating societies – to grapple with radical ideologies and discover how best to organize themselves.”²⁵ This dissertation discusses some of these student groups where the circulation and debate of texts and ideas happened, what texts were discussed and how students used public infrastructure, as well as the bookshop establishment, to subvert apartheid.

A Word on Censorship in South Africa

A discussion of reading in apartheid South Africa would be incomplete without awareness of the context of censorship. While the roots of censorship lie before the coming to power of the National Party in 1948, the period of apartheid saw a dramatic expansion of legislation meant to suppress freedom of speech and information. Close to twenty laws affected the way people could express themselves, including the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, the Customs and Excise Act of 1964 and the Publications Act of 1974. These laws curtailed what could be written about by newspapers, what books could be imported or published within the country, and the assembly of people. Vic Alhadeff, former chief sub-editor of *The Cape Times*, writes:

The government had a practice of ‘banning’ people and organisations. Doing so condemned such people to a twilight existence. Activists such as Mandela were not merely imprisoned, they were also banned. The African National Congress was banned. It was illegal for media to be seen to promote the aims of a banned organisation, quote a banned person or publish photographs of a banned person.²⁶

Alhadeff touches on the complex nature of censorship in South Africa. Not only was the circulation of texts restricted, censorship legislation included the curtailment of freedoms of movement and association.

The apartheid state was very concerned with regulating speech and the flow of information. Scholars such as librarian Christopher Merrett has described the lengths to which

²⁵ Nieftagodien, *The Soweto Uprising*, 38.

²⁶ Vic Alhadeff, “Journalism during South Africa’s Apartheid Regime,” *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies - an Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 2 (2018): 10, <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v10i2.5984>.

the apartheid state went to control the flow of information and ideas.²⁷ Merrett argues that the South African state needed such an extensive censorship apparatus in order to maintain the peculiar system in which a minority ruled over the disenfranchised majority. But, as the censorship records show, the majority of texts were banned not because of their political content but in terms of their presumed immorality. Thus, according to Merrett, the great expansion in censorship following 1948 was in line with the National Party's "right-wing desire to discipline [which was] based on a sense of insecurity." This "subconsciously required eulogies and turned critical opponents into enemies of the state."²⁸

This general climate of censorship had an effect on the way that South Africans read. Matteau-Matsha's study situates itself within this repressive environment and investigates the clandestine ways that books were shared and distributed, the strategies that people adopted to hide books from prying eyes and the different material forms that books took. She posits that while readers of banned literature changed the physical form of books, these books also changed them. The mere banning of books increased their allure among activists and they "utilized" texts to actualise their political identity and bring about social change."²⁹ The research report will address how the politically active high school students who are the subject of this report navigated racial segregation and censorship. While censorship was a reality they had to contend with, many of the texts that came to shape their political imagination were in fact *not* censored. That notwithstanding, I discuss the way in which students still understood that they were participating in what Matteau-Matsha calls an "alternative discourse."³⁰

Matthew Bunn writes that according to New Censorship Theory, "'censorship' connotes not only state repression, a decidedly secondary form of thought control, but also a broad category of social institutions, practices, and actors, often with the consent and participation of the actors, if only subconsciously."³¹ State censorship, the actual banning of books and regulation of what should be printed in newspapers or broadcasted is but one minor aspect of censorship. Indeed, the apartheid state was bent on controlling the discourse in South Africa in order to protect its ideology. This study, on some level, is an investigation into the failure of both the broader kind of censorship and state censorship. For young students living in Soweto found ways to transcend the intellectual limits imposed on them by apartheid through reading

²⁷ Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994).

²⁸ Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, 4.

²⁹ Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers," 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

³¹ Matthew Bunn, "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After," *History and Theory* 54, no. 1 (2015): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10739>.

and other forms of engagement with new ideas. A major argument of the research report is that apartheid was not always and everywhere hegemonic and this was due, in part, to the efforts of common readers like the students whose stories populate these pages.

A Note on Methodology

For this project, I conducted 13 oral history interviews, using the life history approach, with people who were politically active high school students in Soweto during the 1970s. Four of the interviewees were women. Additionally, I had several informal interviews with other people who were active in that period or have a keen understanding of Soweto and its historical dynamics. The central questions in the interviews focused on what was read, how reading material was obtained, modalities of reading and social and political networks that arose from or were linked to this reading. Other questions probed the influence of debates and poetry performances on the spread of ideas, how oral forms related to print and, equally importantly, where reading happened. The choice to focus on politically active students was made in order to bound the study. I chose Soweto as the study site because it was the heart of the 1976 student uprising, beginning with junior secondary school students who latched on the teaching of some subjects in Afrikaans, a language few understood and the language of the oppressor, as a grievance against Bantu Education in general.

Interviewees were contacted mainly through a few contacts from my supervisor and University of the Witwatersrand historian Clive Glaser. These then gave me more contacts that I pursued in a snowball sampling approach. Rather than focusing on quantity, I sought a cross section of people from Soweto high schools during that period. I also spoke with people who had been students in Soweto before returning to work as teachers or librarians. This gave a fascinating take on the context of school culture, that proved crucial in understanding the circulation of texts. Starting with Glaser's contacts inevitably skewed the sample to represent the two schools he has mostly written about in his work on the history of education in Soweto: Orlando High School and the Morris Isaacson High School. However, a few of the participants attended Naledi High School. Before going to speak with interviewees, I did as much background research on them as I could. The oral testimonies and autobiographies collected in *Soweto '76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles* proved very useful both for context and as

a source for background research.³² Some of my interviewees had been interviewed as part of other projects, and these interviews' transcripts or recordings were consulted prior to my own interviews. I found the autobiography authored by one of my interviewees, Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses*, extremely rich in painting a picture of what it was like growing up in Soweto in the 1960s and 1970s.³³

While the utility of using oral sources for groups who are not well represented in the colonial archive is widely accepted in social history, a few methodological observations pertinent to this project and the practice of oral history in the South African context require reflection here. First of these is my positionality as a young, African, postgraduate student from Zambia. In the introduction to Belinda Bozzoli's and Mmantho Nkotsoe's *Women of Phokeng*, the authors reflect on the different ways that Nkotsoe's positionality affected the way that the interviews she conducted turned out. Nkotsoe's positionality as a young researcher whose home village was very near to Phokeng and who spoke the local language, Setswana, leads to some insider status.³⁴ "The interviews display a sense of conversation and intimacy between interviewer and interviewee, which is obviously aided by Mmantho [Nkotsoe]'s fluent use of rural Setswana."³⁵ Other positive assets of Nkotsoe's insider status include her race and gender, which make interviewees more comfortable to reveal things they would not have to a white or male interviewer. While there are differences that negatively affect the interviews, like her youth in relation to some informants which makes them withhold certain information about childbirth, Nkotsoe's success lay in her insider status that was of an optimal degree.

Unlike Nkotsoe, I am neither South African nor can I speak a South African indigenous language with competence. All interviews were carried out in English, and this limited who could be interviewed. On the other hand, my outsider status was counteracted by the fact that my home country, Zambia, was a Frontline State which provided significant support to the liberation movement in South Africa. As a young African man who, while far removed from apartheid or colonialism, lived with the latter's legacies in my own home country, I found that participants were eager to talk to me about their own experiences or share their views about Zambia. A few of them had spent time in Zambia for education or in political exile, and this

³² Khangela Ali Hlongwane, Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, and Mothobi Mutloatse, eds., *Soweto '76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles: Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16th, 1976* (Houghton [South Africa]: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2006).

³³ Sibongile Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Braamfontein, South Africa: Skotaville Press, 2001).

³⁴ Belinda Bozzoli and Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 4-9.

³⁵ Bozzoli and Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, 8.

provided for interesting perspectives as well as a more personal connection. In African societies, age remains an important social category. I approached the research project as an opportunity to learn from my elders. In conversation, I found that the interviewees often reflected broadly on the future of South Africa, perhaps because they saw me as a member of a new generation that has to find answers for pressing concerns. The struggle alumni I spoke to were quite open and provided detailed responses to my questions, and helped fill in gaps in cultural understanding.

In addition to positionality, I also had to be cognizant of issues around sharing authority, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa. As has been stated, I am younger than all informants and this inevitably unbalanced power relationships. Moreover, the people whom I interviewed participated in the liberation struggle and hold a social prestige and authority from “having been there.” As Lorraine Sitzia has noted, shared authority in the context of an oral history interview is not just on the part of the researcher but has to be shared by the interviewee as well.³⁶ Indeed, as most oral historians argue today, the interview process is a collaboration. My experience was resoundingly positive, as every co-creator was eager to speak to me and gladly shared their stories and answered what were sometimes elementary questions with patience. Some participants even referred me to additional resources: sending me thought pieces they had co-authored, giving me a book on the Soweto uprising written by a veteran of the struggle, or referring me to join a Facebook group that is commemorating the history of Mofolo township of Soweto. I am extremely grateful for the time and seriousness interviewees accorded me.

As Alessandro Portelli notes, “oral sources are a necessary (not a sufficient) condition for a history of the nonhegemonic classes.”³⁷ For this study, a number of documentary sources were consulted as a way of triangulating the data obtained from oral testimony. During the course of this research, I spent many hours at Historical Papers Research Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand’s Cullen Library, visited the National Archives in Pretoria, and was lucky to stumble into an exhibit on censorship during apartheid at the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town campus. The sources that I consulted in these archives included the archives of municipal authorities of Soweto, police testimonies, trial records and newspaper collections. In refiguring the colonial archive, Bhekizizwe Peterson advises us to go beyond

³⁶ Lorraine Sitzia, “A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?,” *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ohr.2003.30.1.87>.

³⁷ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 40.

reading the archive against the grain to “rethinking the nature and institutional processes that go into the making of the archives; and second, making sure that the act of refiguring takes due cognisance of the experiences and worldviews of Africans.”³⁸

Going beyond the colonial archive, I specifically sought out publications of the student organization, SASM. I was lucky to find a rich digital archive kept by the Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) project at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The project has archived a few crucial editions of the SASM newsletter as well as some interviews. Because of the scope of the study, records of the censorship board were not consulted. However, I found the website *Beacon for Freedom of Expression* a useful source. A project initiated and hosted by the National Library of Norway, it “is an international bibliographic database with nearly 50,000 titles of censored works and literature on censorship and freedom of expression.”³⁹ While not a complete record of every single publication that was censored in South Africa – a difficult task because of the various laws that affected the circulation of texts and stages at which a publication could be censored - it is nevertheless an impressively comprehensive, searchable source.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One gives an overview of the educational context in Soweto in the early 1970s to create a sense of the school environment that created the interpretive strategies that would become important in reading. Chapter Two delves into the reading practices of politically active students in Soweto, tracing their development as readers in the home and in school, and then arguing that the explosion of Black Consciousness in the early 1970s had a decidedly transformative effect on interpretive strategies and choices of books. The chapter also addresses newspaper reading in Soweto. Chapter Three uses Lefebvrian theory to show how library spaces and youth clubs were appropriated by common readers to further their values and politics. The chapter also discusses evidence of a “samizdat” literature scene, banned and subversive literature that was passed around secretly.

³⁸ Bhekizizwe Peterson, “The Archives and the Political Imaginary,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cape Town, South Africa; Dordrecht, The Netherlands; Norwell, MA: David Philip ; Kluwer Academic Publishers ; Sold and distributed in North, Central and South America by Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 34.

³⁹ “Beacon for Freedom of Expression,” accessed December 21, 2019, <http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/>.

Chapter One:

“We Were Ordinary School Pupils”: Everyday Life Experiences of Black High School Students in Soweto between 1968 and 1976.

Introduction

This chapter describes the everyday life experiences of the politicized high school students in Soweto who came to prominence during the June 1976 Soweto uprising. The chapter argues that during the early 1970s, school going identity became an important youth identity and this was occasioned by a unique reading culture and interpretive mode. Paying particular attention to the schools attended by the cohort of students who became politicized in these years, the chapter outlines some modes of cultural production that served as precursors to reading. The aspects of school culture discussed include protest traditions inherited from their forebears and vibrant student clubs. Furthermore, the students were taught by teachers who actively sought to impart political ideas. While teachers affiliated with the BCM were important influences on the students, I have found evidence of prior subversion of the Bantu Education system pointing to contradictions within apartheid that are discussed further in later chapters.

Black consciousness had great appeal to a generation of students that grew up with an acute awareness of the injustices of spatial segregation and high apartheid. Since the early 1970s, students felt a deep need to address this. As the liberation movements, notably the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), had been banned for over a decade, students used school clubs to express their yearnings for freedom. School debates often touched on topics of liberation, particularly after an injection of Black Consciousness energy from around 1972 or 1973. So did classroom discussions and conversations with members of older generations. The chapter lays the foundation for the next two chapters, which address reading practices among these students and the various spaces in which literature circulated.

In order to contextualise the discussion, the chapter will begin with a broad discussion of the change in government policy on secondary education in black urban areas that occurred at the beginning of the 1970s. Following this, the chapter will sketch some key aspects of high school culture to paint a picture of the milieu in which high school students in the late 1960s and early 1970s came of age. Rather than the category of “youth,” this chapter and the research

report in general uses the category of “student” for historical analysis. The use of this category is further necessitated by the fact that the critical moment that has inspired this research, the Soweto student uprising of 1976, was student-led, not broadly youth-led.⁴⁰ Another reason why the category of high school student is interesting in Soweto in the 1970s is that the ages of high school students varied greatly. According to Phala Modise, who was in Form 5 at Morris Isaacson High School (MIHS) in Central Western Jabavu, Soweto in 1976, it was fairly common to have students who were significantly older than their peers in the same high school classroom.⁴¹ This age difference was partly due to the fact that schooling was neither compulsory nor free for black youth and students would enter school at different ages depending on their families’ ability to pay.

Government Policy on High School Education in the 1970s

The year 1972 saw a major policy shift in the National Party (NP) government’s approach to urban education for Africans. This policy shift was a result of an effort to resolve the shortage of skilled labour in the manufacturing sectors of the economy while keeping the fundamental tenets of apartheid intact. During the 1960s, the government froze the development of secondary schooling in Soweto. At the same time, many more children were receiving primary education because of the expansion of primary schooling that began under Bantu Education in the 1950s. Before 1972, the NP-led central government refused to provide any funds to the Department of Bantu Education (DBE) for increasing the number of classrooms in Soweto. It also blocked the Johannesburg City Council’s Non-European Affairs Department’s (JNEAD) efforts to enact a levy which could pay for such an expansion in school classrooms.⁴² Indeed, the NP government was still committed to the Verwoerdian formula of “R13million plus 4/5 of black taxation” to fund education for all African students in the entire country.⁴³ By 1970, the government spent R461 on every white student while spending only R25.31 on African students.⁴⁴ But this was soon to change.

⁴⁰ See Glaser, “Soweto’s Islands of Learning” for a detailed discussion on what made the Soweto uprisings distinctively student led.

⁴¹ Phala Modise, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 6, 2019).

⁴² Jonathan Hyslop, “Social Conflicts over African Education in South Africa from the 1940’s to 1976.” (PhD diss., Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990), 421–24. The JNEAD was the entity in charge of administering Soweto before the advent of Bantu Affairs Administration Boards in 1971.

⁴³ Hyslop, “Social Conflicts,” 414. The use of the term “African” refers to the racial categories that apartheid enforced.

⁴⁴ “Towards a 20 Year Review: Basic and Post School Education,” Education and Skills Development (Pretoria, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, n.d.), 35.

In 1968, the South African economy entered a recession and the needs of sectors of capital began to demand an expansion of secondary education for the urban black working class. Hyslop notes that “by 1971, organized business began to take up the educational themes which had been advanced by ideologists and politicians associated with the liberal and municipal educational lobbies.”⁴⁵ The need for a better educated and higher skilled workforce became apparent in order to protect the economic gains of the last decade. Ideological conflicts and subsequent shifts within the NP, Hyslop argues, also paved the way for greater acceptance that the DBE had to be funded from the general revenues of the state. This policy change rapidly led to the construction of additional secondary schools in Soweto.⁴⁶ Between this change in policy and private donations from corporations, 40 new schools had been built in Soweto by mid-1974.⁴⁷ The number of students in Soweto’s secondary schools rose from 12,600 to above 34,000 between 1972 and 1976.⁴⁸

This expansion in the provision of secondary education happened within the context of grand apartheid. It is worth noting that during the same years that the government allowed the expansion of urban secondary education, it was entrenching Afrikaner supremacy in the curriculum. The 50-50 rule, as it came to be known, was the directive that half of the curriculum should be taught in the Afrikaans language, while the other subjects were to be taught in English, with non-examinable subjects in the home language.⁴⁹ The policy was developed in a series of DBE circulars between 1970 and 1974.⁵⁰ And at the start of the school year 1976, local school boards in Soweto were instructed to begin implementing the policy in their schools. However, not all schools were immediately affected.

In 1976, Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu was a 14-year-old student at Phefeni Junior Secondary School, one of the schools affected by this directive. For him and his classmates, the protests that erupted in June 1976 were about cultural imperialism manifested through the introduction of an unfamiliar language of instruction. Bantu Education curricula had ensured that students

⁴⁵ Hyslop, “Social Conflicts,” 416.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 432.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 434.

⁴⁸ A. Brooks and J. Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, London, 1980, pp. 42 - 43 quoted in Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976*, Social History of Africa (Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 2000), 160.

⁴⁹ “Home language” refers to a child’s first language or mother tongue. By the 1970s, Soweto primary schools under the DBE were segregated by ethnicity.

⁵⁰ Department of Bantu Education, Circular No. 2 of 1973, “Medium of Instruction in Secondary Schools (and Std 5 classes) in White Areas.” and Bantu Education Department Regional Circular No. 2 of 1974 quoted in Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, “Cultural Imperialism, Language and Ideological Struggles inside the Soweto Classrooms,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 7: Soweto uprisings: New Perspectives, Commemorations and Memorialisation*. (Pretoria, South Africa: University of South Africa Press, 2017), 10, 16–18.

attended primary schools where classes were taught in the home language.⁵¹ Students arrived in secondary school with very little knowledge of English or Afrikaans (in some areas) because the two languages were not used as mediums of instruction prior to this and while they were taught as separate subjects, they were not taught intensively. Ndlovu writes,

In 1975, Form One students in all junior secondary schools were learning in English. When, in 1976, the Department of Bantu Education enforced Afrikaans in selected schools, the affected African pupils were required to adapt to learning in two ‘foreign’ languages within two years, first English in 1975 and then Afrikaans in 1976.⁵²

As Ndlovu points out, this policy shift was fraught with learning challenges for students who were suddenly expected to learn new languages *as well as* subject content in a strange tongue. Furthermore, few teachers of the subjects expected to be taught in Afrikaans felt confident enough with the language themselves to use it for instruction.⁵³ Teachers, school boards, journalists and bantustan leaders alike saw this directive as impractical and these adults spent much of the beginning of 1976 petitioning the DBE to reconsider this policy shift. When the students saw that their elders’ actions were not yielding any results, they took matters into their own hands. Ndlovu recounts the months of boycotts and initial protests leading up to 16 June 1976 to point out that the discontent was not limited to the small group of elite high schools where the South African Students’ Movement (SASM) was most active. Indeed, schools like Morris Isaacson High School (MIHS) which were not immediately affected by the directive only joined the protests later.⁵⁴ The following section will take a closer look at school culture in Soweto high schools in the 1970s.

⁵¹ Peter Kallaway, “Introduction,” in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened* (Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa, 2002), 2.

⁵² Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings*, 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22–25.

⁵⁴ Ndlovu, “Cultural Imperialism, Language and Ideological Struggles inside the Soweto Classrooms,” 28.

School Culture in the 1970s



Figure 1 A typical classroom scene in a Soweto high school in the 1970s. Notice raised "black power" fists and students sharing a newspaper. Undated photograph by Bongani Mnguni. Source: Khangela Ali Hlongwane, Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, and Mothobi Mutloatse, eds., *Soweto '76: Reflections on the Liberation Struggles: Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of June 16th, 1976* (Houghton [South Africa]: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2006), 103.

The expansion of secondary education discussed above created new identities for black youth that had hitherto not existed. Much of urban youth culture, particularly for males, had for the previous three decades focused on gangs, and schooling introduced new alternatives. As figure 1.1 above shows, aspects of school culture such as wearing a uniform served to reinforce school identity. This helped youth who attended school to begin to think of themselves as young scholars. According to Clive Glaser, in the 1950s, while “*tsotsi* subculture was virtually hegemonic among male urban youth, the following decade was a period of rather scrambled and shifting youth identity.”⁵⁵ The term *tsotsi* arose in the 1940s to describe an urban African youth subculture but it became associated with juvenile delinquency by the 1950s.⁵⁶ In the late 1940s and the 1950s, Glaser writes, “A *tsotsi* was a young man who dressed, spoke, and behaved in a clearly identifiable way. He imitated American ‘city slicker’ clothing styles, spoke *tsotsitaal* [a street language], indulged in some kind of criminal or quasi-legal activity, and generally moved around in gangs.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 105.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

By the 1970s, the identity of being a school student had become an alternative aspiration for children growing up in Soweto (and other black townships). One student who grew up with the aspiration of becoming a high school student at one of Soweto's heritage schools is Phala Modise. Modise was born in 1958. His mother was a domestic labourer working for a white family and his father worked for a dry cleaning company, both in Johannesburg. At an early age, Modise and his brother were sent back to the rural area their family hailed from to begin primary school. After a few years there, he returned to Soweto in 1968 to continue his education. Back in Johannesburg, Modise attended Donaldson Primary School and started Form One at MIHS in 1973. He lived with his family of eight in a small house in White City, a section of the Jabavu township of Soweto. The house, which his parents had purchased in 1962, only had three rooms. He remembers his primary school years in the late 1960s as a time when many people just went up to Standard Six "because being a gangster and being known was more important to them." But, at the same time, the mere presence of high school students in the community meant that alternative role models were becoming more prominent. He remembers seeing a MIHS student in uniform walking by his primary school and his teacher telling the class to study hard so that they too could go to high school and wear a smart uniform.⁵⁸

Glaser argues that, in spite of Bantu Education, the dedicated teachers of schools such as Orlando High School (OHS) and MIHS worked to make these institutions respected spaces for learning and forge a strong school identity. The principals of these two schools from the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, T.W. Kambule and Lekgau Mathabathe respectively, chose to work within the Bantu Education system to create spaces where students could thrive. An article published in the *Weekend World* in 1974 illustrates how, even under Bantu Education, some black students thrived. The article is a profile of Labius Lesibu, a former student of OHS who gained scholarships to study in the United States and was at the time of the article studying for a PhD in Engineering at Syracuse University. The article, entitled "Tops in Tough Field," explains how Lesibu was inspired by Kambule, the principal of OHS, to pursue his passion for Mathematics. As the next chapter will show, newspaper reading was popular among Soweto's high school students in the 1970s and this article would have been shared and discussed widely as a possibility for what one could aspire to become, if they stuck to the path of education.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Modise, interview.

⁵⁹ "Tops in a Tough Field," *Weekend World*, September 22, 1974.

Lesibu's exceptional story is not the only example of Black urban public schooling delivering real learning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Other graduates of schools in Soweto in this period remember their education as a positive experience. Sibongile Mkhabela, who attended Naledi High School in the mid 1970s and was one of the students incarcerated for her role in the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) after the Soweto uprising, says "I think we had very innovative teachers... and you had teachers who were conscious. They were conscious about the kind of young people they needed to raise in a difficult environment."⁶⁰ For Enos Ngutshane, a contemporary of Mkhabela at Naledi, the school was the "great school on the Golden West." Ngutshane, who was in Form Four at the time of the 1976 uprising, says that conditions in "deep Soweto" were very bad and for Naledi students to have a "jewel in that space made us feel very proud."⁶¹ Naledi was a newer area of Soweto with poor public services and notorious for crime. Super Moloi went to OHS in 1971 and insists that "we were ordinary school pupils We were learning but the environment is the one that pushed us [to get involved in politics]."⁶²

If most students in Soweto's high schools in the late 1960s and 1970s were simply trying to get an education and secure a decent standard of living, some went further and sought to learn about the situation prevailing in the wider world with respect to the liberation of Black people. The following chapter covers the reading practices of this group. Here, I will sketch the climate that made it possible for this group of highly politicised students to emerge and that subsequently forged the interpretive strategies students used in their reading. Firstly, the experience of having lived through apartheid and experienced dehumanization at the hands of the agents of the state was a common aspect of life in the 1960s and 1970s. In the meantime, protest culture that was a feature in mission schools in the early 1960s was re-emerging in the urban context of Soweto, as evidenced by school boycotts prior to June 1976. Thirdly, adults in the community would often speak to students at various social functions or as part of extra-curricular activities. Politicized adults were among those who addressed students, leading to a transfer of ideas. Fourthly, student extra-curricular activities – while dominated by sport – also included debate and discussion groups that grew out of the youth club culture. These fora helped sharpen the political awareness of students. Finally, while historians like Heffernan have emphasized the role of South African Students' Organization (SASO)-affiliated teachers

⁶⁰ Sibongile Mkhabela, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (August 15, 2019).

⁶¹ Enos Ngutshane, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 13, 2019).

⁶² Super Moloi, interview by author, Pretoria, South Africa, (July 17, 2019).

in politicizing young students in Soweto,⁶³ I have found evidence that other teachers had been doing this prior to SASO's dominance. Below, I argue that in an atmosphere of repression, the classroom became one of the few places where ideas could be discussed out of sight of the authorities.

Shared Experiences of Apartheid

The 1976 generation of students had lived their entire lives under apartheid. They were the first generation to come of age during the period of high apartheid, and to feel the effects of apartheid legislation and urban planning. Interviewees shared with me vivid memories of indignity, such as being forced to walk off the pavement in the city of Johannesburg or not being able to rest on park benches. The generation that grew up in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the townships of Soweto shared a common awareness of racial injustice, but they also came of age when the Black Consciousness Movement had become a powerful force in Black communities. Black Consciousness, through its various manifestations, challenged this generation to view themselves as dignified in spite of what they had learned growing up.

Oupa Moloto was born in White City, Soweto, in 1955. He was one of seven siblings. His parents came to Johannesburg as migrant labourers. Moloto attended primary school in Soweto, then went to MIHS in 1972. When the 1976 uprising started, he was a Form 5 student. His family had participated in ANC campaigns such as the bus boycotts of the late 1950s. He maintains that Black Consciousness helped him overcome the feelings of inferiority that society had nurtured in him because of his darker skin tone. Moloto recalls the influence of Black Consciousness on his reading choices from around 1973:

I started reading books of the Black Panthers, I started reading the books of Angela Davis. That was the Black Power movement in America. And those books, because now, they are very interesting to me. It's about blackness, this pigmentation that has been giving one a problem and then you start reading about books that are empowering. Books that are saying 'black is beautiful.' And then, now, all this what you have been brought up with, that there's something wrong with black pigmentation now, your

⁶³ Anne Heffernan, "Student/Teachers from Turfloop: The Propagation of Black Consciousness in South African Schools, 1972–76," *Africa* 89, no. S1 (January 2019): S189–209, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972018000979>.

attitude changes. For a change you hear people were saying, ‘black is beautiful,’ ‘black has power.’⁶⁴

The next chapter will trace the development of reading practices among Soweto’s politicized high school students in more detail. Nevertheless, the extent to which apartheid negatively affected the self-esteem of Black people is evident in Moloto’s life. Steve Biko rightly emphasized the importance of raising self-esteem to the whole BC enterprise.

Like the majority of the politically active students, Pearl Luthuli, who graduated from MIHS in 1972, has a family history of involvement in the freedom struggle. Her cousin, who was a member of the banned PAC, Vusi Nkumane, was jailed on Robben Island from 1963 to 1975.⁶⁵ More poignantly, Luthuli’s family was forcibly removed from Sophiatown when she was only a year old. Both these experiences contributed to Luthuli’s own growth and conscientization as a young student. While she was not overtly political while in school, her actions and disposition point to someone who strongly felt the need to fight injustice. Luthuli later became a journalist at *The World* and joined the Black Consciousness Movement-affiliated Union of Black Journalists.⁶⁶

She recounts how she ended up studying the high school subjects of her choice after being forced into a science class by teachers:

And I must have been one of the only three students that revolted against that. And we were in mathematics class and whenever mathematics happened in our classroom, without telling our class teacher we used to move out of that class to go to a class where they were teaching history because I wanted to do history and... history and commerce, because I thought, “I don’t want to be a doctor, I don’t want to be a scientist, why am I doing mathematics?” And we did that maybe for two, three months. Every day this class happened we used to move, three of us, and one day our class teacher was an activist, too and funny why he did not understand why... It became a huge story at school and we were thoroughly beaten up... by *those men* [chuckles]. And made to go back and do what we wanted ...we did not want to do basically. But that’s when one

⁶⁴ Oupa Moloto, Informal Conversation with author, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 15, 2019.

⁶⁵ William H Worger, Charles H Ambler, and Nwando Achebe, *A Companion to African History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 470–71. The Pan African Congress was founded by a breakaway group from the ANC in 1959, led by Robert Sobukwe. The group espoused a more Africanist future for South Africa as opposed to the ANC’s non-racialism.

⁶⁶ Pearl Luthuli, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 19, 2019).

was being shaped and somewhere, they decided we must do what we wanted to do. And they gave us the option. So, I ended up, you know, doing the history and commerce.

This act of protest could be seen as insignificant in the grand sweep of South African history, but for a young black girl living in a racist and patriarchal society to assert her rights to choose her own path of education was revolutionary. Furthermore, as Clive Glaser and others have pointed out, high schools in Soweto at the time practiced harsh discipline, which included corporal punishment. Standing up to teachers was not easy for any student, and even more so for girls.⁶⁷ When set against the backdrop of her and her family's experiences of apartheid, Luthuli's story demonstrates how much the childhood family environment influenced her politicization.

School Protest Culture

In addition to sharing a common experience of life under apartheid, students in Soweto high schools inherited a tradition of black protest from their forebears. Although the 1960s are viewed as a period of political quiescence, the 1950s had been characterised by mass campaigns in the form of boycotts, strikes, and stayaways. These tactics have a long history in South African politics. Indeed, even during the quiescent 1960s, there remained a culture of political activism. Raymond Suttner notes the underground activity that the ANC carried out in the country during the 1960s and 1970s. Because of extreme state repression, ANC sympathisers and members could do "little more than exchange views and interpretations, 'spread the word' and keep up one another's spirits."⁶⁸ These underground networks also served to provide some literature to students in the early 1970s, as well as political education on the history of struggle in South Africa.

Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill note that, during the 1960s, at least two student organizations attempted to mobilize black high school students. The African Students Association (ASA) was founded in 1961 and was affiliated with the ANC, while the African Students' Union of South Africa (ASUSA) was affiliated with the PAC. By this time, both the ANC and PAC were banned and their respective student wings did not gain traction. That the

⁶⁷ Clive Glaser, "'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis': School Politics and Youth Gangs in Soweto, 1968-1976," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 301-23.

⁶⁸ Raymond Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976: A Social and Historical Study* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2008), 62.

ASA “sought to mobilise black students above the level of Std. 6, though with what success we do not know,” shows how high schools were seen as potential places of resistance long before 1976.⁶⁹ In the late 1960s, the African Students’ Movement (ASM), the precursor of the South African Students’ Movement (SASM), discussed below, picketed inter-school music competitions that had begun to take up lots of academic time.⁷⁰

The Black Consciousness leader Ongkgopotse Abram Tiro also inspired one of the early school protests in Soweto (Tiro’s role as an activist teacher is discussed in more detail below). Among the students taught by Tiro at MIHS was Pearl Luthuli:

The great thing that happened to me at that time was around the time when... at the Turfloop University there was a student walkout and some of the students were expelled and we ended up with a man like Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro as our history teacher.⁷¹

She claims that after Tiro was initially removed from teaching history in early 1973, students staged a boycott that led to his temporary reinstating until his eventual dismissal later in the same year. Luthuli explains: “The first toyi-toyi to happen in the black schools before ’76 happened in Morris Isaacson when they decided they wanted Tiro not to continue [teaching],” and adds,

it was tools down, we’re not going into class and we managed to influence all the matric classes. Everybody was not going to. We stood outside and we organized to march to the inspector’s offices which were not far from us. It had never happened in the history of the schools and through that they brought Tiro back.⁷²

If Luthuli’s memory is accurate, Tiro did not stay long after this return. He taught at MIHS from 1972, after his expulsion from the University of the North at Turfloop for making an incendiary anti-Bantu Education speech at the school’s graduation ceremony, until the DBE

⁶⁹ Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development Of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), 71–72.

⁷⁰ Nozipho J. Diseko, “The Origins and Development of the South African Student’s Movement (SASM): 1968–1976,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 1992): 54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079208708305>.

⁷¹ Luthuli, interview.

⁷² Luthuli.

pushed him out of the school in early 1973 and then he subsequently went into exile in Botswana.⁷³

Intergenerational Connections

Another aspect of high school culture that shaped the consciousness of politicized Soweto students in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the keen interest that adults in the community took in the education of young people. This ranged from informal discussions between younger and older members of the community, to speaking visits to schools by outside speakers, including respected community members. Additionally, the students themselves invited interesting adults to speak to their student club meetings. One student who Brooks and Brickhill spoke to for their research remembers the SASM club at their school:

We usually met on Friday afternoons, and got in outside speakers to sensitise the students, e.g. Mr. Mathabathe the principal of Morris Isaacson, Aubrey Mokoena (a founder member of SASO, and full-time worker for the Black Community Programme), and the principal of Damelin College – we brought him along to expose him and his out-dated courses and reactionary ideology.⁷⁴

Student groups in Soweto high schools, as well as the administrations of the schools themselves, often invited speakers. At Naledi High School, this was a weekly event, while at others it appears to have been less frequent.⁷⁵ Some of these talks were designed to be motivational, while others occurred at regular functions such as graduations. Supreme Court of Appeal Judge Boise Mbha grew up in a poor area of Soweto called Pimville in the 1960s and also attended MIHS, graduating in 1972. According to Mbha, in 1971, Harry Nengwekhulu – a prominent SASO organizer - gave a speech at the graduation function of MIHS. Usually, speakers at these functions were white school inspectors or other conservative professionals in the black community who would not cause controversy. It appears that in 1971 it was the students who convinced the management of MIHS to allow Nengwekhulu to speak.⁷⁶ Pat Mabena, a teacher who also attended the same event, claims that Steve Biko also attended it

⁷³ See Gaongalelwe Tiro, *Parcel of Death: The Biography of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2019), 135–52.

⁷⁴ Brooks and Brickhill, *Whirlwind before the Storm*, 87.

⁷⁵ Ngutshane, interview.

⁷⁶ Boissie Mbha, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 15, 2019).

and that there was a heightened political atmosphere with the municipal police unsuccessfully trying to intervene to stop it.⁷⁷ Mabena, who had been a student at MIHS between 1965 and 1966, studied for a teacher's certification at the University of Fort Hare and returned to MIHS to teach science classes between 1971 and 1977. He also coached the school's debating team.

Mbha, one of Mabena's students, remembers that rather than dress in the fancy dress common at prom dances around the world, at the 1971 year-end function, ASM members chose to dress up in t-shirts depicting a fist and faces of the different black groups: coloured, African, and Indian. According to an article in the *SASM Newsletter* of April 1973 entitled "Expert in Shakespearean Drama Mrs. Mosala (Maiden name: Buthelezi)," this t-shirt was eventually banned. The article, a reaction to the teacher mocking the students for being unable to act on the banning of their t-shirt, lambasts Mosala for teaching Shakespeare at the expense of more relevant African authors.⁷⁸ Returning to the content of Nengwekhulu's speech at MIHS, Mbha states that "the whole speech was obviously political."⁷⁹

It should be noted that all school students went to these functions, not merely the graduating class. By 1971, MIHS was still a combined junior secondary school and high school and had not phased out the Junior Certificate years.⁸⁰ Several cohorts of students would have listened to this speech. This tradition of inviting politicized speakers to school functions continued in the following few years. Seemingly banal school events, or farewell and year-end functions became opportunities for mass political education. By the time Phala Modise arrived at MIHS in 1973, the speaker at the year-end function that year was Mrs Mabizela, wife of the exiled African National Congress (ANC) member and MK recruiter in Swaziland, Stanley Mabizela⁸¹: "I can't remember the content of what she was saying. But it was about leadership... be responsible. *But she'd also throw in some political things* which went past our head [emphasis mine]."⁸² While Modise, at 15, was too young in 1973 to grasp the full meaning of these hidden political messages, the presence of such speakers added to the already politically-charged atmosphere.

Beyond these formal encounters, informal conversations about liberation history ignited the imaginations of students who then went on to do their own research. Thami Ntenti

⁷⁷ Pat Mabena, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 16, 2019).

⁷⁸ South African Students' Movement, "SASM Newsletter April 1973," April 1973, 9, Digital Innovation South Africa, <https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/new19730400032009739>.

⁷⁹ Mbha, interview.

⁸⁰ The Junior Certificate (JC) years were the first three years of secondary education.

⁸¹ MK, uMkhonto we Sizwe, Xhosa for 'spear of the nation,' was the armed wing of the African National Congress formed in 1961. Notably, the 1976 Soweto uprising led to a second wave of MK recruits after many young people fled into exile through countries like Swaziland.

⁸² Modise, interview.

remembers having a discussion that would prove pivotal to the development of his political awareness. Ntenti grew up in Soweto as one of four siblings. Before starting Form One at MIHS in 1967, he attended Fred Clark primary school in the Mofolo South township (to the east of Jabavu). He was at MIHS until 1973 and later went on to the University of Zululand, another one of the segregated universities set up by the apartheid government to cater to people who were ethnically Zulu. Ntenti was expelled from the university for involvement in SASO and returned to MIHS to teach between 1975 and early 1976 before going into exile.⁸³ During his time at a student at MIHS, he remembers how an immigrant shopkeeper from Malawi named Jackson would “taunt” him about his education. While Ntenti could not speak about politics at home, Jackson led him in a new direction:

He was older but we became very, very friendly. Now, Jackson used to taunt me. Jackson used to say to me, “*wena* Thami you think you are educated? Yes, you are educated, you are doing matric but do you know who’s Kwame Nkrumah”. Kwame Nkrumah? No. “Do you know who is Patrice Lumumba?” No. Honestly, I didn’t know who these people were!⁸⁴

Ntenti went on to research these African nationalist heroes, borrowing books from more politicized friends and thinking about the history lessons at school in a new light.

Student Clubs and Debating

In 1970s Soweto schools, debates were used as a pedagogical tool to teach English language learners confidence in spoken English and, in some cases, Afrikaans. Debates were extracurricular activities that were organized by teachers to enrich the school environment, and were a prominent part of school life from as early as the mid 1960s.⁸⁵ By the 1970s, debates were held in student clubs and attracted the most politically-active students to hone their speaking skills and encounter new ideas. While debates were very popular, students also wrote newsletters, and performed poetry and drama. The latter activities were used by groups such as SASM to spread BC information among the student body.⁸⁶

⁸³ Form One was the first year of secondary school.

⁸⁴ Thami Ntenti, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 4, 2019).

⁸⁵ Mabena, interview.

⁸⁶ Black Community Programs, “Youth and Student Organisations,” *Black Review*, 1972.

In his interview with Tom Karis in 1989, Jackie Selebi, then a political exile with the ANC in Lusaka, Zambia, recalled that “the beginning [of his political consciousness] was definitely related to debating societies which were there in school. People would have topics for debates like ‘The world is at the brink of great catastrophe.’”⁸⁷ Selebi attended OHS in the late 1960s. While debates may not have been overtly political in the late 1960s and probably merely gave students an opportunity to express themselves and play with ideas, by 1971 Boissie Mbha recalls that “most of the debates had political undertones.”⁸⁸ If in 1971 debates were only tangentially political, by 1976 they had become fully political and teachers had stepped aside to let students select topics.

Many of the topics by this time were influenced by what both teachers and students read in the newspapers (newspaper reading will be discussed in Chapter Two). Enos Ngutshane was a student leader at Naledi High School who became famous for writing a letter asking for an explanation for the language policy change to the local DBE superintendent. When the security police came to pick him up on from school on 8 June 1976, the entire school erupted into a riot. He remembers engaging in a “a heated debate on Idi Amin.” Ngutshane adds that, “I still remember the topic as well, ‘Is Idi Amin the true leader of Africa?’ [laughs] Then you’ve got teams of five this side, five this side. Those who are pro Idi Amin and those who are against.”⁸⁹ Idi Amin’s exploits in Uganda were widely covered by the two leading newspapers read by Africans in Soweto in the mid-1970s. For example, a commentary article from the *Rand Daily Mail* in July 1975 discusses the upcoming Organization of African Unity conference in Uganda and Amin’s expected ascension to chairmanship of the body. It also discusses the intention by the presidents of Zambia, Botswana and Kenya to boycott the conference because of Amin’s actions, including the expulsion of people of Asian ethnicity from Uganda.⁹⁰

In great detail, Glaser notes how under the influence of SASM and the Student Christian Movement (SCM) debating clubs became more politicized from 1972 onwards. Noting that debating clubs were a part of school life before 1972, he provides evidence for increased attendance at debating contests because of the new and relevant topics.⁹¹ The debates were inter-school, highly popular and an unofficial training ground for school leaders. Virtually all

⁸⁷ Jackie Selebi, interview by Tom Karis, Lusaka, Zambia, (March 21, 1989), A2675, 33, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

⁸⁸ Mbha, interview.

⁸⁹ Ngutshane, interview.

⁹⁰ Roger Sargent, “Amin’s Death Will Be Dirty,” *Rand Daily Mail*, July 5, 1975.

⁹¹ Glaser, “‘We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis,’” 306–7.

secondary and high schools in Soweto participated in the debates and “debating also provided a link between leadership figures from the various high schools.”⁹² The debates required students to be well read and were very competitive. Mabena, the MIHS debate coach, recalls that debate taught public speaking and remembers Tsietsi Mashini, who would come to lead the SSRC in 1976, to be a “brilliant debater.” To Mabena, students appeared to be well informed but not always revealed what they had been reading because of the heightened state of surveillance at this time.⁹³

The SCM was an older Christian club that many Soweto students belonged to. It emphasized prayer and temperance, and many students remember it to be quite subdued compared to SASM. SCM was created in 1965 after the Students’ Christian Association (SCA) separated into segregated racial units. In South Africa, the SCA had existed since 1896.⁹⁴ Luthuli remembers that during her time at MIHS, SCM was very active. Students met regularly, including at break time, to “pray, but it was also political in a lot of ways. That’s where we discussed our issues.”⁹⁵ The SCM prayer meetings gradually took a more political turn. Ngutshane corroborates this, attributing his political conscientization to his involvement in both SASM and the SCM.⁹⁶

This was also in the context of increased awareness of Black theology, particularly through youth groups attached to religious denominations. Sibongile Mkhabela, who was at Naledi High School in the 1970s, remembers that Christian youth groups, which met outside of school but had great influence on the thinking of students, were important institutions that shaped her political development. Mkhabela recalls the close relationship between SCM and Teen Outreach, one of the Christian youth clubs:

Just many of us who were SCM, also found ourselves members of Teen Outreach. Especially if Teen Outreach is in the same locality where you go to school. You go to school with people around with whom you live in the same neighbourhood. Because you are at the same SCM, some of you will end up in the same Teen Outreach, which is really another Christian platform.⁹⁷

⁹² Ibid., 307.

⁹³ Mabena, interview.

⁹⁴ “Our History,” *Students’ Christian Organisation | SCO South Africa* (blog), accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.sco.org.za/our-history/>.

⁹⁵ Luthuli, interview.

⁹⁶ Ngutshane, interview.

⁹⁷ Mkhabela, interview.

The Christian youth clubs tended to be in tune with changing theological currents of the time because they were deeply rooted in the different townships that make up Soweto. Teen Outreach was more popular in the south of Soweto and another club, Youth Alive, was more prominent in older areas of Soweto such as Orlando.

More will be said about the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement and its ideology on Soweto students, particularly how it impacted their reading practices, in the next chapter. Here, it is sufficient to note that after 1972, Black Consciousness permeated the lives of politically active African students in Soweto. Not only was BC spread in schools via SASM, it was also a reality in the cultural life of the township. Notably, BC affiliated groups such as Mhloti performed at community halls. Some students attended these performances. A core argument of this research report is that politically active high school students responded to this change in the *mentalité* and shifted their reading practices. As evidence presented in the rest of the report shows, after 1972 or 1973, students begun reading material given to them by SASO activists as well as reading older sources in a new light.

Activist Teachers

Teachers were undoubtedly an important aspect of the development of the reading strategies adopted by the '76 generation. Heffernan has written about the "Limpopo school" of activist teachers, those who came from the so-called "bush colleges" – in her case, Turfloop - to teach in Soweto and brought with them political ideas which would influence, if not directly cause, students to become political and protest Bantu Education.⁹⁸ Other universities, like Zululand, were also represented among these SASO and Black People's Convention (BPC)⁹⁹ affiliated teachers who appeared in Soweto after the 1972 protests and expulsions in the wake of Tiro's speech. Perhaps the most famous of these teachers is Ongkopotse Abraham Tiro. Tiro was expelled from the ethnically segregated University of the North at Turfloop after making a famous anti-Bantu Education speech, he was subsequently offered a teaching job at MIHS by Mr Lekgau Mathabathe.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Heffernan, "Student/Teachers from Turfloop." See also Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977*, New African Histories Series (Athens : Johannesburg: Ohio University Press ; Jacana, 2010), 157 for a discussion of how students like Tsietsi Mashinini (who was not directly taught by Tiro) were influenced by Black Consciousness ideas.

⁹⁹ The Black People's Convention was founded in 1972 to coordinate Black Consciousness groups and activities outside of formal education institutions. It carried out a variety of community programmes and enjoyed a legal presence, albeit under repression, until it was banned in 1977 alongside other BCM organizations.

¹⁰⁰ Heffernan, "Student/Teachers from Turfloop.", 197–200.

The protests that followed Tiro's expulsion were widely reported in the press. For example, a 5 May 1972, front page article in the *Rand Daily Mail* entitled "Turfloop expels all 1146" began, "All 1146 students at the University of the North, Turfloop, were yesterday expelled after an 8-hour-long sit-in. The sit-in was in protest over the expulsion of a former SRC [Students' Representative Council] president, Mr. Tiro."¹⁰¹ Two pages later, another article reports that the protests "started when Mr. Tiro was expelled because he made a 'disgraceful speech and endangered the good order of the university,' at the graduation ceremony of the university last Saturday, according to the rector, Prof. J.L. Boshoff."¹⁰² Tiro's speech boldly called out the segregated system of Bantu Education, which he called a "repugnant system of education" much to the dismay of the white administrators sitting behind him on the stage. He concluded, "Let the Lord be praised, for the day shall come, when all shall be free to breathe the air of freedom which is theirs to breathe and when the day shall have come, no man, no matter how many tanks he has, will reverse the course of events. God bless you all."¹⁰³

When Tiro arrived at MIHS later that year, his fame preceded him. Tiro was hired to teach history and according to Mabena, a fellow teacher at MIHS who observed Tiro's lessons remembers that Tiro was a very good speaker who understood his subject. "The students really loved him," he says.¹⁰⁴ One of Tiro's students, Pearl Luthuli, remembers that Tiro "taught history in a black way," highlighting the agency of black people in history and downplaying the Euro-centric curriculum he was expected to deliver.¹⁰⁵ It is very likely that these memories reflect the Freirean teaching methods Tiro and other SASO members had learned from Anne Hope of the Christian Institute (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two). Other students remember Tiro to be a kind and conscientious teacher and role model, almost a saintly figure. Mmagauta Molefe remembers that before SASM went for a meeting with SASO at the Wilgespruit Conference Centre, Tiro took the girls aside and talked to them about how to deal with unwanted sexual advances from boys and older men.¹⁰⁶ He also took special interest in students who came from poor families and even used his own money to purchase school uniforms or shoes for them.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Langa Skosana and Jim Kidson, "Turfloop Expels All 1146," *Rand Daily Mail*, May 5, 1972.

¹⁰² "Turfloop - 13 Years of Unrest," *Rand Daily Mail*, May 5, 1972.

¹⁰³ –Quoted in Tiro, *Parcel of Death*, 92–96.

¹⁰⁴ Mabena, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Luthuli, interview.

¹⁰⁶ Mmagauta Molefe, informal discussion with Gaongalelwe Tiro, Roodeport, Johannesburg, (March 4, 2018) in Tiro, *Parcel of Death*, 144.

¹⁰⁷ Tiro, 147.

Tiro was assassinated in Botswana on 1 February 1974 when a parcel he opened turned out to be a bomb. Many in Soweto were shocked and saddened. *The World* newspaper made Tiro's assassination its front page story on Monday 4 February 1974 which read: "Mr. Tiro first came into prominence in 1972 when the student body of Turfloop University asked him to deliver a speech at a graduation ceremony. It was a brilliant speech but one which found disfavour with the administration of the university."¹⁰⁸ Luthuli remembers clearly the day she heard the news of Tiro's death. "We were all in tears," she says of her and her peers' reaction.¹⁰⁹ We can understand why Tiro inspired such love and devotion from students when we consider the theological and deeply affective personal aspects of Black Consciousness ideology. By the time students met Tiro in late 1972, they had been exposed to the ideas of black liberation theology through various means including SASO newsletters and discussions in Christian groups. For the students at MIHS and in Soweto, Tiro was a prophet coming into their school. He was a real, living manifestation of all they had come to believe in.¹¹⁰ The news coverage of Tiro and SASO further increased his fame and the prestige of SASO and its ideas in Soweto.

While it is true that these highly political teachers injected a new energy into the political climate in schools, there is evidence that in the 1960s and later, other, less famous, teachers found ways to subvert the Bantu Education curriculum. In Crain Soudien's model of how black teachers worked during Bantu Education (strategic resistance, resistance, compliance or acceptance), resistance involved actively agitating against Bantu Education; compliance was when teachers worked within the system but did not accept it. Some teachers simply accepted the new system as superior to the older ones it replaced. However, many teachers unrecorded in history chose the first, strategic resistance, which involved finding ways to subvert Bantu Education when they could.¹¹¹ Zweli Sizane, who became an important organizer of the June 16 uprising at OHS, remembered that "in '68 when I was doing Standard 4 ... in one way or another [my teacher] would raise political issues in class."¹¹² It seems, then, that some African teachers, even in the early periods before SASO's strategy to send their

¹⁰⁸ "Bomb in Parcel Kills SASO Man: Tiro Dies in Botswana," *The World*, February 4, 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Luthuli, interview.

¹¹⁰ See Daniel Magaziner, "'Black Man, You Are On Your Own!': Making Race Consciousness in South African Thought, 1968-1972*," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*; New York 42, no. 2 (2009): 221-IV for an overview of the development of black consciousness thought.

¹¹¹ C. Soudien, "Teachers' Responses to the Introduction of Apartheid Education", in P. Kallaway (ed.), *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948 - 1994* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 2002), pp. 211 - 23 in Glaser, "Soweto's Islands of Learning," 163-64. Glaser also adds that while the DBE had strict inspection, it was not feasible to monitor all classrooms all the time and, most pointedly, some white inspectors, and increasingly black inspectors, were likely not in full agreement with the merits of Bantu Education.

¹¹² Lucas Zwelinzima Sizani, interview by Ali Khangela Hlongwane, place unknown, (August 13, 2006), Cullen Thesis, DT 1959 HLO, University of the Witwatersrand.

members into schools, found ways to subvert the curriculum and students like Sizane absorbed these early lessons in politics.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Soweto high schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s were vibrant sites of cultural production. The expansion in secondary education in the urban townships in the early 1970s, necessitated by a crisis in labour, exposed a contradiction in the apartheid system. While industry required more high skilled workers, schools in the DBE were operated by human beings with a variety of motivations. Students were “ordinary school pupils,” as Moloi put it. Teachers in these schools created environments where some students thrived, growing into politically conscious youth who would eventually question the very system that produced them. In everyday school lives, students expressed their yearnings for freedom through a plethora of school activities. Debates had been used to teach language for a long time in Black schools but, by the mid-1970s, students used these to hone their political ideas.

Acutely aware of the injustices of apartheid and the heavy repression of the state, students were drawn to BC as a remedy for their state of oppression. Teachers who came into Soweto in the early 1970s from SASO and the BCM actively *conscientized* students, sharing with them the message that being Black was beautiful and imploring them to recognize their self-worth and dignity. While BC alone cannot be credited with leading to the 1976 uprising, the ideas certainly changed the discourse of Soweto. The Class of 1976 also benefited from conversations with other adults about the history of liberation in South Africa and the broader contexts of freedom in the African continent in the 1960s. The winds of change had blown across the continent and students, through their reading and discussions, were well aware of the possibilities and limitations of freedom in South Africa.

The next chapter will turn to a discussion of the reading practices of Soweto’s high school students in the 1970s. It will show how the contexts of cultural production among students in school discussed in this chapter paved the way for an evolution of interpretive strategies where students read to understand their oppression. The evidence I found showed that reading was a very big part of the lives of politically active students. The reading that students did in 1970s Soweto was not merely to glean political ideas but also included leisure reading and reading that kept them abreast with happenings in the rest of the continent and the Black diaspora. Newspapers were the texts where most of this latter reading was done.

However, the chapter takes a close look at fiction reading and how it informed the political development of students in Soweto in the period of rising political ferment.

Chapter Two:

“This is Relevant Literature to Us Because These Authors Have So Much in Common with Us.”

Reading Practices of Soweto Students

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the reading practices of politicized high school students in Soweto in the 1960s and 1970s. My analysis is mainly concerned with reading students did in their leisure time, although I will also show that their academic reading impacted their leisure reading choices. The chapter uses a practice approach to analyse reading habits that first developed at school in the context of language classes, as well as while reading newspapers both in the home and at school. I argue that, because of their experiences of apartheid, Bantu Education, and their shared world view (as discussed in Chapter One), students adopted counter-hegemonic interpretive strategies when they read the English classics. The former high school students I talked to also remember reading genre fiction such as James Hadley Chase’s crime novels, which they found more interesting than their prescribed reading. The dynamic networks of exchange of this literature predated that of counter-hegemonic texts. During the Black Consciousness (BC) era, students used these networks to exchange and read what they called “relevant literature.”

Existing studies have addressed reading under apartheid censorship but have neglected reading in a more broad sense, including of “legal” texts.¹¹³ My project explores how high school students encountered texts in their everyday lives, and what role these played in political conscientization. I also argue that while the intention of apartheid in general and Bantu Education in particular was that prescribed books and library collections would be read and interpreted in a certain way, students often came away from these texts with their own interpretations. As discussed previously, this was a result of contradictions in the apartheid system as well as indicative of innovation and cultural production among the students. The chapter also discusses newspaper reading and its role in informing and conscientizing students, particularly during the early to mid-1970s. Newspaper reading was a well-established tradition among urban black South Africans and took on an important role in the lead up to the Soweto uprising.

¹¹³ See especially Rachel Matteau, “Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading under Apartheid,” PhD diss., (University of the Witwatersrand, 2012).

I have already discussed some core concepts in the history and sociology of reading in the Introduction. In this chapter, I use the practice approach to the study of reading as a theoretical framework and will briefly outline this conceptual framework here. The practice approach begins with Michel de Certeau's theorization of reading as a sociological phenomenon in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.¹¹⁴ For De Certeau the assumption that print media "informs" the public is flawed. Readers are more active in the reading process, he maintains. He distinguishes between decoding symbols on a page and making meaning; the latter process can be studied sociologically. Readers employ certain tactics to ascribe meaning to texts. Texts can never have a "literal" meaning, especially not among the lower classes. De Certeau writes, "whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control."¹¹⁵ For De Certeau, the text is therefore a hunting ground. Different groups fight for the "correct" meaning. Reading is like poaching: "Far from being writers... readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt, to enjoy it themselves."¹¹⁶

However, De Certeau's metaphor of reading as poaching does not adequately apply to common readers, argues historian of scrapbooks Ellen Gruber Garvey.¹¹⁷ Garvey has studied nineteenth century scrapbook makers and, based on this, suggests "reading as gleaning" as the more appropriate metaphor for the activities of readers in conditions of scarcity, or those operating at the periphery of communication systems. Not only does "reading as poaching" incorrectly imply the existence of a correct reading, her argument goes, it also neglects the "community building potential" of common readers and is an overly masculine metaphor for reading.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, thinking of reading as gleaning allows for the remixing of ideas – not always accessed in the original source and not always cited. Garvey notes that:

authors inevitably leave a surplus of meaning, sometimes obvious as ambiguity, which readers manoeuvre within, or scoop up, glean, and reuse. And just as authors cannot nail

¹¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹¹⁵ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 170.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 174

¹¹⁷ Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Scissorizing and Scrapbooks: Nineteenth-Century Reading, Remaking, and Recirculating," in *New Media, 1740-1915*, ed. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, *Media in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 207–27.

¹¹⁸ Garvey, "Scissorizing and Scrapbooks", 208.

meaning to a fixed spot, neither can they or their publishers control the circulation and ordering or reordering of meaning.¹¹⁹

Thus, among common readers, traditional values of intellectual property are suspended, making room for new articulations of ideas not previously envisaged by the author. Indeed, texts always contain a surplus of meaning, a fact exploited by former Soweto students I talked to throughout their reading lives.

Although no actual scrapbooks were located for this study (many were confiscated during the police raids in the lead up to June 1976), informants attested to having made scrapbooks from widely available newspapers, a process almost identical to that described by Garvey. The students made scrapbooks, cutting articles from newspapers based on their interests. Pearl Luthuli, a high school student in Soweto in the early 1970s, says that she kept a scrapbook where “anything that resonated with me at that point, I would cut and put it in the scrapbook.” The scrapbook was a prized, personal, possession: “it was mine at home and I remember when I started getting visits by the security police that’s the first thing my dad got rid of.”¹²⁰ These scrapbooks often contained cut-outs of stories about political developments in the rest of Africa which, in spite of the censorship regime, were published in newspapers such as *The World*.

The chapter ends by showing how the growth of black consciousness ideology in Soweto and in schools contributed to a more radical reading and a turn to relevant literature on the part of the students. While students were always interested in reading about Africa and the broader black diaspora, after 1972, there was a stronger awareness among politically active students that reading could be a weapon in their fight for dignity and freedom. I use the example of the *African Writers Series* (AWS), published by Heinemann, to illustrate how books by black authors were highly sought after 1972. These books were procured by the state and were available in Soweto’s public libraries in the 1970s. Students, armed with BC ideology, “gleaned” different messages from these texts than the state anticipated.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁰ Pearl Luthuli, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa (July 19, 2019).

Early Experiences of Reading

High school students growing up in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Soweto had differential access to texts. The vast majority experienced a scarcity of books in their homes. A few enjoyed an abundance of texts. Although he grew up in Mpumalanga township near Durban, the author Fred Khumalo's experiences may be viewed as typical of black students growing up in South Africa at the time, including in Soweto. Scarcity of books and reading material was a common experience. Born in 1966, Khumalo remembers that "as a kid I was never read a bedtime story. There were no books to read at home." Those books that eventually did end up in the Khumalo home, such as Enid Blyton children's series the *Famous Five*, were discarded from the homes of white families his mother worked for as a domestic worker.¹²¹ On the other hand, students like Kgomotso Moroka came from families that had entire libraries at home and grew up in a print rich environment. Moroka, now an advocate and Senior Counsel, was born in Sophiatown in the 1950s. Her family was forcibly removed from Sophiatown soon after her birth. Her family sent her to mission schools in Swaziland until 1971 or 1972, when she returned to South Africa for high school. She intended to study law in a South African university and came back to prepare for this by enrolling at Morris Isaacson High School (MIHS).

Moroka remembers that her father, a businessman, had a home library that had "everything from medical books, that you would go and peep about when you were a child..."¹²² Moroka's father had the means to buy books from trade bookstores and perhaps even by mail order. By the 1970s, publishers were advertising directly to Black readers in the press. For example, the front page of *The World* of 31 January 1974 advertised a 24-volume *New Book of Knowledge* published by Grolier (See Figure 2.1). Grolier was an American company which "was by the early 1970s the largest US publisher of encyclopaedias and reference books, securing c.30 per cent of the encyclopaedia market."¹²³ The advert claims that the "fantastic range of books covers the widest range possible for children before and during their school days." It added that, by purchasing these volumes, parents would "give [their] children a head start." These kinds of sets were not cheap. As a comparison, each of the

¹²¹ Fred Khumalo, "Books and Belonging—Fred Khumalo Reflects on How James Hadley Chase and Alan Paton Changed His Life," *The Johannesburg Review of Books* (blog), October 1, 2018, <https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2018/10/01/books-and-belonging-fred-khumalo-reflects-on-how-james-hadley-chase-and-alan-paton-changed-his-life/>.

¹²² Kgomotso Moroka, Telephonic interview by author, (July 20, 2019).

¹²³ Paul M. Wright, "Grolier Inc.," in *The Oxford Companion to the Book* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606536.001.0001/acref-9780198606536-e-2074>.

24 volume 1965 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (a competitor of Grolier's products) cost about \$85 in today's prices. A complete set would have cost more than \$2000, which was beyond the reach of most black families.¹²⁴ Even if this particular set of the *New Book of Knowledge* was cheaper than *Britannica*, sets of encyclopaedia were still an expensive purchase that distinguished socioeconomic classes of readers. That Grolier was advertising to black readers indicates that there was at least a small market of wealthier families who would have purchased these volumes for their family. It also challenges the notion that *all* black youth readers in 1970s black townships were experiencing conditions of absolute scarcity.

¹²⁴ Richard Cooke, "Wikipedia Is the Last Best Place on the Internet," *Wired*, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/wikipedia-online-encyclopedia-best-place-internet/>.

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Johannesburg cuts down on petty apartheid

'WHITES ONLY' SIGNS TO GO



Mrs. Emily Mashazi of 165 Dubura Street, Vosloorus, goes through what remained of her two-roomed house after it was hit by a tornado this week. More than 40 buildings were flattened.

Big train fire scare—culprits jailed

By Basil Khumalo

THE culprits in the big train fire scare in Soweto last year, in which three people died and a young girl lost her leg, are to pay for their "silly joke" by going to jail for two years.

This was the sentence handed on two young negro men, Simon Kgagane (23) and Petrus Machake (18) when they were convicted in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court yesterday on three charges of culpable homicide and one of assault.

The magistrate Mr G. van Dam, found they were responsible for causing panic on a train outside Merafe Station, Soweto, on October 23 last year by spraying passengers with a fire extinguisher.

Fearing that the train was on fire, two women and a man jumped from the train, only to lose their lives under the wheels of another oncoming train.

A 21-year-old Orlando West High School girl, Rosaline Rampa, who also jumped from the train, lost a leg.

The pair, who pleaded not guilty, told the court: "We were playing when we sprayed the people with the extinguisher. We thought it was a joke and we did not realise that the people were in danger."

But looking at Rosaline Rampa in court, the magistrate said: "One must look at her with sympathy. There she is sitting minus one leg. You have made her life miserable. I think you are intelligent enough and you should have realised that the people in the train would be in danger."

Earlier the packed court listened in silence as a schoolgirl, tears streaming down her face, told how the three people died and she lost her leg when she and other terrified passengers jumped from the train.

PANIC
The girl recalled how a group of youths had started spraying a train with fire extinguishers. She and other passengers were in a terrible panic. There was confusion as people rushed for the doors and others jumped down her face, told how the three people died and she lost her leg when she and other terrified passengers jumped from the train.

Immediate
These steps which will take immediate effect are:
• Queues at all places where accounts are paid, including the Rates Hall, but excluding the Licensing Department, until the end of March, will be integrated.

Turn to Page 2 ➔

APARTHEID in Johannesburg's parks, libraries, museums and in queues at municipal offices where accounts are paid is to be abandoned immediately. And what is more, all signs on city benches and bus shelters indicating they are for "Whites only" are to be taken down.

This has been decided by the Johannesburg City Council which last night recommended several big steps to cut petty apartheid in Johannesburg.

Some measures will be applied immediately, while others will take time to implement.

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Figure 2 Jan 31 1974 Front page of The World announcing the end of petty apartheid in some municipal spaces with advert for the New Book of Knowledge.

Interestingly, the leading story that day was the end of petty apartheid in Johannesburg's "parks, libraries, museums and queues at municipal offices."¹²⁵ Chapter Three will address public library use by Soweto high school students in the 1970s and the important role that the space played for young activists, as well as provide an overview of the history of the provision of library services to black communities in the Johannesburg area. Here, I will highlight how public libraries in Soweto helped nurture reading habits in the students who would grow up to become politically active in their adolescence. Students used libraries if they were close to home, but in some cases travelled long distances to access books and services. Phala Modise remembers joining the public library in Jabavu, his neighbourhood, in 1968. He remembers borrowing books in Setswana, Afrikaans and English to read for pleasure at home. At one point, Modise got a fine from the library and his mother pleaded successfully with the librarian to cancel the fine.¹²⁶ This anecdote suggests a close and ambivalent relationship between libraries and the communities they served in Soweto, indicating that while some of the libraries were destroyed in the riots following 16 June 1976 as symbols of the apartheid regime, these institutions were also integral to the community.

Pearl Luthuli started using the Dube Library in the late 1960s, which was only ten minutes' walk from her home. She remembers reading many children's books in English and Afrikaans and seeing the library as a place of refuge and tranquillity. She remembers that the library:

was pleasant, because it was the most quiet place. You walk into the library, it had to be quiet and you can sit and read. The other place where I had peace when I was reading was in my bedroom, or the bathroom at home [laughs].¹²⁷

Observing such warm memories of public libraries may unsettle us, since they were institutions that were essentially extensions of the apartheid state. But, like the high schools discussed in Chapter One, libraries represented just another contradiction in the system. They were staffed by community members - students' neighbours, aunts, uncles, and older siblings. And while they represented and sought to further apartheid policies, many librarians and library users appropriated these spaces for their own purposes, a theme I shall return to in the next chapter.

¹²⁵ "Johannesburg Cuts down on Petty Apartheid: 'Whites Only' Signs to Go.," *The World*, January 31, 1974.

¹²⁶ Phala Modise, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 6, 2019).

¹²⁷ Pearl Luthuli, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 19, 2019).

Sibongile Mkhabela grew up in Zola in the 1960s and 1970s. Zola was, according to her, a tough part of Soweto for a young girl to grow up in. The area had many gangs and few public services. Her parents had immigrated from Mozambique and settled in Soweto where they were raising their children as South Africans. Mkhabela's mother passed away when she was only 14, and this left her with the task of taking care of her younger sister. Life was hard, and she often had to suspend her education to work. However, because her mother had raised the family in a progressive way, her older brother often assisted with household chores. The two older siblings, Mkhabela and her brother, were inseparable.¹²⁸ Mkhabela, who is now the CEO of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, later attended Naledi High School, became the General Secretary of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) and was the only young woman among the 11 students who were put on trial and later incarcerated for their role leading the Soweto uprising.

Although Mkhabela did not have a public library in her immediate community, she still travelled to Dube Public Library in another part of Soweto, more than 6 kilometres away. She remembers that she first went to Dube Library with her older brother. A lover of learning and books from a young age in spite of her tough background, she did not mind that her brother might have felt irritated by her constantly following him around. Remembering her interactions with her brother, Mkhabela says that she was:

always following him around, he didn't know what to do with me [laughs]. I can see now how annoying that must have been [for her brother and he felt that; 'she] just wants to be here. I can't! She doesn't want to go play in the street with other children!'¹²⁹

And when Mkhabela was old enough to travel to the library on her own, she took taxis (public buses). Initially, Mkhabela went to the library to read books that had been assigned by her school teachers but soon found that the experience of inhabiting the space was liberating. Simply leaving her small township and venturing out to a public space, as a girl, was a big step in the development of her sense of self. I shall return to this theme of how spaces assisted in the development of the sense of self among the Soweto Class of 1976 in the next chapter.

¹²⁸ Sibongile Mkhabela, Item 111 - Sibongile Mkhabela (x2) Interview, July 17, 2008, AG3298 Legal Resources Centre (LRC), Oral History Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, <http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/sibongile-mkhabela-x2-interview>.

¹²⁹ Sibongile Mkhabela, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (August 15, 2019).

Reading Instruction at School

A brief look at the type of reading instruction available to pupils in the primary and secondary years during the 1960s and 1970s provides some insight into their development as readers. In primary school, Bantu Education allowed learners to study in their home language, and Afrikaans or English were taught as second languages. In the primary years, informants remember reading home language prescribed books, which left a strong impression on them. Reading of indigenous language literature would continue into the high school years and while students were streamed according to ethnicity, some students like Luthuli subverted this by reading books in languages not “meant” for her:

I was fond of literature and whether it was English or any other language that I understood. For instance, I had friends in my school who were Xhosa, and I’m Zulu. So, I would read all my literature books, Zulu literature books, and end up reading the Xhosa books.¹³⁰

Some of the African language books that were read in schools at Junior Certificate level include *Maboko a Setswana* (Setswana sayings) by B.D. Magoleng and S.F. Molhake, *Imicibisholo* (a collection of short stories in isiZulu) by D.B.Z. Ntuli and *UAndonisi wasentlango* by S.E.K. Mqhayi, which was a translation into isiXhosa of the Afrikaans language novel *Kees van die Kalahari* by G.C. Hobson.¹³¹

When it came to English literature in the classroom, the English canon was taught intensively. This included Shakespeare and abridged editions of Dickens. An article in the June 1968 edition of the *Bantu Education Journal* provided guidance to teachers in African schools on how to teach Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* to Junior Certificate classes. The article extols teachers to ensure that students understood the books that they read, adding that “Any writer worth reading offers his readers rewards : Enjoyments; pleasure; ideas; food for thought; topics for discussion, humour; wit; drama and the sharing of his own experience of life.” The author of the article suggests that instead of having students read aloud sections of the book during literature class periods, a more active approach to learning must be taken to maximize on teacher-pupil contact time. Reading of the chapter to be discussed on a particular day was to

¹³⁰ Luthuli, interview.

¹³¹ “Department of Bantu Education: Prescribed Books 1973 - 1975,” *Bantu Education Journal*, August 1973.

be done in advance, at home or the public library. In the context of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it is suggested that background to the novel is given (i.e. the French Revolution, who Dickens was), followed by a detailed study of the book's plot, characters and vocabulary. Dramatization was suggested as an exercise for the students to do so that they could gain a better understanding of texts. On dramatization, the author instructs, "Children enjoy dramatization, particularly Bantu children, who have a natural gift of dramatization and character-understanding. Don't waste this talent."¹³²

Several insights about how school shaped reading practices of students in Soweto can be drawn from this brief description of reading instruction under Bantu Education. The first is that students did not strictly conform to the type of reading that officials had imagined for them. They read what they enjoyed and in several different languages – not necessarily the ones that they were expected to read in. Reading was also as much a collective activity as it was a private activity. The school system encouraged students to purchase prescribed books, read them at home then discuss them in class. Many students diligently read them. Modise remembers reading so far ahead in his free time that he memorized portions of novels that were to be read aloud in front of friends in class, such that he did not need to look at the text when asked to read. This amused his friends and attracted praise from his teacher.¹³³ Finally, while the architects of apartheid had set out to confine Africans to certain careers, technical experts designed curricula that drew from progressive pedagogical tenets, especially the emphasis on reading comprehension. Nevertheless, curricula still contained racist and paternalistic undertones.

That education experts drew from practices elsewhere in the world and from the previous missionary tradition when designing curricula left contradictions in Bantu Education lessons that the resourceful students exploited. For example, Thami Ntente, in Form 4 at MIHS at the time, remembers a history lesson:

It is in 1970 when our lessons in history, it's the French Revolution. Now, that was an important turning point in my life because that's when we started now really really engaging amongst ourselves as students about the French Revolution and getting excited, you know 'revolution.' Now, you have a new concept, 'what is this thing, 'revolution?'" Now, when we looked at the causes of revolution, the causes of revolution as we studied it. They seemed very very similar to that we were confronting in this country, you could easily draw similarities.

¹³² D.N. Young, "English Setbooks for Junior Certificate 1969: The Teaching of English Literature in the Secondary School - a General Approach, with Particular Reference to 'A Tale of Two Cities,'" *Bantu Education Journal*, July 1968, 41.

¹³³ Modise, interview.

The culture of reading developed through their schooling encouraged students to internalise and critique what they read and it is no surprise that they began to glean messages about their own life experiences from this lesson. Ntenti continues,

So, we were talking about all of this... in fact, I remember again, we were so excited when we studied French Revolution, our history teacher, Mr. Mahlaba, Cyprian Mahlaba. He could see that the lesson had generated some kind of enthusiasm and interest. I remember his comment, he said, 'You guys, now that you're doing the French Revolution, you think you're going to start a revolution here in South Africa? Forget it! Mandela is in prison. Now, let's continue with the lesson.' [laughs].¹³⁴

High school students in 1970s Soweto were not merely *tabulae rasae* who uncritically absorbed what they were taught in class. They practiced a counter-hegemonic practice that placed themselves in their history or language lessons and, thus, imagined a better future than the present they were experiencing.¹³⁵

Newspaper Reading

The chapter will now turn to newspaper reading by students. As discussed below, newspapers were the most abundant texts in black townships in the 1960s and 1970s and there was a long established and strong culture of newspaper reading among black South Africans.¹³⁶ Because of their ubiquity, newspapers were often the first genre of texts that research participants encountered in their childhood. Reading newspapers was a family tradition for many Sowetan homes. Recalls Pearl Luthuli:

Every Sunday my dad used to read Sunday papers and I was the one who had to go and buy Sunday papers and because he woke up late on Sundays, I would be at the corner [of the street where there was a] the newspaper boy...

Newspapers were well distributed throughout all of Soweto, and families bought a variety of newspapers according to their means. She continues:

¹³⁴ Thami Ntenti, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 4, 2019).

¹³⁵ This type of subversive reading in African secondary schools wasn't new. In 1946, students at Lovedale used Dickens's *Oliver Twist* to protest their missionary education. See Cynthia Kros, "W.W.M. Eiselen: Architect of Apartheid Education," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened* (Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa, 2002), 61–62.

¹³⁶ See, for example Peter Limb, ed., *The People's Paper: A Centenary History & Anthology of Abantu-Batho*, 1st ed (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012).

He [My father] would leave the money for newspapers overnight. So, I take the money, at six o'clock I go off and take the papers and I would have read those papers before he read them.

Luthuli says that the newspapers that her family bought included *The World*, *The Post* and *The Sunday Times* and adds that, “*Sunday Times* was the thickest and had a lot of stories. And there used to be the section for black people in the *Sunday Times* but I read everything in *Sunday Times*.”¹³⁷ By the 1970s, newspapers predominantly read by white readerships, such as *The Post* and *The Sunday Times*, as well as the *Rand Daily Mail*, begun including supplements for the black townships.¹³⁸ Moreover, the early 1970s saw an increase in the proportion of black readers (including Coloured and Indian) who read such newspapers. In 1968, for example, a survey found that 38 percent of readers who read the *Sunday Times* were black. By 1975, the proportion had risen to 50 percent.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of – and perhaps because of – the isolation that apartheid wished to impose on black readers, they read the whole paper, retaining a vital link to the rest of South Africa and the wider world.

Like Pearl Luthuli, Christina Moabelo also remembers a strong culture of newspaper reading in her home. She claims that it was common to see men returning from work in the evening with a newspaper tucked in their back pocket. Moabelo states that in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

parents [in Soweto] used to buy the newspaper and read it. But there were those who couldn't read, because other men held a newspaper in their hands... they used to wrap it like that [demonstrates rolling paper], every man would have a newspaper in the pocket. Everyone seemed to be reading a newspaper in Soweto.¹⁴⁰

This story shows just how important newspaper reading was to black urban identity and respectability and that newspapers were quite abundant. Newspapers remained an important source of information throughout the 1960s and 1970s and even during the Soweto uprisings. Activists cultivated relationships with journalists to cover their stories and it is no accident that

¹³⁷ Luthuli, interview.

¹³⁸ Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press In South Africa And Lesotho*, Bibliographies and Guides in African Studies (Boston: Hall, 1979), 16.

¹³⁹ Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Christina Moabelo, Johannesburg, South Africa, (20 January 2020).

a journalist from *The World* helped rush the injured Hector Pieterse – the first student to succumb to police bullets – to the clinic on 16 June 1976.¹⁴¹ Giving testimony to police in 1977, Murphy Morobe – a key organizer of the Soweto uprising – said that he was aware that other student leaders, including Tsietso Mashinini, had been in touch with journalists on the night before 16 June 1976 to get them to report on the march. Mashinini, the chair of SASM at MIHS, was elected the first President of the Action Committee that planned the 16 June march. The Action Committee became the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) and led students in Soweto in the months of protests after 16 June. The students kept up to date with developments following the march by reading newspapers. Morobe adds that:

On the 17th June 1976 I got up at home and went to Orlando station to buy a newspaper and then went back home. Here I read about the death of the white doctor [Edelstein], who was killed in Orlando West, Soweto [during the riots following the march]. I also read about the riots in Soweto and the burning of the Municipality offices in Soweto.¹⁴²

As I have noted, newspapers served as a vital source of information about Soweto and the wider world in this period. For this project, I reviewed a selection of issues of *The World* from the late 1960s and early 1970s. *The World* was a major English language newspaper read in Soweto and the only one exclusively targeted towards a black audience. Furthermore, for most of its history, while white-owned, *The World* had black editors. The newspaper was an important source of information on political developments in the rest of Africa and the broader black diaspora throughout these years and noted a change of tone, discussed below, after 1972. *The World* came to play an important role in shaping the reading practices of Soweto's high school students in the early 1970s.

Initially, *The World* was known as *Bantu World*. *Bantu World* was owned by Bantu Press Limited and was founded in April 1932 by Bertram F. G. Paver, a white “ex-farmer and itinerant salesman,” and other shareholders including some who were black. Within 13 months, however, the Argus newspaper group – a large corporate entity – bought Bantu Press.¹⁴³ Under Argus, Bantu Press expanded and had operations across English speaking southern Africa and

¹⁴¹ Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, “The Anatomy of the Crowd,” in *The Road to Democracy. Volume 7*, ed. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (Pretoria, South Africa: UNISA Press, 2017), 69.

¹⁴² South African Police, “Mafison Morobe: Statements by Students and Individuals Involved in the Soweto Demonstrations,” January 12, 1977, A2953, A11, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

¹⁴³ Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, 7.

as far north as present day Zambia. By March 1948, “*Bantu World*, flagship of the [Bantu Press] chain, had a circulation of 24,000 and it was estimated that each copy was read by about five adult wage earners in addition to those read to illiterate friends and members of the family.”¹⁴⁴ *Bantu World* was from the beginning targeted at black readers, and was initially published in six indigenous African languages apart from English. In the 1950s, English became the sole language of publication.¹⁴⁵

The use of English in the major African newspaper in South Africa is important to note. For it was in English that politically active students encountered most texts and conducted their political discussions in the period under study. As Murphy Morobe reflected in his 1991 interview with Gail Gerhart, the use of English in SASM was a marker of elitism and a constraint on the extent to which it could carry out its objectives in the community:

The fact that most of our meetings got conducted in English, because we all could speak English and we'd converse in English. Those things invariably constrained the extent to which we could interact with the community, especially in a situation where we were at a stage where we were saying psychological liberation was important.¹⁴⁶

The predominant use of English by Soweto high school student activists was in no small part due to the context in which they had acquired and honed their literacy, including the choice to use English by the major African newspaper of the time. The word “Bantu” was dropped from its name and the paper became *The World* in 1955.¹⁴⁷ In this period, the paper went through several changes in ownership, only returning to the Argus group in 1962.

In the face of competition from new publications such as *Drum*, *Bona*, and new township supplements from older mostly white-read publications such as *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail*, *The World* held its own partly because of a flexible editorial arrangement where Argus gave the African editors of the paper relative independence. The *Sunday Times* and *Rand Daily Mail*, as mentioned above, were popular newspapers. *Bona*, on the other hand, was a pictorial magazine that was founded in 1956 and targeted black audiences. The magazine was owned by the Nasionale Pers before being bought by Perskor, two large Afrikaans publishers. The magazine was initially published in isiZulu but soon had English, isiXhosa,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁶ Murphy Morobe, interview by Gail Gerhart, (May 4, 1991) (May 4, 1991), Digital Innovation South Africa, <http://disa.ukzn.ac.za/ora19910504000009000>.

¹⁴⁷ Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, 10.

and Sesotho editions.¹⁴⁸ *Drum*, also a pictorial magazine, was founded as the *African Drum* in 1951 by Jim Bailey. At *Drum*, “Black writers, illustrators and photographers ... virtually carved a niche for themselves alone in the story of black journalism in subsequent years.”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, many black South African writers who would become famous in the 1960s, such as Es’kia Mphahlele, had worked at *Drum*.

The relative editorial independence enjoyed by black editors at *The World* would lead to trouble in 1977, when the newspaper, then under the editorship of Percy Qoboza, was banned alongside a score of other Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) aligned organizations on what is known as Black Wednesday.¹⁵⁰ Qoboza’s editorship coincided with the growth of the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) and black consciousness. In 1973, the Union of Black Journalists (UBJ) was founded under the auspices of the BCM. Mzamane and Howarth claim that, during Qoboza’s tenure, *The World* “moved away from its old apoliticism and [came] out strongly against existing apartheid institutions from a qualified Black Consciousness perspective.”¹⁵¹ In the earlier years factual reports on continental political developments were often tucked away on the inside pages. News stories included the progress of recently independent states in Africa and updates on the US civil rights movement.

However, the paper had an increasingly confrontational tone after 1972. While an editorial on the state’s challenges in implementing separate development in *The Weekend World* of 16 March 1969 was carefully worded and stopped short of declaring opposition to the apartheid state’s policy of depriving black Africans of their South African citizenship by creating the ethnic states, by the mid 1970s the paper had become more forceful in its opposition to apartheid. The editor in 1969, M. T. Moerane, was very subtle, recognizing that separate development was a “device to entrench White opportunity and privilege, while salving Government conscience with the illusion that the African will somehow, some day, also achieve his destiny somewhere.” He ended the editorial by writing, “Why not just admit apartheid has failed and try something else.” Even the title of his editorial, “Independence: A

¹⁴⁸ Kirsten Ruether, “Communicating Issues of Human Concern: Bona Magazine and the Creation of a Site for the Discussion of African Culture and Religion, c. 1970-1990,” in *Religion and the Political Imagination in a Changing South Africa*, ed. Eve Mullen and Gordon Mitchell (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2002), 59.

¹⁴⁹ Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ “Black Wednesday, the Banning of 19 Black Consciousness Movement Organisations | South African History Online,” accessed January 29, 2020, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/black-wednesday-banning-19-black-consciousness-movement-organisations>.

¹⁵¹ Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane and David R. Howarth, “Representing Blackness: Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement,” in *South Africa’s Resistance Press: Alternative Voices in the Last Generation under Apartheid*, ed. Les Switzer and Mohamed Adhikari, Research in International Studies. Africa Series, no. 74 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), 186–87.

Dream Ends,” indicates at least a resignation to the fact of apartheid if not acquiescence to whatever policies are introduced by the state.¹⁵² By 1974, however, under Qoboza’s editorship, an editorial unequivocally called for an end to the Bantustans. Qoboza was clear in his opposition to the “independence” of the ethnic states, arguing that “divisions on the base of colour have no moral foundation”.¹⁵³ On 24 August 1975, the paper, reporting on a new compilation of thoughts by black clergy under the title “Why Should Whites Tell us What to Do?”, quoted Dr Manas Buthelezi – a key South African black theology proponent and minister in the Lutheran church – as saying, “We must teach the Black man that he is also a person made in God’s image.”¹⁵⁴ The former Sowetan high school students I spoke with came of political age at precisely the point when this shift in political outlook of their main newspaper happened. This contributed to their radicalisation.

In addition to newspapers being read at home, they also served a pedagogical role in schools. Students were given assignments to read English or Afrikaans language papers to improve their language skills. They also consulted different periodicals, both at home and those held by school and public libraries, for research while preparing for debates. Sibongile Mkhabela, for example, remembers using newspapers for research during debating competitions. She says, “we really did the research using the [news]papers that were written by different people and quoting from those papers that were written.”¹⁵⁵ Phala Modise remembers that he read about Steve Biko in newspapers and thus felt a connection with the older BC leader.¹⁵⁶ It could be that a rise in political debates in high schools in the early 1970s (discussed in Chapter One) fed off the increasingly political tone of *The World*.

Reading James Hadley Chase in Soweto

Apart from newspapers, high school students in the 1960s and 1970s read genre fiction like the crime novels of James Hadley Chase. While these were not political books, they opened up fictional worlds that developed the imaginations of students while improving their literacy skills. In his essay entitled “Raffles and Miss Blandish,” George Orwell reflects on the popularity of James Hadley Chase’s novels in Britain during the Second World War. By way of comparing Chase’s novel *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (published 1939) to the Raffles novels that had appeared earlier, at the turn of the century, Orwell traces the growth of the

¹⁵² “Independence: A Dream Ends,” *The Weekend World*, March 16, 1969, sec. Editorial.

¹⁵³ “Separation Will Not Develop SA,” *Weekend World*, September 29, 1974, sec. Editorial.

¹⁵⁴ “Why Should Whites Tell Us What to Do?,” *Weekend World*, August 24, 1975.

¹⁵⁵ Mkhabela, interview.

¹⁵⁶ Phala Modise, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (6 July 2019).

publishing of crime novels that included detailed murder scenes, rape, and other displays of brute power. Both the Raffles books, by E. W. Hornung, and Chase's novels are centred on the criminal, however Chase's novels revel in the triumph of the power motive. "The real high points of [*No Orchids*] are cruelties committed by men upon other men," Orwell writes.¹⁵⁷ In the essay, he bemoans the apparent lack of moral clarity in Chase's novels, preferring the snobbery of Raffles who, though still a criminal, operated according to a gentleman's code according to which a criminal just could not do certain things. Why were these novels so popular in England during the war? For Orwell, Chase's novels helped common readers deal with the brutalities of the war. "The average man is not interested in politics and when he reads, he wants the current struggles to be translated into a simple story about individuals," Orwell writes.¹⁵⁸ Another important aspect of Chase's novels is that they are written in American English (though Chase was British), perhaps to conjure up the image of the American crime movies of the era.

In Soweto in the 1960s and early 70s, high school students devoured James Hadley Chase's books. The author was popular with both boys and girls. Chase's novels were as available as books could get in black townships during apartheid. They were perhaps handed to a parent who worked as a domestic worker in the suburbs or bought with hard earned cash in one of the commercial bookstores in the city. In any case, books were exchanged, re-sold, lent, borrowed and read by many. Contrasting the works that were required reading in high school with Chase, Fred Khumalo calls the fast action crime stories "the perfect antidote to the English Classics." The books were written in simple English and the contents were relatable "because we saw some of it in the streets, or in movies that we watched at the local community hall." Khumalo remembers a typical scene during a class,

When we went back to class and the teacher stood at the front reading from *Wuthering Heights*, some of us would open the book at the correct page but then tuck a Chase novel inside. As the teacher continued to drone on up there, we would start laughing. Initially the teacher would be impressed, assuming we were with him. But he would soon realise that we were laughing at the wrong places, and flipping the pages much faster than we should have been.

¹⁵⁷ George Orwell, "64. Raffles and Miss Blandish," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism And Letters Of George Orwell Volume III: As I Please, 1943 - 1945* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 218. I thank Prof. Dilip Menon of the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa for pointing me to this essay.

¹⁵⁸ Orwell, "64. Raffles and Miss Blandish," 223.

When he finally wised up to what was happening, the teacher would confiscate the book. No sweat. We were guaranteed to get another copy in the streets, paying about twenty cents for the privilege of taking the book home to read it overnight.¹⁵⁹

Chase novels were read at school or at home in the kitchen, under candlelight, after everyone had gone to sleep. But reading these exciting novels was also a collective activity. Boissie Mbha remembers that in the late 1960s and early 1970s at MIHS, James Hadley Chase was “fashionable” and his novels were “for people to chat [about] when [they]’re socializing.”¹⁶⁰ Thami Ntenti, who was Mbha’s senior at MIHS, goes as far as saying “We believe that if you belong to my generation and you never read James Hadley Chase, then you are not educated.”¹⁶¹

Ratubatsi Super Moloi also remembers reading James Hadley Chase. Moloi was born on 14 November 1955 in Orlando East, Soweto. He attended Ditau Primary School before moving to OHS in 1971 where he stayed until 1976, his matric year and the year when the Soweto uprising started. Moloi’s uncle, Elliot Shabangu was a member of the ANC and stalwart in the South African Confederation of Trade Unions (SACTU). Shabangu’s involvement in politics had a strong impression the young Moloi. He says:

you see we were not staying in the same house with my uncle but any time you go to his house and the police are there or they come, they find you there, they take your name, your details and they want to know your relations and all that. And, sometimes, they would come and search the house thinking that maybe he has hidden some stuff at our place. That affects you, it traumatizes you and you get to be subjected to the harshness of the system.¹⁶²

Moloi would later use these ANC networks to acquire subversive texts. However, in 1971 the texts that most interested him and his peers were James Hadley Chase novels, which were shared widely among friends. A few friends had collections of the novels and circulated them. Moloi joined SASM in 1973 and by 1976 he took a leading role in organising the 16 June march. After the SASM trials of 1977 to 1979, Moloi helped the ANC in exile set up the

¹⁵⁹ Khumalo, “Books and Belonging.”

¹⁶⁰ Boissie Mbha, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 15, 2019).

¹⁶¹ Ntenti, interview.

¹⁶² Super Moloi, interview by author, Pretoria, South Africa, (July 17, 2019).

Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Moloi, now retired, served in the ANC government as South Africa's High Commissioner to Kenya and Ambassador to Algeria.¹⁶³

James Hadley Chase's novels were, for these students, pleasurable reading to counter the boredom-inducing English classics. But they also served other purposes; the language and stories were a mark of identity for high school students as a group. It was the "cool" thing to use language from the novels in speech as well as in writing. School essays were written using Chase's Americanisms, much to the annoyance of some teachers who preferred that students stick to British English.¹⁶⁴ The novels were in high demand. Pearl Luthuli remembers being pressed to read one of these novels and pass it on quickly because so many people wanted to read it: "James Hadley Chase, we all read it and you would be pressed for time to finish because somebody else, the next one is [waiting]. So, you'd be reading James Hadley Chase while the teacher is busy teaching there! [laughs]."¹⁶⁵ Phala Modise attributes Tsietshi Mashinini's eloquence of speech to reading lots of James Hadley Chase novels.¹⁶⁶

James Hadley Chase was not the only author high school students read in their leisure time, but he was certainly the most popular. Apart from Chase, students read Agatha Christie, photocomics (either separately published or as part of periodicals), and literary fiction. To a lesser extent, they also had access to magazines such as *Drum* (in libraries and some homes). There is no evidence that romances such as the *Mills and Boon* series had become widely popular among girls as they did later in the early 1990s.¹⁶⁷ Photocomics such as *True Africa* published by Republican Press, a South African publisher, left a very strong impression on readers and were also shared widely. The photocomic medium also featured in *The World*, for example the "James Zondi: Ace Reporter and Investigator". It is not surprising that photocomics were important for young readers, since the comic form is an accessible medium for those whose reading skills are still developing. Among the research participants, only one recalls reading literary fiction. Moroka grew up in a home with a good library and had been educated in mission schools in Swaziland before returning to South Africa to complete her high school education in Soweto. She attributes her love for reading literary fiction, such as John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, to her family and educational background.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Gail M Gerhart and Thomas Karis, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 - 1990, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964 - 1979* (Pretoria, South Africa: UNISA Press, 1997), 326.

¹⁶⁴ Phala Modise, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 6, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ Luthuli, interview.

¹⁶⁶ Modise, interview.

¹⁶⁷ Nuttall, "Reading in the Lives and Writing of Black South African Women."

¹⁶⁸ Moroka, interview.

The Coming of Black Consciousness and Turn to “Relevant” Literature

The impact of newspapers, particularly *The World*, on student radicalisation has been discussed above. Students continued to read novels in their leisure time but a greater emphasis was placed on “relevant” literature after 1972. To understand how Black Consciousness (BC) ideology came to suffuse high school culture and thus the interpretive modes that readers adopted, the chapter will first take a step back and outline the development of BC philosophy itself. In this venture, the work of Daniel Magaziner and Ian MacQueen is instructive. According to Magaziner’s analysis the period between 1968, when black students left NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) to form SASO, and 1972 was the first stage of the formation of Black Consciousness as a philosophy.¹⁶⁹ These years, before BC became a movement, were characterised by existential probing of the place of black people in apartheid society. This probing was two pronged, on the political philosophy side and on the theological side. Magaziner insists that the way in which developers of the BC worldview saw race is historically contingent. “Blackness was entirely of that particularly historical and political moment,” Magaziner writes. He adds,

those called black – and those who called themselves black – were adults without ancestors. Family and pigmentation did not matter; a historically constructed ontology – which was also a subjectively developed and vehemently asserted identity – vis-à-vis the extant state of oppression did.¹⁷⁰

Indeed, that is why the category ‘black’ could include all those who were experiencing oppression under white minority rule in South Africa at that particular historical moment. For Steve Biko and his contemporaries, achieving this realization and spreading the message through ‘conscientization’ was a necessary step towards a yet unknown future.

In probing the roots of this philosophy, Magaziner analyses the speeches and writings of key BC thinkers. He finds that the sources of the philosophy are many but what underpinned the gleaning of ideas was the concept of relevance to the South African situation. Biko gleaned from Kenneth Kaunda’s writings when they were relevant and from African American cultural products at other times.¹⁷¹ For Biko, a key source was Stokely Carmichael and Chris

¹⁶⁹ Magaziner, “Black Man, You Are On Your Own!”; Daniel Magaziner, “Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa,” *Radical History Review* 2007, no. 99 (October 1, 2007): 80–106, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-004>; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*.

¹⁷⁰ Magaziner, “Black Man, You Are On Your Own!,” 228.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 232.

Hamilton's *Black Power*. Here he found an analysis of the African American situation which called first for a transformation of the perception of self before going on to improve the world for African Americans through existing institutions. However, in South Africa, Biko could only hope for a change in consciousness because black people still lacked fundamental rights. According to Magaziner, this is why SASO chose the term "black consciousness".¹⁷² The term "black consciousness" was only arrived at the end of 1971 after several years of internal thinking and debate within SASO.

This process was happening in tandem with a re-analysis of the role of Christian faith in South Africa and the introduction of Black Theology. The University Christian Movement (UCM) was founded in 1967 by an ecumenical group of South African clergy. The movement, with links to the American left, was concerned with reforming Christianity for modern South Africa. It was greatly influenced by secular theologians such as Harvey Cox, who saw the role of the church in the new world as to work continuously for social transformation. However, many black students within the UCM felt that secularist theology did not apply to them. For them, the question of the "absurdities" of life was not theoretical but practical and experienced daily. This created some tension in the movement.¹⁷³ Another strand of UCM followed the liberal critique of South African society, which sought to transform the country starting from interpersonal race relations, as reflected in the discussions held at UCM conferences of 1969 and 1970. Black students in UCM saw "the secular critique as irrelevant and the liberal critique [...] as insulting."¹⁷⁴ These tensions led to the disbanding of the UCM in 1971, but the movement did introduce ideas of Black Theology to Biko and others.

Macqueen emphasises the Christian roots of black consciousness, tracing Biko's and Barney Pityana's background in mission schools in the Eastern Cape. Biko, in particular, went on to St. Francis College, a Catholic school at Marianhill, where he openly challenged the racist attitudes that his teachers had towards African cultures.¹⁷⁵ Prior to St. Francis, Biko studied at Lovedale, a prestigious mission school, from which he was expelled for suspected political involvement. At Lovedale, Biko and Pityana were close friends and they would later reunite in student groups and be among the first prominent leaders of SASO. During his time at St. Francis, Biko also established a connection with a liberal Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, and an Anglican priest by the name of Aelred Stubbs. Both these connections

¹⁷² Ibid., 236–37.

¹⁷³ Magaziner, "Christ in Context," 89–93.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

¹⁷⁵ Ian M. Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements under Apartheid* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2018), 33.

would prove crucial to the development of Biko's thinking.¹⁷⁶ Macqueen argues that SASO was, in the first instance, formed to overcome the isolation of the segregated colleges set up by the apartheid government for black students by creating a nationwide platform where all black students could engage each other.¹⁷⁷

Many SASO students remained in the UCM to assist SASO in its efforts to maintain contact with the outside world. As stated above, the broader UCM network was the medium through which Black Theology entered SASO. It was a white UCM member and Protestant minister, Basil Moore, who visited the United States in 1967 and met with James Cone. Upon Moore's return to South Africa, he disseminated Cone's ideas.¹⁷⁸ All this is to say that UCM was another way in which black students could overcome isolation and that these connections with liberal whites were important for BC's development. SASO would very enthusiastically adopt Black Theology, as is apparent in early columns by Steve Biko in the *SASO Newsletter*.¹⁷⁹ Although the UCM disbanded in 1972, its effect on SASO was critical. By the early 1970s, SASO and the Black Consciousness Movement held Black Theology conferences and proclaimed the coming of the "Black Messiah." Especially with the formation of the Black People's Convention in 1972, this message was preached alongside conscientization as a political message. Black Theology placed the suffering black masses at the centre and the gospel thus no longer became about enumerating the number of sins people should desist from, but about liberating black and white people from the sins of apartheid.¹⁸⁰

High school students in Soweto were exposed to these ideas through their interactions with SASO, either as members of SASM or as students of the teachers that SASO sent into schools following the "Tiro affair." The previous chapter showed how SASO-affiliated teachers came to work in Soweto's schools after 1972 and influenced students to think differently about their existential situation. This section will show more closely how BC ideas were shared between teachers and students. Onkgopotse Abram Tiro, who taught at MIHS briefly in late 1972 and early 1973, was the most famous teacher who came to Soweto after being expelled from Turfloop. However, SASO was working with students in Soweto from as early as 1971 and this relationship was solidified in 1972. According to Nozipho J. Diseko, the South African Students' Movement (SASM) has roots in the African Students' Movement

¹⁷⁶ Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements*, 34.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 38–40.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

¹⁸⁰ Magaziner, "Christ in Context," 98.

(ASM) in 1968.¹⁸¹ The organization started as an organic student movement in Soweto without any links to the existing liberation movements or the BCM. Initially, the movement was concerned with immediate problems facing students, especially the poor quality of teaching and the disciplinary methods meted out by mostly semi-skilled teachers. The organization campaigned for Students' Representative Councils, the reduction of time allocated to singing competitions and created holiday schools to help students remedially with their academic work.¹⁸² It is important to note that though it did become a national organization, SASM was never a large mass movement of students in Soweto in these early years, indeed it could be argued that it is only the march of 16 June 1976 (which, itself, was not an exclusively SASM affair) which catapulted it into prominence.

ASM changed its name to SASM in 1972 after the younger students had "serious discussions" with SASO leaders like Steve Biko, Strini Moodley and Harry Nengwekhulu. Harry Nengwekhulu, the SASO permanent organizer, had spoken at the MIHS farewell function at the end of 1971. The discussions involved the use of the word "African" and how it conveyed an exclusionary identity, leaving out Coloured and Indian Students. The older activists encouraged the younger students to use the term 'South African' to convey that the organisation included Coloured and Indian students.¹⁸³ Citing SASO archival sources, Clive Glaser notes that SASO's strategy to "conscientize" high school students was deliberate and planned between 1971 and 1973, and included the intention to hold workshops outside of schools if it proved difficult to gain access to school premises.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, after 1971 several highly politicized high school students had extensive contacts with SASO activists, learning the BC ideology from them. The students then went back to their high schools and shared this new perspective, translating the message for a high school audience.

High school students living in Soweto in the early 1970s had different ways of coming into contact with BC thought. Firstly, there were the speeches such as the farewell function at MIHS in 1971 by Harry Nengwekhulu discussed in Chapter One. Secondly, the classrooms where SASO teachers taught after 1972 led to many side conversations in class about BC. These were accompanied by informal conversations between the two generations after hours. Thirdly, as Glaser has pointed out, SASO held formation schools attended by SASM members.

¹⁸¹ Diseko, "The Origins."

¹⁸² Ibid., 51–53.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸⁴ Glaser, "'We Must Infiltrate the Tsotsis,'" 304.

These students would then “spread the gospel” of BC in their schools. And lastly, Soweto students came into contact with BC ideas through performances by cultural groups.

Oupa Moloto, who was a high school student at MIHS in the early 1970s, remembers very close interactions between SASM students and Ongkopotse Tiro when the latter taught there in 1972 and 1973:

those who are from SASM would go and stay with him, talk to him. It was more like celebrity status, for a change we meet a person who has been a person who has been part of the struggle. Whereby we are not being intimidated about the Mandelas and the Sisulus.¹⁸⁵

Mandela and Sisulu, members of the banned ANC, were imprisoned on Robben Island, and parents and teachers cautioned students not to talk about the ANC for fear of arrest by the state.

For Moloto and his peers at MIHS, having read about Tiro’s speech at Turfloop in newspapers, seeing him come to their school was exciting. They had the chance to discuss his views on the emancipation of African people, and black people in general, first-hand. Another prominent SASM member, Murphy Morobe, who was at MIHS at the same time as Moloto, remembers many other close contacts between SASO and SASM and a cultural group at school that spread BC ideas among students:

We had a group at my school [“Khindlimuka”, which means “Arise” in Tswana] that had a strong Black Consciousness emphasis. It got students together to perform and conduct cultural activities – poetry, drama, exchange of literature, reading.

In addition to sharing BC ideas within the school, Khindlimuka also travelled to the University of the North at Turfloop. Morobe adds, “On days when SASO would have events at Turfloop we would travel to Turfloop and present some of the plays, poetry. And this would expose us to people outside of the ranks of high school students.”¹⁸⁶ The texts that were shared in these networks included works by W.E.B. Du Bois and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in addition to copies of the *SASO Newsletter*.

The discussions between the SASM core and the older SASO leaders in turn led to SASM spreading BC ideas in schools. Seth Mazibuko, a student at Phefeni Junior Secondary School during the time of the Soweto uprisings, remembers that after meeting older students at the local community hall who were already members of SASM he shared his own frustrations

¹⁸⁵ Oupa Moloto, Informal Conversation with author, Johannesburg, South Africa, May 15, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ Morobe, interview.

of the status quo in South Africa with them and they influenced him to join SASM. Through these informal connections and his own membership of SASM, he says, “I transported Black Consciousness into our own school, I mean the concepts and the philosophy of Black Consciousness through South African Students’ Movement.”¹⁸⁷

Phala Modise illustrates how Tsietsi Mashinini, spread BC ideas in the classroom. Mashinini would come into the classroom, and ask other students: “what is the colour of this wall?” And they would respond, “It’s white.” Mashinini would challenge them, “You’ve been taught to believe that it is white, but you actually need to believe that it is blue, you can continue to believe that it is blue and you can convince other people.” Modise thinks that Mashinini was trying to convey the idea that reality is socially constructed, and that even the ideas they had learned about the conditions that black people in South Africa found themselves could be changed through thought. Modise had been aware of apartheid as a child but was not “conscientized,” he adds. These interactions with SASM members helped him begin to perceive the world differently. He further says Mashinini’s approach to sharing BC ideas was gradual and appropriate to the students’ own situation.¹⁸⁸

These new ideas shaped the reading practices of students. Furthermore, there is evidence that BC adherents actively promoted certain types of literature within their circles and to younger students. For example, in the police testimony quoted above, Morobe notes that while at Orlando Secondary School, an older student named Vusi Sithole:¹⁸⁹

used to talk to me about Black Consciousness, and he told me to get books about the situation in South Africa from the South African Council of Churches (S.A.C.C.) at Diakonia House in Braamfontein at their library, but I did not go as I was interested in my studies.¹⁹⁰

While Morobe claims, perhaps under duress, that he did not get any literature from Diakonia [at the time, Pharmacy] House, other students did. According to Phala Modise, a student at

¹⁸⁷ Seth Mazibuko, Soweto Interviews, place unknown, (n.d.), A2848-20, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

¹⁸⁸ Modise, interview.

¹⁸⁹ Sithole was an active member of the Transvaal Youth Organisation (TRAYO), an organisation set up to promote black consciousness among non-school going youth in the province, as well as one of the founders of a student organisation at Orlando North High School, the Orlando North Students Body, set up to promote black consciousness. See Mosala Mosegomi and Boatamo Mosupyo, *Soweto Explodes: June 16, 1976* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co, 2007), 60.

¹⁹⁰ South African Police, “Mafison Morobe: Statements by Students and Individuals Involved in the Soweto Demonstrations.”

MIHS at the time, several other students would go to Pharmacy House to get pamphlets on various progressive and theological topics from Tiro. Tiro was in 1972 tussling with the state over teaching at MIHS and spent time at Pharmacy House when he was not teaching.¹⁹¹ The Christian Institute of the radical Dutch Reformed minister Beyers Naudé, which at that time employed a number of SASO activists, also had an office in close proximity. In addition, for a brief time in 1972 and 1973, the Black People's Convention (BPC) worked from the dying UCM's offices across the street from Pharmacy House, at Dunswell House.

Noting this constellation of progressive organisations that allowed black students to use Braamfontein as a space for meeting, Macqueen writes "that in Johannesburg, SASO and the BPC formed alongside the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches, a nexus of organisations committed to social change."¹⁹² It is from this nexus that high school students in Soweto drew ideas and literature. The introduction of BC in Soweto's high schools coincided with the turn to what students called "relevant" literature. This discussion of relevant literature and its importance in shaping consciousness of the black community was drawn from SASO, the organization for older students in university. "The Black Students' Manifesto", printed on the back cover of the *SASO Newsletter* for September/October 1972 "Conference Issue", stated, among other things, that "We hereby commit ourselves to: ... encourage and promote Black Literature relevant to our struggle."¹⁹³

An analysis of extant copies of SASM newsletters shows a striking resemblance to contemporaneous SASO newsletters. The format of the two newsletters is almost identical: both contained a few original articles and reproductions from newspapers, some editions included quotations that the editors thought would be interesting to readers. However, there are some important differences that reflect innovation among the younger students. The issues raised, newspaper articles reproduced, and quotations printed in the SASM newsletters reflect distinctively high school themes and point at the kind of texts that they would have read. A 1974 SASM newsletter reproduces the "Black Students' Manifesto" and includes quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "We don't want freedom fed to us in teaspoons over another hundred and fifty years" as well as a quotation from Abram Tiro's anti-apartheid speech at the University of the North at Turfloop.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Modise, interview.

¹⁹² Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements*, 185.

¹⁹³ South African Students' Organisation, "SASO Newsletter," September/October 1972, Digital Innovation South Africa, https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/sasep72.pdf.

¹⁹⁴ South African Students' Movement, "SASM Newsletter 1974," 1974, Digital Innovation South Africa, https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/new19740000.032.009.739.pdf.

The editorial in a 1973 issue of the *SASM Newsletter* mentions the books *Black Theology*, whose author is unstated, and *Cry Rage*, a poetry anthology by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas. *Cry Rage*, an anthology of poems that portray the conditions of black people living under apartheid, was subsequently banned in South Africa. Imploring students not to be intimidated by the recent bannings of senior SASO members and alluding to discussions already going on about the plan to introduce Afrikaans in some black schools as the medium of instruction as indicative of the dangers of Bantu Education, the editorial states that “if we are not read the contents [of *Black Theology* and *Cry Rage*], then the truth is being withheld from us.”¹⁹⁵ An article in the same issue about the students’ displeasure with their English teacher specifically mentions the *African Writers Series* (AWS) as more relevant than the Shakespeare they were studying in class. Authors from this series mentioned are James (Ngũgĩ) wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, all of whom had published books in the AWS by this date.¹⁹⁶ This is important evidence on the authors that were read and deemed relevant by Soweto high school students in the early 1970s.

Modise remembers that Tsietsi Mashinini, his senior at MIHS, specifically encouraged younger students to read books in the AWS.¹⁹⁷ What was so relevant in the AWS that led many students to read these books? Written by the first generation of post-independence African authors, novels such as Wa Thiong’o’s and Achebe’s deal with matters of history, and how African societies handled the coming of European colonizers. Wa Thiong’o’s novel, *A River Between* (1965), for example, draws from Kikuyu responses to missionary and colonial activity in 1920s Kenya. Neither unambiguously critical of colonialism nor unambiguously upholding traditional values, the novel does nonetheless highlight the difficulties divided Africans faced when they encountered the challenges of land dispossession, forced labour and colonial taxes. The main character, Waiyaki, is the would-be leader of his divided people against colonialism. He is side-tracked by his excessive belief in the uplifting power of missionary education and ends up failing to fulfil the prophecy that his father left him. The story, a multi-layered meditation on the Kikuyu-colonial encounter, also revolves around Waiyaki’s ill-fated love affair, and leaves a lot of questions unanswered. The affair is ill-fated because of the cleavages

¹⁹⁵ South African Students’ Movement, “SASM Newsletter April 1973.”

¹⁹⁶ South African Students’ Movement, “Expert in Shakespearean Drama Mrs. Mosala (Maiden Name: Buthelezi),” *SASM Newsletter*, April 1973, Digital Innovation South Africa.

¹⁹⁷ Modise, interview.

that Christianity brought about in traditional society. Interestingly, the original title of Wa Thiong'o's novel was "The Black Messiah."¹⁹⁸

Fascinating works of literature in their own right, the AWS books were particularly critical to the political moment that the Sowetan high school students in the early 1970s encountered. Of the AWS, Moloi says that the novels, "groomed us politically."¹⁹⁹ Morobe also says that the AWS were highly sought after by highly politicized students during the early to mid-1970s and adds that "Many of these books were banned in South Africa, but we had some that were available in libraries."²⁰⁰ Records reveal that very few AWS books were in fact banned. During the years of high apartheid, less than ten AWS books were banned in South Africa.²⁰¹ In the same period, more than 200 titles were published by British publisher Heinemann Educational Books, making the banned portion less than five percent of the total.²⁰² The Board of Censors, set up by the Publications Act of 1963, saw itself as guardians of literature and morality. Most of the texts were banned for moral reasons, for instance in 1965 "around 44 per cent of the 702 publications banned were declared undesirable for broadly moral reasons, whereas 30 per cent were explicitly political; the reasoning behind the remaining 26 per cent, though unlikely to have been overtly political, was less obvious."²⁰³ Among the AWS books actually banned were Kenneth Kaunda's 1962 political autobiography *Zambia Shall be Free*²⁰⁴ and Nelson Mandela's 1973 collection of political writings *No Easy Walk to Freedom*.²⁰⁵

That Morobe and others thought that more of the AWS books were banned demonstrates their awareness of participating in a counter-hegemonic reading culture. The AWS novels spoke directly to students, now armed with BC thought, and challenged them to look at their own marginality and transform their consciousness to perceive the beauty in themselves while radicalising them. In reading the AWS, they begun to understand that white

¹⁹⁸ Michael Loudon, "The River Between by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o," in *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Literature* (Salem Press, 2019), <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/innopac.wits.ac.za/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=119623139&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁹⁹ Moloi, interview.

²⁰⁰ Morobe, interview.

²⁰¹ Peter D McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford; New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

²⁰² The African Writers Series ran from 1962 to 2003. During this time 350 books were published from across Africa. A table in James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford : Johannesburg : Athens, Ohio : Ibadan : Nairobi : Harare : Dar es Salaam: James Currey ; Wits University Press ; Ohio University Press ; HEBN ; EAEP ; Weaver Press ; Mkuki na Nyota, 2008), 301–10 lists the works and year of publication.

²⁰³ McDonald, *The Literature Police*, 41.

²⁰⁴ "Beacon for Freedom of Expression."

²⁰⁵ McDonald, *The Literature Police*, 112.

minority rule was not beyond questioning. Furthermore, they were well aware that African countries to the north had achieved independence. Jacob Sadie, a student at Naledi High School starting in 1974, remembers that when he arrived at the school reading the AWS had become fashionable, “it would be like name dropping, ‘I read this book!’” It seems that previous networks of sharing popular novels like James Hadley Chase’s crime fictions were now being used to share AWS novels. To sum up the argument of this section of the chapter, the author of an article from the SASM Newsletter of 1973, after lambasting their English teacher for teaching them Shakespeare, wrote of black African writers, that “This is relevant literature to us because these authors have so much in common with us.”²⁰⁶ In the struggle for their rights and dignity, high school students in 1970s Soweto found allies in African authors like Wa Thiong’o, Achebe, and Soyinka.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how reading preferences and practices among politicized high school students in Soweto evolved from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s. The first texts that students were exposed to were often newspapers in the home. For many parents, this was the only kind of text they could afford. Furthermore, newspapers kept Sowetans informed about the outside world – countering the isolation that apartheid sought to impose. Newspapers continued to be an important part of the reading ecosystem throughout their childhood, primary and school years and they would later be very important for politically active youth to glean ideas from the stories that reported developments in politics both inside and outside South Africa. Because of their background growing up during high apartheid, students often developed counter-hegemonic reading practices that they used in school as well as in the rest of their reading.

Bored by assigned English classics at school, many students in the 1960s and 1970s gravitated towards popular fiction like the crime novels of James Hadley Chase. The networks developed exchanging these novels would later be used to exchange politically relevant texts after students were radicalised by black consciousness, especially novels in the African Writers Series. The public library services available in Soweto carried many novels in this series and students exploited this contradiction in apartheid to come up with their own interpretations of the texts – the novels did not inspire an ethnic identity, as the apartheid policy makers would

²⁰⁶ South African Students’ Movement, “Expert in Shakespearean Drama Mrs. Mosala (Maiden Name: Buthelezi),” *SASM Newsletter*, April 1973, Digital Innovation South Africa.

have hoped, but actually were midwives to a pan African consciousness. Students had, in fact, learned to read in Bantu Education schools and used these literacy skills to go on to read widely in order to understand their place in the world, and then eventually seek to overthrow the system. In the next chapter, I turn to a discussion of how politically active high school students living in Soweto in the years preceding the Soweto uprising appropriated other public facilities, libraries and community centres, to develop the self, meet like-minded youth and eventually create a cadre of activists who would lead the uprising. The chapter will also address subversive reading among a small group of students.

Chapter Three:

Reading under Repression:

Libraries, Youth Clubs, and the Alternative Literary Circuit among Black High School Students in Soweto

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at reading practices among high school students in Soweto in the late 1960s and 1970s. This chapter will look at the social infrastructure that supported this reading in Soweto: libraries and community centres. The chapter begins by outlining a history of library services in Soweto and then moves on to describe the way that high school students appropriated the township spaces that they were provided by the state for their own burgeoning political activism, using Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. Notable among these spaces were community centres, where secular (in contrast to the Christian clubs discussed in Chapter One) youth clubs met. The chapter will also touch on the theme of reading under repression by examining subversive reading acts. Bookstores in the city are discussed as nodes in what Rachel Matteau-Matsha has called the "alternative literary circuit".²⁰⁷ In this context, I also discuss the reading of banned publications including the literature produced by liberation movements in exile. I am aware that the printing and distribution of pamphlets by the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) became more important during the Soweto uprising, but a study of these pamphlets is out of the scope of this study, which traces the reading culture before the start of the uprising.

Henri Lefebvre's idea of the production of space is useful for examining the relationships of Soweto library users with library spaces.²⁰⁸ Lefebvre developed his critical theory in response to what he saw as "the commercialized and inauthentic ambient environment in cities, suburban developments, and housing design."²⁰⁹ The library and information science profession has only in the last thirty years been grappling theoretically with what libraries as

²⁰⁷ Rachel Matteau, 'Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading under Apartheid', PhD diss., (Johannesburg, South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, 2012), 140–87.

²⁰⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991).

²⁰⁹ William A. Darity Jr., ed., "Lefebvre, Henri," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008), 400–401, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3045301327/GVRL?u=colu44332&sid=zotero&xid=b67f9024>.

spaces mean. In the face of what some in the profession have perceived as competition from bookstores and the Internet, and the subsequent decline in visits to physical library buildings, librarians have attempted to argue for what is unique about the library. James Elmborg, suggesting a new way to conceptualise library services to highly mobile and postmodern societies, uses Lefebvre's theories about the social production of space to argue that librarians ought to take into account not only their own profession's ability to control space, but also the common library visitor's production of the spaces they enter. In summary, according to Elmborg's reading of Lefebvre, spatial practices are the ways that we perceive of space through our senses. Secondly, represented space is space which is conceptualized by technocrats with certain behaviour and uses in mind. These spaces "do not explicitly prohibit action, though they do define normal activity."²¹⁰ Furthermore, highly controlled represented spaces, like libraries, are called dominated spaces. Lefebvre's last perceptive category is representational space, which "arises when imagination seeks to change and appropriate dominated space. Individual citizens experience the spaces of the culture, and they produce meaningful events for themselves claiming space as their own arena for enacting their values and their lives."²¹¹ This chapter argues that library users in 1970s Soweto experienced libraries as representational space. As Elmborg notes, "Representational space is individual, perceptual, intuitive, and symbolic."²¹²

Overview of the History of Library Services in Soweto

Before addressing how students in late 1960s and first half of 1970s Soweto interacted with the social infrastructure of reading, I will provide a brief overview of library services in Soweto up to 1976. A comprehensive work on this topic does not yet exist and this overview combines public records, secondary sources, and an oral history interview I conducted with a librarian who worked in Soweto during the mid-1970s to sketch the general picture of libraries. When the City Public Library in downtown Johannesburg was established in 1924, its charter specified that use of library services would be "for whites only".²¹³ At the same time, there was a growing black population in the city, and by the time Orlando, the first township of what

²¹⁰ James K. Elmborg, "Libraries as the Spaces Between Us: Recognizing and Valuing the Third Space," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2011): 342.

²¹¹ Elmborg, 343.

²¹² Ibid. I have relied on Elmborg for an interpretation of Lefebvre and the application of his theories to libraries.

²¹³ The Johannesburg City Public Library was desegregated in 1974, some participants interviewed for this project remember using the city library after this date, although the distance to the city centre was often prohibitive.

would become Soweto, was formally established in 1931, liberal initiatives for library services to “Non-Europeans” were also taking shape across South Africa. The Carnegie Non-European Library Service was formed in the 1930s and circulated book boxes to black communities in Natal, Free State, Cape, and Transvaal Provinces.²¹⁴ It is worth noting that in 1940 until 1948, the Johannesburg Public Library maintained a room at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in downtown Johannesburg in order to serve black populations, since they were not allowed in the main branch. The library was open for all but, in practice, only a certain elite segment of black men used it.²¹⁵

The Winifred Holtby Library was founded in Western Native Township in 1940 and moved to Moroka, Soweto, in 1962, after that township was zoned as a coloured township. Western Native Township was a part of the Western Areas of Johannesburg, just to the west of the city centre, which became increasingly crowded in the 1930s following the Johannesburg City Council’s (JCC) decision to clear inner-city slums. The Western Areas were unique in that black residents were able to have freehold title. However, during and after World War Two, the area became racially mixed and this unsettled white residents of Johannesburg. The coming to power of the National Party in 1948 heralded a new era of racial segregation. The Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 were used to enforce forced removals of black populations from Western Native Township. “Africans” were moved to parts of Soweto, especially Meadowlands and Diepkloof.²¹⁶ Other families and individuals were forcibly moved from Alexandra, also a freehold area to the north of the city, and resettled in Soweto.²¹⁷ The memories of such removals were strongly etched on some of the participants in my research project.

By the 1940s, the Johannesburg municipality had plans well underway for the development of libraries in the black areas. Winifred Memorial, while built with funding from the Friends of Africa, was operated by the municipality from its inception. Moroka Library, as it came to be generally known, was one of the libraries burned down during the 1976 Uprising. Winifred Holtby Library was named after an English writer who, during her travels in South Africa in early 1926, spoke strongly for racial justice. After her early death, a group called the

²¹⁴ Sandwith, “The Appearance of the Book,” 18–19. Before 1994, South Africa had four provinces which were reorganized into the current nine provinces, incorporating the Bantustans. Johannesburg and Soweto fell under the Transvaal province, and are now part of Gauteng.

²¹⁵ Jacqueline Audrey Kalley, “The Effect of Apartheid on the Provision of Public, Provincial and Community Library Services in South Africa with Particular Reference to the Transvaal” (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, University of Natal, 2000), 88–89.

²¹⁶ Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 27–30.

²¹⁷ Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), 20.

Friends of Africa collected money in her memory and founded the library. The library earned the reputation of being the first library in South Africa especially built for blacks. Jacqueline Audrey Kalley writes that, “The book selection for the library proved to be a prototype for similar libraries which followed, and categories included Reference; Africa and the Africans; General Non-Fiction; English Fiction; and Children’s Books. Everything published in the vernacular languages of Southern Africa was purchased.”²¹⁸ The belief that Africans required ethnic reading material contributed to future library services purchasing the African Writers Series (AWS) thus, as was discussed in Chapter Two, unintentionally contributing to the students’ political conscientization.

Already in the 1940s, some library services were offered to black people living in Orlando out of make-shift “iron huts.”²¹⁹ The Orlando Library was the first public library built in what would become Soweto and began offering services on 12th January 1950. Soon after, in 1951, the Jabavu Public Library was opened. The West Rand Administration Board’s (WRAB) Department of Community Services took over the running of libraries in Soweto after the administration of African townships was moved to central government in 1971.²²⁰ According to Christina Moabelo, a library assistant at the Dube Library from 1975 until it was burned down on 16th June 1976, in addition to Orlando, Moroka, Dube, and Jabavu Libraries, there were four other locations in Soweto where public library services were offered by 1976. These were Baragwanath Hospital, Diepkloof, Pimville, and Meadowlands.²²¹ The Meadowlands, Dube and Moroka (Winifield Memorial) Libraries were all destroyed during the June 1976 Uprising (See Figure 3.1).²²² During the riots that followed the student march, buildings belonging to WRAB were targeted. The Cille Commission, set up by the apartheid government to determine the causes and course of the Soweto uprising, found that dissatisfaction with Bantu Affairs Administration Boards (BAAB) among black witnesses was very high. The Boards, the Commission reported, was “also the body that has to give effect to unpopular laws passed by higher authority.”²²³ The Commission heard that officials at Board

²¹⁸ Jacqueline Audrey Kalley, “The Effect of Apartheid on the Provision of Public, Provincial and Community Library Services in South Africa”, 91–93.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 94.

²²⁰ Reuben Musiker, *Companion to South African Libraries* (Craighall: Ad Donker, 1986), 47–48.

²²¹ City of Johannesburg, *The Johannesburg City Library 2012: A Commemorative Publication on the Occasion of the Re-Opening of the Johannesburg City Library on 14 February 2012* (City of Johannesburg; Carnegie Coporation of New York, 2012). Reuben Musiker, *Companion to South African Libraries* (Craighall: Ad Donker, 1986), 48.

²²² Musiker, *Companion to South African Libraries*, 48.

²²³ Republic of South Africa, “Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th of February 1977, Volume 1” (Republic of South Africa, 1980), 598, Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University,

offices were often unhelpful and racist. This made WRAB offices and other services provided by the system targets in the arson and damage during the Uprising. Some public libraries in Soweto, though understood as part of the oppressive BAAB system, were spared arson and damage. Why certain buildings were targeted and others not remains an open question for future research.



Figure 3 The Winifred Holtby (Moroka) Library was burned down during the June 1976 uprising in Soweto. The graffiti on the walls includes: “Uhuru,” “Freedom” in KiSwahili; “Azania,” the name that black consciousness minded activists called South Africa; and “We are all involved.” Source: South African Police, ‘Moroka Library,’ A3200, Folder 2, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

While these libraries were a welcome addition to the communities, they were underfunded compared to libraries in the white suburbs. Super Moloi went to the Orlando Public Library as a child but felt that it was not well equipped.²²⁴ Furthermore, a report published just months before the Soweto uprising by WRAB reveals that the staff in the public libraries under the Board in Soweto were overseen by a white librarian alongside fifteen black librarians and black seven assistants. The black librarians in Soweto at the time did not have formal training in library science. The same report, marked “Confidential”, reveals that the library services provided included: “*afgesien van boekematerial, n aantal tydskrifte en*

https://www.aluka.org/stable/10.5555/al.sff.document.comenqp2b10002?searchUri=so%3Dps_collection_name_str%2Basc%26Query%3Dreport%2Bof%2Bthe%2BCommission%2Bof%2BInquiry%2Binto%2Bthe%2BRiot%2Bat%2BSoweto%2Band%2BElsewhere.

²²⁴ Super Moloi, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 17, 2019).

koerante en subsidieer ook sekere kapitaal projekte soos byvoorbeeld, nuwe geboue meubelment, ens” [apart from book material, a number of magazines and newspapers and also subsidize certain capital projects such as, for example, new buildings, furniture, etc.]. The report notes that about 2,000 books were lent out by each library under the department’s control per month in the preceding year (1975), and that English literature was the most popular genre. School-going youth formed the greatest number of library users. The report does not provide information on exactly what books were available to read or borrow for school-going youth specifically.²²⁵

School libraries were not much better equipped. In theory, all schools under the Department of Bantu Education had a school library. In practice, funding allocated to African schools was not sufficient to run effective school libraries. In a 1967 speech to the segregated association for African librarians, the Bantu Library Association of South Africa, the Inspector for Bantu School Libraries, Dr. F. Vermooten, mentions that all schools in the department were required to have library rooms but that there had been difficulty in implementing the policy, supposedly due to “misunderstandings.” He does not elaborate on the nature of these misunderstandings. While Vermooten mentions the availability of a grant to assist schools in purchasing books (schools were expected to supplement this grant with their own funds), he admits that “full use was not made of the grants because of the late introduction of the scheme [in the previous year] and numerous misunderstandings.”²²⁶ Of the 44 Department of Bantu Education (DBE) schools in Southern Transvaal Vermooten had visited in 1967, only “12 of these schools have library rooms and 22 schools have steel cupboards.” One school did not have anywhere to place books, and he did not elaborate on the facilities at the other nine schools.²²⁷ The situation likely got worse with the addition of more schools into the system in the early 1970s, stretching already thin funds.

It appears that one of the few Soweto schools that had a functioning school library during the period this research report investigated was Orlando High School (OHS) under headmaster T.W. Kambule. Sir Robert Birley, a teacher from Eton in England, visited OHS in

²²⁵ West Rand Administration Board, “Community Services Annual Report, March 1975 - March 1976,” 1976, BAO T9/5/9 (Vryetydbesteding. Jeugklubs in Soweto. Tredkarbeiders. Ontspanning.), National Archives of South Africa.

²²⁶ F Vermooten, “Bantu School Libraries and Their Relationship to Public Libraries: Address Delivered to the Annual Meeting of the Southern Transvaal Branch of the Bantu Library Association of South Africa, Held at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, Johannesburg, on Saturday 19th June 1967,” *Bantu Library Association of South Africa Newsletter*, September 1967, 42.

²²⁷ Vermooten, 44.

1965 and raised money for a library, which was opened in 1968.²²⁸ It appears that this library soon deteriorated, since libraries require trained staff and consistent maintenance of the book stock. Students who attended OHS in the early 1970s do not remember having a well-stocked school library, and if the Birley library still existed it certainly did not leave a strong impression on students. The story is similar for Morris Isaacson and Naledi High School. At Naledi, Sibongile Mkhabela remembers, the books in the school library were irrelevant to student interests.²²⁹

Subversive Use of Spaces: Libraries

Archie Dick's work on the history of library services in the Cape Flats townships, an area outside of Cape Town, in the 1980s and their relation to social change provides national context and a critical approach to studying the relationship of apartheid libraries to their users. In his study, Dick finds that libraries in the Cape Flats were contested spaces and that "the live discussion, debate, and circulation of ideas precluded and included the use of books and libraries".²³⁰ Dick writes about the "Cape library tradition", which transcended print and encouraged debate, discussion, and community literacy. The Cape library tradition refers to the library practices that developed among coloured communities in Cape Town during the segregation era and continued into the 1980s. This tradition was characterized by autodidact intellectuals who collected books and shared them with their community, teaching literacy and encouraging debate and discussion along the way.

With the formation and growth of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) in 1943, this tradition was given a new life by the emphasis of this group on dissemination of political ideas. NEUM was formed to coordinate leftist groups among Africans, Coloureds and Indians. NEUM launched education "fellowships" in the Cape province in order to spread its ideas, especially non-racialism, anti-imperialism, and non-collaboration with the apartheid state. In the context of NEUM, non-racialism was the belief that the idea of race was a social construct that was used to initiate and maintain imperialism.²³¹ The fellowship meetings were

²²⁸ Michael Marake Morapeli, "The Rock: The History of Orlando High School, 1939-1984" MEd. Research Report, University of the Witwatersrand, (1985), 106.

²²⁹ Sibongile Mkhabela, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (15 August 2019).

²³⁰ Archie L. Dick, "'The Books Were Just the Props': Public Libraries and Contested Space in the Cape Flats Townships in the 1980s," *Library Trends* 55, no. 3 (April 12, 2007): 698–715, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2007.0006>.

²³¹ Crain Soudien, *Cape Radicals: Intellectual and Political Thought of the New Era Fellowship, 1930s-1960s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019), 1–28.

places “where the dialectic of the local and global [struggles for liberation] became the norm for regular participants through the mediums of music, film, poetry readings, inter alia.” One NEUM member who participated in these fellowships remembers that the meetings were attended by many youths.²³² Prominent among these fellowships was the New Era Fellowship which was active until political repression increased in the 1960s. At the same time, liberal whites had developed some library services for coloured communities, notwithstanding that these library services were racially segregated even before the formal advent of apartheid. When Cape Town City Library Service was launched in 1952 as a segregated service, an older generation of educators, who were members of the Teachers’ League of South Africa and resigned in opposition to Bantu Education, “educated young library workers in Non-European Unity Movement politics. Some of them ended up managing township libraries in the 1980s

Some libraries in the Cape Flats in the 1980s maintained the Cape library tradition. Libraries such as the Lentgegeur Public Library held literacy classes and were used by United Democratic Front members for meetings. At the Hanover Park Public Library the librarian, John Jacobs, actively carried on the Cape library tradition. However, Jacobs was partial to the Cape Action League, itself a part of the Black Consciousness-aligned National Forum. The National Forum, advocated socialism in the new South Africa. At Hanover Park and other libraries where he worked, Jacobs created a space where left wing political groups could meet. He showed films at the library and even kept a secret collection of banned books.

Overwhelmingly, participants in my research project feel that library spaces were more valuable to them than the book collections in early 1970s Soweto. Notwithstanding the availability of the African Writers Series in public libraries beginning in the 1970s, students felt that libraries did not contain relevant literature. In an interview with the London-based Thames TV just before he left for exile, Tsietsi Mashinini, the first Soweto Students’ Representative Council (SSRC) leader, claimed that:

School libraries, school books, they’ve got nothing to do with civics or anything that is affiliated in any manner to politics. What happens is that we are fed a lot of fiction stories. I could quote so many authors... fiction writers that you’d be surprised where I get them.

²³² Paul Hendricks, “The History and Politics of the Teachers’ League of South Africa’s Transformative Praxis,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2018): 126.

Mashinini, who was a voracious reader, acknowledged his use of libraries and then expressed his frustration with the lack of politically relevant literature:

Even our libraries are ill-equipped. You don't get much works on, say, democracy, communism, fascism, capitalism, and all that. We only know these things as concepts and something not within our world.²³³

Mashinini's sentiments reflect what was felt about Bantu Education: that while there were useful things in it, it lacked political relevance. What this interview excerpt does not reveal – and perhaps is something Mashinini could not have recognised at the time – is the extent to which the books that were available in the libraries and the counter-hegemonic ways in which they were read led students like himself to become politically active. I argue that this type of reading was the most common among Soweto high school students in the 1970s (as outlined in Chapter Two). While I have found some evidence of reading of openly subversive texts, presented below, there is no evidence that high school students engaged in this on a large scale.

Although an equivalent to the Cape library tradition has not been uncovered in this research, there is some evidence that library workers in Soweto were part of leftist book clubs and espoused a silent resistance. Murphy Morobe, a key student leader of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) in 1976, remembers that he and his friends joined a discussion group around 1975 while on their quest “for light, for ideas, for information.” He recognized librarians as some of the people in the group. The discussion group discussed Marx's *Das Kapital*, among other works. However, the students found the discussions too abstract. “The level at which they were looking at things was just too far removed from us,” Morobe says. The students did not spend much time with this group because of the inaccessibility of the material covered (although Morobe does say that listening in on these discussions helped in their later understanding of politics) and the lengthiness of meetings. Meetings would start “at about 10 p.m. and it goes on throughout the night, until about 3, 4, 5 a.m. And after that we'd have to go home, and in the morning go to school.”²³⁴ The group met in a home, strikingly, without electricity so all deliberations had to be done by candlelight. It is not clear that the librarians shared ideas discussed in their private reading groups directly with library users.

²³³ *South African Apartheid | Student Uprising | Tsietshi Mashinini | This Week | 1976* (London: Thames TV, 1976), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw7rxbIpyHU>.

²³⁴ Murphy Morobe, interview by Gail Gerhart, Cambridge, Massachusetts, (4 May 1991), Digital Innovation South Africa.

That notwithstanding, former students interviewed as part of this study shared some happy memories of the library spaces in Soweto and how they made these their own. Positive memories of Soweto public libraries, particularly Dube Library, were shared most strongly by the female research participants. Pearl Luthuli insists that she “loved being in the library.”²³⁵ Sibongile Mkhabela says that the library was a place where she felt free:

it’s free, if I were to explain it in one word, it felt liberating, it felt, made one feel... I suppose when you think about it now, because I wasn’t thinking about it then, I was just living it. It’s a sense of congruence, finding your place and finding a place where you felt comfortable. Because at that time people like Tom Manthata, I don’t know if you’ve heard of Tom Manthata, you know, was slightly older and when you think about it now, it’s not that much older, but they’d take the time to talk to you about what are you reading, why are you reading that, what else do you want to read? Okay, let’s read this, let’s read that. You want to read in Zulu? When you get to high school, they want you to read in English but at primary school you can read in Zulu so that opens up... yeah, in every language.

Tom Manthata, who was a teacher at Sekano Ntoane High, was also a leader in Christian youth clubs. Mantatha befriended SASO activists, imbibed black theology, and as early as 1971 helped shape the radical direction that the African Students Movement, later South African Students Movement, would take.²³⁶

Among the adults who frequented Dube Library were Winnie Mandela, Nelson Mandela’s wife and active member of the ANC underground, and Ellen Khuzwayo, who had been President of the YWCA.²³⁷ While discussions between older and younger youth might not have been overtly political, the very act of going to the library, a place where someone can read and come into their own, choosing what they want to read, albeit from a limited choice, helped form reading subjects. During the months before the Soweto uprising, when students at the Phefeni Junior Secondary School had already started to protest the change in language of instruction policy to include Afrikaans, the Dube Library assistant Moabelo remembers that the junior secondary school students used Dube Library for their informal meetings. This

²³⁵ Pearl Luthuli, interview.

²³⁶ Gerhart and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, 160.

²³⁷ Christina Moabelo, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (20 January 2020).

memory stands out for her because the library would normally only get busy in the afternoon after school let out, but students had begun coming to the library earlier.²³⁸

For many young people, in Lefebvrian terms, the library became representational space. While the library space had been designed to promote a certain type of behaviour and reading, they appropriated it as a space of discussion both with their peers and across generations, and borrowed books that they found relevant and interpreted them in their own, liberating, way. Furthermore, simply gaining fluency in reading – a rare skill in those days – was empowering. Students could then apply their literacy skills to read texts that were more directly political, write newsletters or participate in debates and conscientization efforts. That females remember their libraries as more impactful in their lives perhaps speaks to the gendered nature of township space in 1970s Soweto. The streets were perceived as male domains inhabited by gangs and adolescent boys negotiating their masculinity, and not a place for girls.

Like township libraries, school libraries – where they existed – had to adhere to the climate of censorship. While young people enjoyed reading James Hadley Chase in their free time, library holdings – with the exception of the AWS – remained largely conservative. An article published in 1968 in the periodical circulated to teachers and administrators in the DBE, the *Bantu Education Journal*, about the ideal school library reference collection suggests a highly controlled reading environment in the schools. Books in the school library had to support the curriculum and “healthy interests of the pupils.” Furthermore, several categories of books were suggested. These include encyclopaedias, language dictionaries in the main African languages, “The Bible, covering all the languages mentioned above” as well as books complementing the Bible. “Shakespeare” is mentioned as an important category. Others are year books, atlases, “learned society publications” and “one or two informative periodicals.” The same article lists the government gazette as another reference work that should be on hand so that school librarians were kept up to date with banned publications.²³⁹ As already noted, in practice funds were not available to have all these books in the library. However, this list shows what kind of books were intended to be read by students. It is interesting that the Bible is given such a prominent place, but not surprising considering the Christian nationalism of the ruling Nationalists.

²³⁸ Christina Moabelo, interview.

²³⁹ E Fanele, “Reference Works for the High School Library,” *Bantu Education Journal*, February 1968.

Subversive Use of Spaces: Youth Clubs at Community Centres

Community halls were important spaces for youth to socialise and interact in early 1970s Soweto. Community halls, owned by the WRAB, were the place where many social events happened: dances, community meetings, youth club meetings, prom dances (or farewell functions as they were known). The role of school farewell functions as events where older people shared ideas with younger has already been covered in Chapter Two. A number of the halls were purpose-built for sports. For example, the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) in Orlando East was used for boxing, in addition to being a community meeting and performance space. The DOCC, founded in 1948, boasts Nelson Mandela as one of its early users, as he honed his boxing skills at the centre.²⁴⁰ Building of the centre was funded by the Donaldson Trust, which was founded by Lieutenant Colonel James Donaldson as a liberal philanthropic institution to “advance the status, improve the conditions and remove the disabilities suffered by the black African population of South Africa; and generally to seek their benefit and betterment.”²⁴¹ Among the initial trustees of the Trust was the seventh president of the ANC, Dr. Alfred Bitini Xuma. Donaldson was a “retired Johannesburg businessman who had made a fortune in the gold and diamond mining industries.”²⁴² The DOCC was one of the Trust’s flagship projects.

According to an annual report from Community Services Department of the WRAB released in early 1976, there were no fewer than twenty-five community halls in Soweto administered by the WRAB and used for a variety of meetings and sporting activities.²⁴³ One of the most important activities that took place around community centres run were the youth clubs. It should be noted that these government-sponsored youth clubs were distinct from the Christian youth clubs that were run through various religious organizations discussed in Chapter One. The Christian clubs had a heavier presence in schools in addition to churches. There were twenty-one youth clubs run by WRAB in 1975, with a total membership of 4, 243. The activities at the youth clubs included: dancing (“Ballroom, Latin American, Traditional, Gumboot, Folk dancing and modern dancing”), singing (“Community, traditional, classical and popular”), indoor games, outdoor games, exercise, puppetry and drama, and arts and crafts. The youth clubs also organized trips to places like the Carlton Centre in the Johannesburg

²⁴⁰ Yolisa Mkele and Bonginkosi Ntiwane, “Madiba’s Old Gym Still Creating Fighters,” *TimesLIVE*, July 15, 2013, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2013-07-15-madibas-old-gym-still-creating-fighters/>.

²⁴¹ “Donaldson Trust - ESAT,” accessed March 10, 2020, https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Donaldson_Trust.

²⁴² S. Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma: African, American, South African* (Springer, 2000), 117.

²⁴³ West Rand Administration Board, “Community Services Annual Report, March 1975 - March 1976,” 15–21.

Central Business District, the Zoo, and the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre. The department also held a drama festival for all youth clubs in 1975.

Further afield, the club arranged trips to the beach. Between 1975 and 1976, three hundred and thirty camps were held at the Sunlight Beach and Mnini in Natal and Kiwane in the Ciskei, then a Xhosa ‘homeland’. Parents had to pay for their children to attend this camp, while one of the camps was paid for by a “private trust, and the most needy children attend this camp.” Through the youth clubs, some children were given primary school scholarships that covered “school fees, books, and clothing. Needy cases with a good academic record were chosen to receive bursaries.” Furthermore, welfare staff bought school supplies and clothes for the children. The youth clubs were led by paid group leaders while “club helpers” were recruited from among the youth and trained to help run the clubs. In the first few months of 1976, about thirty-five to forty club helpers were trained in “games, dancing, bookwork, first aid, care of equipment, exercises, art, puppetry, drama, drum majorettes, debating, courtesy, catering and organization for club functions.” The same WRAB report notes a reduction of funding over the previous few years to youth clubs that led to a drop in the number of clubs, inability to update equipment, and charging parents more for their children’s outings.²⁴⁴

While the youth clubs could not impact the system on the whole, as Clive Glaser has noted, evidence suggests that they did make a difference in some individual lives.²⁴⁵ Apart from the library, youth clubs and community centres provided an alternative place where youth could “hang out” away from the danger and allure of gangs on the streets. Furthermore, their open nature (as opposed to schools where only students from that particular institution could attend) created a space where children from various backgrounds and several schools could meet. Jacob Sadie was a member of the Tladi Youth Club, which met at the area community hall. He remembers that the most memorable activities in this club were the drama performances and field trips. Additionally, there was also a corner that held magazines. Sadie says the activities in his youth club taught him to “be a better person and a responsible citizen.”²⁴⁶ A story from *The Weekend World* in 1974 shows just how important youth clubs had become in Soweto. The clubs taught a variety of sports and even ballroom dancing. While drama is not mentioned as an activity, one of the youth club leaders, who were under the supervision of white social workers, a Mr. Z. N. Phalatse, is quoted as saying, “Youth clubs provide an opportunity [for young people] to occupy themselves usefully during their free time

²⁴⁴ West Rand Administration Board, 22–25.

²⁴⁵ Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 102.

²⁴⁶ Jacob Sadie, interview by author, July 19, 2019.

under expert guidance.” He adds that “parents spend less and less time with their children and get surprised when the child gets into trouble. All they have to say is, ‘but I give him everything he wants.’” According to Phalatse, such children were in want of love and attention.²⁴⁷

A fascinating “Report on a hippie fact-finding Mission” from the SASM Newsletter of April 1973 shows another way in which community halls were used in the performance of youth identity and politics.²⁴⁸ The report describes how Mofolo Hall was used for parties, in this case a party where the predominant youth sub-culture was the “hippie.” The party included dancing in close proximity and smoking of marijuana. The SASM students went to Mofolo Hall to determine the facts of hippie youth culture in Soweto, concerned that “this type of behaviour cripples the black nation.” The behaviour they were most concerned about was the apparent drug taking and free sex, including across the colour line with students from Wits University and other white youth. White youth had access to expensive drugs and this allegedly led some of the young men in Soweto to resort to selling “their girls in order to be provided for by the white hippies.” Among the Sowetan hippies, the SASM investigators found two groups, ordinary hippies and the “Rezu” group, who seemed to be highly committed to the hippie culture and were alleged to have “a house somewhere in Mapetla where they have occasional meetings. At this place there is free sex and strong drug taking.” The authors of the article felt that the party goers who merely wanted to have some occasional fun could be “tapped and called to join the struggle.”²⁴⁹

Testimony from students like Seth Mazibuko, who became highly political and was the youngest member of the Action Committee that planned the Soweto uprising points to the process of appropriation of state sanctioned spaces by Soweto students in the early 1970s. In a video interview of Mazibuko for the documentary *Soweto: A History* directed by Angus Gibson, Mazibuko claims that he was recruited into SASM when he ran into older youth who were already politically active at the DOCC. He says,

in my area there is a hall called the DOCC, the Donaldson Community Centre in Orlando East. It’s known as one of the very oldest kind of youth clubs. And, neighbouring Orlando Police Station, and we used to sit there play billiards, play snooker, American basketball. There was Dan Kekeke who was known to be very

²⁴⁷ Mothobi Mutloatse, “24 Leaders Keep Kids Happy,” *Weekend World*, March 10, 1974.

²⁴⁸ South African Students’ Movement, “Report on a Hippie Fact-Finding Mission,” *SASM Newsletter*, April 1973, Digital Innovation South Africa.

²⁴⁹ South African Students’ Movement, 8.

good American basketball player. And we had some time when we used to meet around with people such as Zweli Sizane, Thamsanqa Qweta, and those were the guys who belonged to organizations for instance such as the South African Students' Movement.

Mazibuko continues,

And that time, organizations such as the National African Youth Organization, NAYO, TRAYO, Transvaal Organization of South African Youth. And, we talked about these things. I told them my frustrations. We used to talk about our frustrations, not only at school. But also at home, I remember I wrote a play around about that time that was called *Who's to be Blamed?* And that was a serious question that I was asking, "who's to be blamed?" Because I was asking, you know, it was more of an interrogative statement. Not only interrogative as far as I was concerned but also interrogative as far as the situation around me is concerned. And the story was about my life, generally. There was a main character there by the name of *Sihluthu*. I had long hair, long hair means *sihluthu*.²⁵⁰

It appears that Mazibuko put on the play with his youth group at the DOCC and this sparked a conversation that led to him joining the SASM:

So that was what used to happen and these guys saw my play and they thought the subject and the theme in my play is more relevant to the Black Consciousness kind of philosophy and I started from that time and then I... then, [they] of course recruited me to the South African Students' Movement. They felt that now if I were to join such an organization, then I'll be, I'll have put some substance in the question and in the answers that I tried to give in the play.²⁵¹

Oupa Moloto remembers books found in public libraries were "Books that were not talking about the struggles of black people." Only those books "to read when you want to

²⁵⁰ The Transvaal Youth Organisation and its mother body, the National Youth Organisation were founded under the aegis of SASO leaders who sought to organize out of school youth in black consciousness thought. See Gerhart and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge*, 156–60 for a detailed discussion of NAYO and TRAYO and their role in youth politics in the early 1970s.

²⁵¹ Mazibuko, Soweto Interviews.

relax.” He compares the kind of poetry one would find in the public library and contrasts this with the kind of poetry his brother Doctor Moloto and other poets like Lefifi Tladi performed during the height of Black Consciousness, which:

was talking more about our struggle. But when you go to libraries, you don’t find the books about these people. They were not published, it was the British writers or English writers here in South Africa. The influence of Shakespearean work within the libraries and with us, we wanted the hard-core materials that were talking about our struggle.²⁵²

Doctor Moloto, the Transvaal regional President of SASM in 1974, was part of student groups that performed plays and poetry in Soweto.²⁵³ Oupa Moloto claims that Doctor Moloto wrote a play about the Sharpeville Massacre that was performed in schools and at Mofolo Community Hall, attracting many students.²⁵⁴ Tsietsi Mashinini was part of the cast of Doctor Moloto’s play.²⁵⁵ Lefifi Tladi led Dashiki, a black consciousness-aligned jazz and poetry group that performed in Soweto in the early 1970s. Tladi, later a painter as well, was exiled after the Soweto uprising and returned to South Africa in 1997.²⁵⁶ Bhekizizwe Peterson notes that “notwithstanding the crucial significance of the literary endeavours of black artists, the pulse of the arts in the 1970s was provided by the performing arts, especially theatre.”²⁵⁷ This research report has focussed on the reading culture of high school students in Soweto in the 1970s, but many participants I spoke to, like Moloto, attested to the importance of the performing arts in their political conscientization.

While a detailed discussion of plays and poetry performances in Soweto in the early 1970s is out of the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note that many theatre performances were initially held at community centres before WRAB caught wind of their subversive potential. Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane and David R. Howarth note that “Mzwandile Maqina’s unpublished play *Give Us this Day*, which attacked Bantu education and township administrators, was based on [Onkgopotse Abram] Tiro’s life, had a major

²⁵² Oupa Moloto, Informal Conversation with author, Johannesburg, South Africa, 15 May 2019.

²⁵³ Mosegomi and Mosupye, *Soweto Explodes*, 61.

²⁵⁴ The Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960 happened when members of the Pan Africanist Congress marched to the Sharpeville police station as part of a nationwide anti-pass protest. Although the marchers were peaceful, the armed policemen opened fire, killing 69 and injuring another 180. Soon after, on 8 April, the ANC and PAC were outlawed.

²⁵⁵ Oupa Moloto, informal conversation with author, Johannesburg, South Africa, 10 March 2020.

²⁵⁶ ‘Lefifi Tladi’, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/lefifi-tladi>, accessed 10 March 2020.

²⁵⁷ Peterson, “Culture, Resistance and Representation,” 175.

impact in Soweto when it was presented in 1975. The authorities would not allow the play to be staged in Soweto's public halls so it was staged in churches, where there were sometimes two or three shows a day by popular demand." They conclude that "*Give Us this Day*, like most of the radical theatre and poetry of the 1970s, heightened political consciousness to the point where in retrospect the Soweto uprising seemed almost inevitable."²⁵⁸ Coupled with their own poetry and theatre performances in schools, high school students in Soweto in the early 1970s were exposed to these black consciousness ideas through attending or hearing about such performances. Furthermore, teachers like Fanyana Mazibuko at Morris Isaacson High School, were themselves amateur poets who participated in cultural production alongside their students. Mazibuko's poem from 1977, "You Say I Must Sing," is a painful reminder of the anguish that Soweto faced during the uprising. The first stanza goes, "You say I must sing/Sing of roses/Roses that are red/Red with blood/The blood of my children/The children who got killed/Killed by the man."²⁵⁹

In the preceding two sections, I have discussed the way in which libraries and community centres were made into representational space by their users in Soweto. Provided by the state in order to achieve its aims of urban segregation, users instead utilized the spaces in ways which furthered their values and political aims. Many connections that led to political consciousness of the students of the Soweto uprising were born in the youth clubs. The public libraries also facilitated connections between older generations and younger ones, sharing lessons and values. During the protests against Bantu Education, some students also met in public libraries to plan and share space. Christina Moabelo, at the time an assistant at the Dube Public Library in Soweto, even helped students come up with some of the slogans they painted on their placards prior to the march on 16 June 1976.²⁶⁰ Having discussed the appropriation of spaces provided by the state, the chapter will now turn to a brief discussion of the reading of politically radical literature by a small component of the politically active students in Soweto in the early 1970s, using the conceptual framework of an alternative literary circuit.

²⁵⁸ Mzamane and Howarth, "Representing Blackness: Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement," 206–7.

²⁵⁹ In Hlongwane, Ndlovu, and Mutloatse, *Soweto '76*, 76.

²⁶⁰ Moabelo, interview.

The Alternative Literary Circuit among Soweto's High School Students

Rachel Matteau-Matsha uses the idea of an “alternative literary circuit,” adapting Robert Darnton’s concept of literary circuit, to explain the readerships that developed in South Africa during high apartheid. (See the Introduction of this report for a discussion of Darton’s communication circuit). The alternative literary industry in South Africa grew in opposition to the mainstream reading culture that adhered to state censorship regimes and “good reading.”²⁶¹ Matteau-Matsha argues that in apartheid South Africa, the regular communication circuit was disrupted by censorship, and to compensate for these disruptions readers participated in an alternative circuit. One of the ways that readers compensated for the gaps in the circuit was by actively seeking out banned literature or literature that they believed could be banned. Pointedly, and also a finding of this research report, among Soweto high school students in the early 1970s, “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.”²⁶² As was discussed in Chapter Two, many high school students in 1970s Soweto read books from the AWS, and while they were not certain about the legal status of particular books in the series, they knew that they were participating in a counter-hegemonic reading culture. This belief was so extensive that some parents forbade their children from reading *any* books in the AWS.

Investigating the causes of the Soweto uprising, the Cille Commission especially noted the pamphlets that the ANC distributed in the South Africa “by letter or [pamphlet] bomb” having incited people to protest.²⁶³ Pamphlet bombs were a method of distributing the ANC’s propaganda by detonating them in busy public places so that as many people as possible could have access to them. Beginning in the late 1960s, pamphlet bombs were developed and deployed in South Africa by the ANC and South African Communist Party in exile and were used alongside the placing of loudspeakers at crowded train stations playing ANC propaganda to inform the public about developments in the liberation struggle.²⁶⁴ The Commission highlighted pamphlets that were circulated in 1975 and 1976 that drew attention to the demise

²⁶¹ Matteau, “Real and Imagined Readers,” 140.

²⁶² Matteau, 143.

²⁶³ Republic of South Africa, “Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th of February 1977, Volume 1,” 570.

²⁶⁴ Hans-Georg Schleicher, “The German Democratic Republic and the South Africa Liberation Struggle,” South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), 2008, 1121, <https://www.aluka.org/stable/10.5555/al.sff.document.sadet010>.

of the Portuguese empire in Africa and the success of black people in Mozambique and Angola gaining independence. The report adds that:

In a pamphlet issued in March and May 1976, [the ANC] stated that the lesson of Angola was clear, namely that there was nothing that could stop the flames of freedom from spreading throughout Southern Africa. All Blacks were asked for their support. According to a pamphlet issued in June 1976, Frelimo and MPLA had shown that the South African Army was not invincible.²⁶⁵

What is clear from my research is that at least some students read material from the banned ANC and had access to subversive literature through their connection with underground cells and older activists. In his book on the Soweto uprising, Noor Nieftagodien traces the development of underground political activity in the early 1970s in Soweto. Following heavy repression by the state of older veterans of the struggle in the late 1960s, a group of radical youth which included Kgalema Motlanthe, Stan Nkosi, Sphiwe Nyanda, and George Nene formed a radical cell around 1973 or 1974. These youth “imbibed radical literature” and travelled to neighbouring countries to meet with the ANC, PAC and BCM and to obtain more banned literature.²⁶⁶ Another group, the “Soweto Seven,” felt the need to form secret cells after their political activism in school was suppressed. The cells discussed banned literature, also obtained from exiled groups, and shared it with other cells.²⁶⁷

For Thami Ntteni, a student at MIHS in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the nexus of his political network was the activist George Nene, mentioned above, who was older than him and provided him with subversive and banned literature. Apart from the conversations Ntteni had with a shopkeeper in the neighbourhood about African liberation, it was Nene who would provide Ntteni with his first copies of the *SASO Newsletter*. Later, Nene introduced Ntteni to the librarians at the Johannesburg City Public Library, which had been desegregated after 1974. Thami Ntteni (TN) says:

Now, George was senior to me and he actually went to university before me but we were very very close friends with George and he was my political mentor, in a sense.

²⁶⁵ Republic of South Africa, “Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th of February 1977, Volume 1,” 579.

²⁶⁶ Nieftagodien, *The Soweto uprising*, 46–50.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 51.

You know, during our time, you may not believe it but people don't know that some of the books that were banned were actually available. Guess where? At the city library, Johannesburg City Library.

Ntteni claims that you had to be a trusted patron to access these books that were not available to the general public.

TN: All that you had to do was go to the librarian there and the librarian already... if you were introduced, those books were kept under, you know, as a librarian you would know books that are kept under classified or research or whatever...

KM: Sort of behind the counter?

TN: Yeah! Hidden somewhere and the librarian knew. So, I started reading Marx here in South Africa.

KM: Really?

TN: Yeah. I started reading Marx here in South Africa and a lot of other banned books at the City Library in Johannesburg.

KM: Hmm...

TN: They were available, those books, but you had to know that because you go there you find all these cards of books, now. The librarian had to know you.

Additionally, Ntteni says that he was part of a group of people who got books from Vanguard Bookstore in the Johannesburg Central Business District. Nene introduced him to the booksellers as well:

There was a bookshop, I think it was in Commissioner Street, it was called Vanguard, it was called Vanguard. Now, again, when you went to that bookshop, it had two floors, the other one was almost like a basement, you went downstairs. Here, on the top floor, you got all the ordinary books that were available. But you went into the

basement, that's where you get all the books that were banned at that bookshop called the Vanguard.²⁶⁸

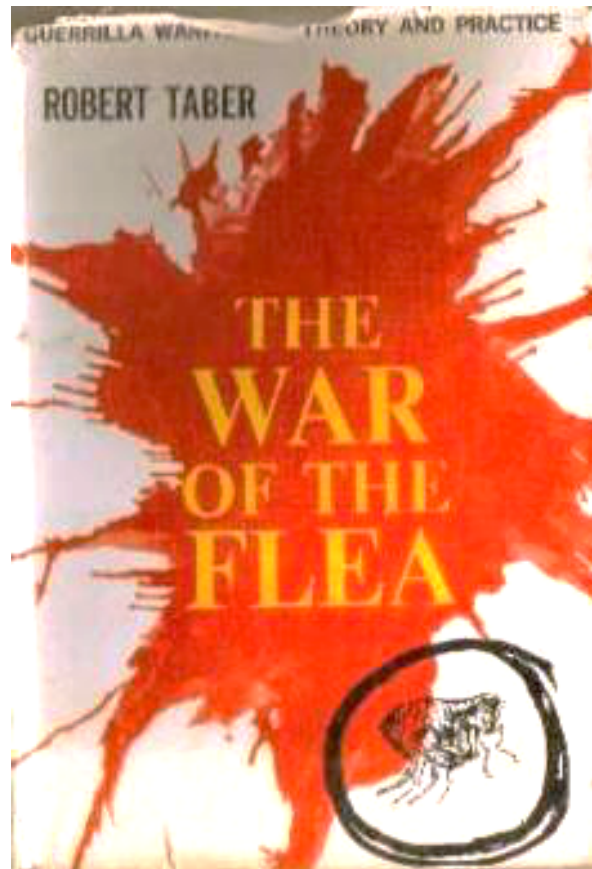


Figure 4 First edition cover of Robert Taber's *War of the Flea: Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (1965: Lyle Stuart), which Thami Ntteni said he first read in South Africa in the mid-1970s. Screenshot by author, source: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/photo/16120302-the-war-of-the-flea>, accessed 11 March 2020

Ntteni adds that extreme levels of trust had to be established before the bookseller trusted a client to sell them banned books. Matteau-Matsha also notes these important relationships of trust among booksellers who sold banned books and readers who sought them. This was necessary because of the risk involved in selling banned books secretly.²⁶⁹ The Vanguard Bookstore was opened in Johannesburg on 17 April 1931 after Fanny Klenerman took over the running of the former Frank Glass Bookstore from her partner, Frank Glass. The bookstore ran from 1931 until sometime between 1970 and 1975.²⁷⁰ Klenerman, who had at

²⁶⁸ Ntteni, interview.

²⁶⁹ Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers," 158.

²⁷⁰ Fanny Klenerman, "Transcript of Taped Autobiography of Fanny Klenerman Transcribed by Ruth Sack," A2031, Tape 3, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, accessed September 15, 2019, <http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/papers-of-fanny-klenerman>.

least one co-owner during this 40 year period, came from an immigrant Russian Jewish family and was involved with the Communist Party of South Africa.²⁷¹ It is not clear exactly what kind of banned books were held by Vanguard but a perusal of Klenerman's papers at the Historical Papers Research Archive of the University of the Witwatersrand reveals that as a communist she owned a number of texts that would have been deemed subversive. The booklets among her papers include: *The Collaborators* published by the British Anti-apartheid Movement²⁷², Trotsky's *Stalinism and Bolshevism*²⁷³, and a National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) reprint speech given at the University of Cape Town in 1960 by a Prof. D.V. Cowen entitled "Freedom of Thought and Its Expression in South Africa."²⁷⁴

Ntteni mentions *The War of the Flea* (See Figure 3.2) as one of the banned books he obtained from this alternative literary circuit and read in South Africa before leaving for exile in early 1976.²⁷⁵ *The War of the Flea* by Robert Taber is a study of guerrilla warfare in several countries including China, Cuba, Algeria and the Philippines. Taber argues that "The flea can endure: his war is fought in space and time, and each passing day raises...the will of the people to resist...The record stands: No colonial war has yet been, lost by a colonial people, once entered into."²⁷⁶ Ntteni notes, "that book, I read while I was still in South Africa. That book, I believe it was a banned book but it was through an exchange. One guy, this book... because that book speaks about guerrilla warfare, it was circulating amongst us. Once you finished reading it, you passed it on to somebody else."²⁷⁷ *The War of the Flea* was indeed banned under the Publications Act of 1974.²⁷⁸

Super Moloi also read banned publications when he was still a high school student at Orlando High School in the mid-1970s. Moloi, whose uncle Elliot Shabangu was a member of the ANC underground, and who, himself, formed an underground cell with friends, read the ANC's publication *Sechaba* as well as the South African Communist Party's periodical the

²⁷¹ Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Routledge, 2019), n.p.

²⁷² Rosalynde Ainslie and Dorothy Robinson, "The Collaborators" (Anti-Apartheid Movement, n.d.), A2031 Fanny Klenerman Papers, B7, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

²⁷³ Leon Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism, Concerning the Historical and Theoretical Roots of the Fourth International," n.d., A2031 Fanny Klenerman Papers, B23, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

²⁷⁴ D.V. Cowen, "Freedom of Thought and Its Expression in South Africa" (National Union of South African Students, 1960), A2031 Fanny Klenerman Papers, B5, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

²⁷⁵ Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1970).

²⁷⁶ Taber in "Review of The War of the Flea by Robert Taber," Kirkus Reviews, August 14, 1965, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/a/robert-taber/the-war-of-the-flea/>.

²⁷⁷ Ntteni, interview.

²⁷⁸ "Beacon for Freedom of Expression."

African Communist, of which he says, “that was gold.” Both the *African Communist* and *Sechaba* were produced with assistance from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). *Sechaba* was printed in the GDR starting from 1967. The magazine was mailed to Western cities but also smuggled into South Africa by ANC sympathizers and underground members, and then distributed through the underground network.²⁷⁹ When Moloi and his comrades went for political education with the older ANC underground, his uncle would give them copies of political material, including *Sechaba*, and they “would keep it in good order so that it could be duplicated and circulated to other people.” The students were highly secretive about this banned material, passing it on clandestinely from cell to sell. Moloi also remembers getting banned material from universities in Johannesburg.²⁸⁰

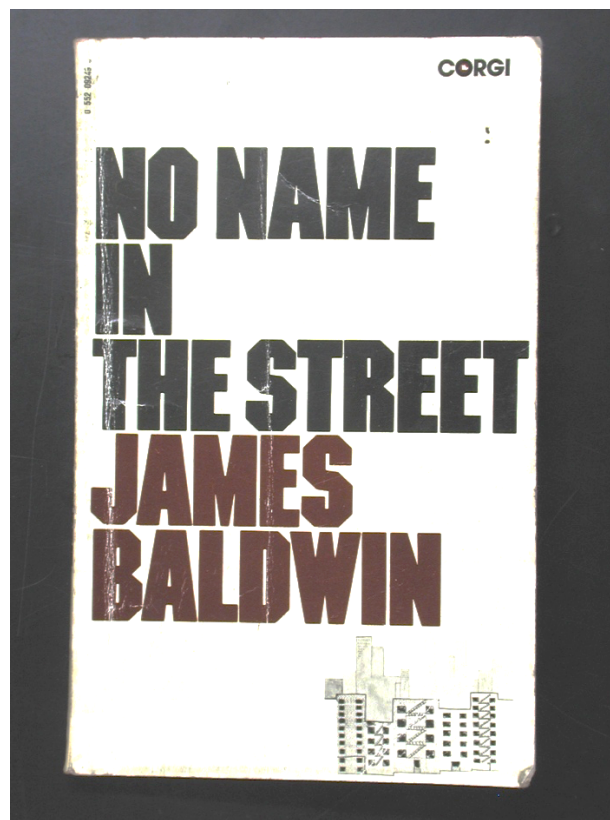


Figure 5 James Baldwin's *No Name in the Street* was confiscated during the Soweto uprisings. The handwritten name on the title page is “Sindiswa Gwazela.” Source: South African Police, ‘Picture of *No Name in the Street* by James Baldwin WLD 6857 Civil Case 1977 Volume 413 (Exhibit)’, n.d., SAB K345, Volume 3-4 Box 99, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

Police raids during apartheid often targeted printed material. An inventory list from such a raid of a young activist in Soweto contains no less than 20 publications, including: *Nobody Knows my Name* and *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Black Theology and Black Power* by James Cone, *Naught for Your*

²⁷⁹ Schleicher, “The German Democratic Republic and the South Africa Liberation Struggle,” 1117–19.

²⁸⁰ Super Moloi, interview by author, Pretoria, South Africa, (17 July 2019).

Comfort by Father Trevor Huddleston, *Not Yet Uhuru* by Oginga Odinga, and what is labelled a “Wits Student Pamphlet.”²⁸¹ Cone’s *Black Theology and Black Power* was a banned book and several books by James Baldwin were banned in South Africa by the mid-1970s. James Baldwin, an African American writer, wrote novels, poems, plays and essays that were scathing in their assessment of the racial injustices in his home country of the United States. *Notes of a Native Son* and *Nobody Knows my Name* are collections of essays on this and related themes. *No Name on the Street* (See Figure 3.3) reflects on developments in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s, including the 28 August 1963 march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, the Algerian War of Independence, and the continuing fight for civil rights in the United States. The book was confiscated from a young female activist by the name of Sindiswa Gwazela in the course of the Soweto uprising. Gwazela was an activist and was arrested in November 1976.²⁸² Other books confiscated by the police during the uprising include *Not Yet Uhuru* (“uhuru” means “freedom” in Kiswahili). This is the 1967 autobiography of the Kenyan politician Odinga Odinga which traces the Kenyan fight for independence and calls out the government of president Jomo Kenyatta for failing to realize the promise of freedom in that country. Another one is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (originally published 1852), by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a conservative novel about slavery in the United States that would still have given readers in Soweto an insight into the brutalising aspects of that system. The entire inventory list from a police raid that confiscated books on 17 June 1977 in Orlando Soweto is reproduced below (Figure 3.4):

²⁸¹ South African Police, “Inventory List, Masabatha Loate from WLD 6857 Civil Case 1977 Volume 413,” n.d., SAB K345 Volume 3-4 Box 99, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

²⁸² Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, “Chapter 4: The Participants - Section 3: Shifting the Point of View,” “I Saw a Nightmare...” *Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto uprising, June 16, 1976*, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pohlandt-mccormick/PM.c4p3.html>.

H-55

AMPTELIK-OFFICIAL

SOEDERE SEYIND DEUR S/H/D. TALLIP OP 1/11. IN TREKWOODSHEED VAN
MASABATHA LOATE TE 7798 ORLANDO WES.

(1) BOKK:- RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND WHITE PREJUDICE - BY ROBERT BUTS.

(2) BOKK:- NOTES OF A NATIVE SON - BY JAMES BALDWIN

(3) BOKK:- BLACK VIEWPOINT - BY SPADOCAS.

(4) BOKK:- BLACK THEOLOGY AND BLACK POWER BY JAMES H. CONE.

(5) BOKK:- NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME BY JAMES BALDWIN. - (CHIEF HARRIS)

(6) BOKK:- NAUGHT FOR YOUR COMFORT BY FAIRER TREYOR HUBBLESTON.

(7) BOKK:- DETENTE - BY S.A. INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS.

(8) BOKK:- SOME IMPLICATIONS OF INEQUALITY BY SPADOCAS.

(9) BOKK:- UNCLE TOMS. CABIN BY HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

(10) BOKK:- THE EASTERN PHILOSOPHERS BY E. W. F. TOMLIN

(11) BOKK:- NAUGHT FOR YOUR COMFORT - BY FAIRER TREYOR HUBBLESTON

(12) BOKK:- ASSAULT ON PRIVATE ENTERPRICE - THE FREEWAY TO COMMUNISM BY H. D. WASSERMAN.

(13) BOKK:- NOT YET UHURU BY OJINSA ODINSA.

(14) BOKK:- INSIDE THE K.E.B. BY HENSEL MYERSKOV.

(15) TWEE GESKRAWE VELLE PAPIER - NOT YET UHURU - UETTERKESL.

(16) TWEE BAIKWE DEUR POKURAHU SHUN CHETTY EN LEN DEUR POLISJE

(17) TWEE SEIKKE STUNKE SED. 1/11. SEKIS VAN NUSAS STUDENTE.

(18) WITS. PAMELET -

(19) LYS. MET NAME.

(20) I KORREKT SEKADRESSEER HAN. "THE SECURITY OFFICER, SECURITY BARNIN. MET TWEE BAIKWE.

(21) CHEQUE PAYMENT HOUCE. DEUR SHUN CHETTY HAN JOKE DIMPKE.

(22) LOS NOTES.

P.A. 81/70175 (E.3)
Gebruik van handse omtrek aan postgeld
te voldoen, is strafbaar met R100 boete.
Penalty for private use to avoid payment
of postage R100.

Figure 6 A list of books and other publications confiscated from a politically active youth in Soweto. Source: South African Police, 'Inventory List, Masabatha Loate from WLD 6857 Civil Case 1977 Volume 413', n.d., SAB K345 Volume 3-4 Box 99, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

The confiscated books in this police list belonged to Masabata Loate, a student from Orlando West who was part of the 1976 protests, Loate was also Khotso Seatlholo's girlfriend. Seatlholo led the SSRC after Tsietsi Mashinini left South Africa for exile. In 1977, Loathe turned state witness in the State vs. Twala case against the 'Soweto 11,' the trial of the students who were considered the leaders of the Soweto uprising.²⁸³ It is worth noting that both the last two pieces of evidence on reading of banned and subversive texts are connected to young women activists, who are often marginalized in the predominant narrative of the Soweto uprising. The role of these young women in activism, and how this related to reading, remain important questions for research.

²⁸³ "Mary Masabale Loatse and Others - In the Magistrate's Court, District of Johannesburg, Held in Johannesburg," 1982, AD2021 -19 Security Trials, Court Records, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the social infrastructure of reading and how it was appropriated by Soweto students. The spaces, libraries and community centres, were created by the state as instruments of control but were subverted to suit the political and personal values of the people who used them. I used the conceptual framework introduced by Henri Lefebvre on the social production of spaces to argue that libraries, especially, represented spaces that were turned into representational spaces by their users and – to a certain extent – library staff. Community halls feature prominently in the stories that high school students who lived in Soweto in the 1970s tell about their own attainment of political consciousness. These spaces were usually used for youth club meetings and it is at these youth clubs that some of the first drama performances and poetry that questioned the status quo happened. Beyond the cultural production among young people, a rising tide of radical drama in the 1970s infused Black Consciousness into the township. This, alongside the conscientization students were getting in the classroom under some teachers, paved the way for a change in reading practices, discussed in Chapter Two.

The chapter also examined the reading of banned publications. While the majority of texts that were read by students were not banned, some students did participate in what Matteau-Matsha calls an “alternative literary circuit.” Students who were connected to underground cells or had relatives who were members of the banned liberation movements were able to get copies of publications such as *Sechaba* and the *African Communist*, among other banned literature. The majority of students, I argue, kept reading novels that were not banned in a counter-hegemonic fashion. For high students living in Soweto in the 1970s, reading was their first act of resistance.

CONCLUSION

This project sought to uncover the reading practices of politically active high school students who lived in Soweto in the late 1960s and early 1970s. To do this, I first analysed the schools they attended, the kind of education they received and what other social infrastructure was available for them to support reading in the community. Students found, in the course of everyday life, the cultural tools to stand up and resist apartheid. They had all experienced apartheid as a degrading and oppressive system and, thus, developed counter-hegemonic interpretive tactics that they used when they encountered a variety of texts. Through oral history interviews and a few fascinating conversations with people who were actors in the political developments in Soweto at the time, I was able to construct a story of the reading practices among politicized high school students before the 1976 Soweto uprising. This data was complemented by sources I found in archives and libraries to provide an account of reading practices at the time.

In the course of this research, I also asked the research participants the extent to which reading is important to developing politically conscious young people. The response of Super Moloi is instructive:

I'd say reading is very important. Reading is very important because it exposes you to other people's experiences besides what you are experiencing in your country. But you've got to... without understanding the world, you would be narrow in approach. So, reading or even storytelling, it becomes very important.²⁸⁴

Moloi's point here is that reading stimulates the imagination to conceive of other worlds beyond the one we inhabit. In Einstein's words, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution."²⁸⁵ The former students interviewed for this study read widely and deeply and even their early stages of reading crime novels were important in enabling them to imagine that other worlds did and could exist.

The same can be said of the performances that theatre groups performed in the 1970s and 1980s. Bhekizizwe Peterson points out that in the early 1970s, the political moment drove artists to gravitate towards poetry and theatre as a form. Though not all writers were formally

²⁸⁴ Super Moloi, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, (July 17, 2019).

²⁸⁵ Albert Einstein, *Einstein on Cosmic Religion and Other Opinions and Aphorisms*. (Newburyport: Dover Publications, 2012), 97.

affiliated to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), there was a general consensus that artists needed to explore what it meant to be black.²⁸⁶ Plays by BCM-affiliated groups such as Mhloti were popular in Soweto in the 1970s. Such groups performed politically charged poetry, music at public spaces like churches, political rallies, and schools.²⁸⁷ Mhloti was a group formed by the South African Black Theatre Union's Music, Drama, Arts, Literature Institute. The institute held a festival in Soweto in 1974 that showcased Mhloti's performances of poems by Mongane Serote, Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Zinjiva Nkondo and James Matthews. Paintings and sculptures were also displayed at the event.²⁸⁸ Some of the students interviewed for this study recall attending such plays and poetry performances that probed the question of blackness, a few even participated in such groups. The role of the broader arts in the political conscientization of young people in Soweto in the early 1970s is an area that needs further research.

In his memorial lecture for Eduardo Mondlane, the Mozambican freedom fighter and leader of Frelimo, Amilcar Cabral said, "the study of liberation struggles shows that in general, they are preceded by an increase in cultural phenomena which progressively crystallize into an attempt, successful or not, to assert the cultural personality of the oppressed people in an act of rejection of the oppressor."²⁸⁹ This research report has traced some of the cultural roots of the Soweto uprising. The study explored the reading lives of a group of students who attended the older, better, high schools in Soweto, who may thus be viewed as something of an "elite". This raises the question of whether the conclusions of my research can be extended to a broader body of student protestors. The thesis looked at the culture in these schools in the lead up to 1976, broadly conceived. Students attending schools such as MIHS and Orlando High School in the late 1960s and early 1970s had grown up under high apartheid and had, to a large extent, experiences of forced removals and other traumatic encounters with the state either directly or through their families. They attended schools where several teachers found ways to quietly subvert the curriculum, inserting political lessons where they could. Schools also provided platforms for adults to speak to them about the political situation in the country. Finally, the growth of student groups – including debating societies - provided space for discussions among the students, but also for reading and exchanging texts that would stimulate their minds to begin to think about the political situation in South Africa at the time.

²⁸⁶ Peterson, "Culture, Resistance and Representation," 170.

²⁸⁷ John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 73.

²⁸⁸ Peterson, "Culture, Resistance and Representation," 174–76.

²⁸⁹ Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture," *Transition*, no. 45 (1974): 45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935020>.

In looking at the reading practices of these students, I found some interesting insights about literature read by black youth in Soweto in the 1970s. Politically active high school students read popular fiction such as crime fiction written by James Hadley Chase voraciously before moving onto what Black Consciousness considered “politically relevant” literature such as novels in the *African Writers Series*. They had also developed a counter-hegemonic interpretive strategies which enabled them to read even assigned texts in school subversively, from which they gleaned messages that apartheid ideologues would not have imagined. Reading newspapers was common in South African townships reflecting a continuity of black urban modernity, and black children encountered these texts in the home as well as at school. Newspapers were the main source of news well into the 1970s and perhaps even played a larger role than explicitly subversive literature in conscientizing youth.

While Bantu Education was generally underfunded, this study has found evidence of moments of real learning and inspiration particularly under creative and dedicated teachers. Several scholars have pointed out how the very institutions, the ethnically segregated “bush colleges,” that were meant to limit the prospects of black youth growing up in South Africa in the 1970s became incubators of the ideas that would initiate the death of apartheid.²⁹⁰ Graduates and activists of the Universities of the North, Zululand, among others, entered schools as teachers. Under the influence of these South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) affiliated teachers, the high school student organization South African Students’ Movement (SASM) transformed itself into a more radical and black consciousness aligned group. I argue in this research report that students were heavily influenced by Black Consciousness in the change in their reading practices and interpretive modes. They began to demand more relevant literature, literature that spoke to their condition as an oppressed class of people in South Africa and linked them to the broader black diaspora and pan-African cultural landscape, which they began to feel part of.

Finally, using Lefebvrian theories of the social production of space, the research report examined the libraries and community centres that supported reading habits in Soweto in the 1970s and found that these spaces were appropriated by their users. It also touched on the “*samizdat*” in more detail and how librarians and booksellers contributed to the production of alternative literary circuit. Students appropriated state-supported youth clubs, which met at community halls, to further their political interests. Seth Mazibuko, who was one of the leaders

²⁹⁰ See Macqueen, *Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements*, 14–17; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*; Anne Heffernan, *Limpopo’s Legacy: Student Politics & Democracy in South Africa*, 2019.

of the march on 16 June 1976, first came into contact with SASM's members and ideas while attending a youth club meeting at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC).²⁹¹ These new political connections used existing networks of book exchange and discussion to begin to circulate banned and subversive texts and, by 1976, students secretly read books like the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (covered in brown paper), speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and copies of magazines printed by the liberation movements in exile.

The research participants I talked to were unequivocal about the positive impact of the youth clubs and public libraries provided by the state on their growth as adolescents, some even suggested that the decline of such facilities in the townships at the end of apartheid has had harmful effects on the youth of today. Glaser notes the continuous friction between the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) and the Nationalist government in their policies towards urban black people.²⁹² While the JCC took the recommendations of advisory boards (which consisted of prominent members of the township community) seriously and attempted some measure of reform alongside recommendations from liberal institutions such as the South African Institute of Race Relations, the central government's policies during high apartheid were to, in the words of William Carr, who led JCC Non-European Affairs Department, "make urban life insufferable" for black residents of townships.²⁹³ That an element of modern city planning remained even during high apartheid allowed youth to have spaces where they could meet peers, express their creativity and grow into, as one informant put it, "a better person and responsible citizen." This study has, in a small way, contributed to showing that apartheid was not totally hegemonic even during the so-called "high" apartheid years, partly due to the efforts of black people who interfaced with different branches of government and also due to relatively liberal tendencies within some parts of government.

The high school students of Soweto 1976 were cultural innovators who broke from the strictures imposed by the apartheid education to call for radical change in the education system. I have argued that the institutions that were meant to repress black South Africans were riddled with contradictions. It is these contradictions that high school students and adults from the community who worked in them exploited to create a cadre of critical youth. The apartheid context that students grew up in forced them to develop counter-hegemonic interpretive modes that subverted the intended messages that cultural institutions sought to impose. While the school context was important, so was the local cultural context. Heavily infused with Black

²⁹¹ Mazibuko, Soweto Interviews.

²⁹² Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 100.

²⁹³ quoted in Glaser, 100.

Consciousness, high school students in late 1960s and early 1970s Soweto grew up with the mentality of finding the beauty in black which, in a sense, helped them transcend their surroundings and imagine better circumstances for themselves and for the country. I have also argued that radical and subversive literature, though a significant presence among politically conscious youth in Soweto in the years before the Soweto uprising wasn't a necessary condition for their politicization. The roots of cultural resistance lay in many places, including in their everyday lives.

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