

Article

‘I Read What I Like’: politics of reading and reading politics in apartheid South Africa*

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Abstract

This article discusses the alternative reading practices that occurred in the shadow of censorship during the apartheid period in South Africa. Following a brief overview of the censorship apparatus’ institutionalisation process, the focus of this article turns to readers and the alternative reading networks and sites of book distribution of banned or likely to be banned publications that emerged despite censorship. By linking these reading practices to the broader political landscape, this article will examine the role played by readers as agents of social change, drawing parallels between their reading protocols and political activism. Building on the field of book history, albeit modestly, this research reflects on the value of literature as a medium for social change, or in the words of Robert Darnton, investigate ‘the world behind books’ (1982: ix).

Introduction

Amilcar Cabral observed that it is ‘generally within the culture that we find the seeds of opposition, which lead to the structuring and development of the liberation movement’ (1994: 56). Although literature was one of the many cultural factors informing resistance against apartheid, it undoubtedly played a substantial role in raising awareness, mobilising and consolidating political activism through the ways in which publications articulated progressive readers’ broader socio-political roles.

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The South African apartheid regime devised an intricate censorship system as a tool to combat dissident voices. As Peter McDonald (2009) points out, censors became self-proclaimed guardians of the literary, and censorship took the shape of a literary institution controlling the context and the manner in which books were written, published, distributed, and read. In the face of this cultural and ultimately political oppression, a strong alternative literary-cultural sphere emerged, mainly led by anti-apartheid writers, alternative publishers and media and, as advocated in this article, progressive readers. Through their active role in shaping an alternative discourse, these readers contributed not only to the alternative literary sphere per se, but also to the development of reading practices attuned to creating a new social order. In a context where the poetic function of a text is complemented with a political function, 'the reader is constructed primarily as a locus of political intervention and change' (Sandwith 2013: 1).

This article focuses on the reading practices, tactics, habits and strategies performed by such readers during the apartheid period, from its institutionalisation in 1948 to the early 1990s. After providing an overview of the institutionalisation of the censorship apparatus, this article will discuss the creation of alternative reading circuits, sites of book distribution and reading within this specific historical period. It will examine the reading communities, reading practices and aesthetic protocols that emerged during censorship and how these became attached to ideas about a changing social order. Based on interviews with readers and several accounts of readers from secondary sources,¹ the social context in which banned publications were read will be examined, reflecting on the value of literature as a medium for social change and, as book historian Robert Darnton terms it, investigate 'the world behind books' (1982: ix). Finally, the reading networks developed and supported by alternative readers will be discussed, as well as the ways in which these readers were, beyond being readers through the role they played in the life cycle of books, political activists through their usage of banned publications in the anti-apartheid ranks.

The readership that evolved around banned political literature in particular, while being heterogeneous and diverse, was centred on a common interest in oppositional politics. In the South African context, several reading communities coexisted, including those readers who supported and those who opposed existing censorship laws. Progressive readers, active in the broader socio-political space, could be defined as 'utilitarian readers', as they subverted the literary function of texts and used reading for socio-

political advancement whereby ‘the book may be read in order to acquire culture, not primarily to enjoy reading’ (Escarpit 1971: 90).

While censorship in South Africa controlled the possession and circulation of a vast range of publications, ranging from pornography to poetry and political philosophy, this article will limit its scope to fictional and non-fictional literature of a socio-political nature. In this context, literature is understood in its broadest sense to include printed works of fiction such as novels and poetry, and non-fiction such as newsletters, magazines, autobiographies, political essays, encyclopaedia, alternative media and academic works, amongst others. For the purpose of this article, literature as a concept and object of study is extended to include an ‘activity, the construal of meaning within a system of communication, rather than a canon of texts’ (Darnton 2002: 21), and the term ‘book’ is used liberally and in its most generic sense.

Overview of censorship in South Africa

The censorship apparatus in South Africa underwent numerous changes, changes which were informed both by the various ideological positions adopted by successive boards and chief censors and by prevailing socio-political circumstances and legislation. As McDonald (2009) and Margreet de Lange (1997) note, the implementation of censorship varied in form and through time. Thus while literary considerations were dominant in the 1960s, these gave way to a more politicised reading of submitted publications in the 1970s before returning to a more literary and relatively more politically tolerant approach – at least on the surface – in the 1980s. These changes were personified in the chief censors themselves, amongst who were Gerrit Dekker, reflecting a more literary approach, JJ Kruger and Abraham Coetzee, who were more politically inclined and the reformist JCW van Rooyen.

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

When the National Party (NP) came into power in 1948, it found substantial components of publications control in place that would subsequently be developed over the years into a complex censorship machinery, gaining momentum from the mid-1950s until well into the 1980s (Thompson 2000: 193). Yet, it added considerably to this arsenal. One of the pieces of legislation that affected the availability and circulation of publications in a significant way was the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, initially passed to outlaw the Communist Party of South African (CPSA), and which gave the State power to ban anyone or any organisation suspected of promoting communism. The notion of communism and communist was itself loosely defined and arbitrarily applied to eliminate dissent. Individuals deemed communists were banned, and so were all their previous and current works.

The Press Commission was set up in 1950, following NP Member of Parliament AJR van Rhyn's suggestion in 1948 that printed media be brought under control. He called for a probe into the alleged 'sensationalism', 'misrepresentation', 'subversive' and 'misleading' nature of reports in South Africa and its effect on the reputation of the country abroad, and on race relations within South Africa (Hachten and Giffard 1984: 52). The newly elected National Party government felt a great deal of animosity towards the English press, as it was openly critical of its new policies and contributed in exposing the situation and in generating criticism from the international community. The main objectives of the Commission included an investigation into the possibilities of increased state control over internal and external media reporting; monopolistic propensities; and the work of foreign correspondents in South Africa (Merrett 1994: 36, Hachten and Giffard 1984: 54). In McDonald's words, the Press Commission's objective was to 'reign in the dominant White-owned liberal English language newspaper' (2009: 22). With the control of the press and the institutionalised communist witch hunt, publications control in general gained momentum.

The Commission did not table a report before the 1960s, although the psychological effects of being consistently under observation and subjected to intimidation for nearly a decade took its toll on the press (Merrett 1994: 37). Between 1950 and 1955, the Press Commission proceeded to undertake a thorough surveillance and recorded the activities of the written media: press releases, posted reports, and clippings were assessed, and dossiers on journalists and editors were compiled (Merrett 1994: 36). This constant surveillance of journalists often led to self-censorship (Hachten and Giffard

1984: 58). Also during this period, several foreign correspondents were deported from South Africa, notably British correspondents Basil Davidson, John Hacht and Doris Lessing (Merrett 1994: 37).

Running parallel to the Inquiry into the Press, which primarily targeted the media, the Commission of Inquiry in Regards to Undesirable Publications was launched in 1954 and targeted publications in general. It was led by Geoffrey Cronjé, a professor of sociology and influential apartheid ideologue who wrote several books, and who had a keen interest in classical literature (Coetzee 1996: 166). Its aim was to investigate the production, possession and circulation of imported and local publications in South Africa. McDonald explains that the Commission was tasked with conducting a policy review: ‘the main aim ... was to use the powers of the state to seize control of the public sphere at a time when extra-parliamentary protest against the emergent apartheid order was still open and strong’ (2009: 22). Findings were published in September 1957 in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Undesirable Publications, after being tabled for the first time in October 1956. Referred to as the Cronjé Commission, the report contained several recommendations that turned out to have a critical impact on the development of subsequent censorship laws from the 1960s onwards.

The Commission’s recommendations eventually led to the seminal Publications and Entertainments Act No. 26 of 1963, which officially institutionalised publications control for the decades that followed and extended powers over imported and locally published publications. McDonald points out that the aim of the Cronjé Commission was ‘to make recommendations into the most effective ways of combating ... the evil of indecent, offensive or harmful literature’ (2009: 23). This highly suggestive labelling of literature as being ‘indecent’, ‘offensive’ or ‘harmful’ laid the foundation of the rhetoric typical of apartheid censors’ discourse. These notions underpinned the concept of undesirability, which would inform literary considerations performed by censors to justify censorship in the subsequent decades. Several notions of readers emerged from these concepts, as the ‘evil of indecent offensive or harmful literature’ could manifest itself in various ways through its readers. These would form the basis of some of the main ideas of the reader that would more or less consistently inform the censors’ arguments revolving around issues of readers and readership throughout apartheid.

The Publications and Entertainments Act was adopted in Parliament in March 1963, under Hendrik Verwoerd’s leadership. Through this Act,

publications control became stricter and tighter. It is estimated that by 1963, 12,629 publications had already been taken out of circulation in South Africa, mainly through the Suppression of Communism Act, the General Law Amendment Act, and the Customs Act (de Lange 1997: 7). Literature by black authors was often caught in a web of legislations long before it even entered this new institutionalised publications control system.

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

In May 1973, deputy Minister of Interior JT Kruger launched the Kruger Commission, which advocated a complete rework of the censorship system, focusing on countering the so-called international communist influence on South African morals, and using, as McDonald points out, an anti-liberal and anti-literary rhetoric (2009: 58). The emphasis on a political rather than a literary approach had the effect, obviously deliberate, of diminishing the influence and powers of those board members who possessed literary expertise. Despite opposition from PEN SA and the Afrikaans Writers' Circle who, amongst others, pleaded for a more literary approach, the recommendations of the Kruger Commission were turned into law through the Publications Act 42 adopted by Parliament in October 1974.

Later in 1974, a Directorate of Publications based in Cape Town, then headed by JL Pretorius, replaced the Publications Control Board. The Minister of the Interior had powers to appoint the members of this Directorate. Other new structures included the countrywide censorship readers committees, which included a few coloured and Indian – but no African – readers appointed by the Directorate of Publications (Hachten and Giffard

1984: 162). However, censorship was still being controlled by whites, who represented 95 per cent of all committee members in 1975 (McDonald 2009: 62).

The right to appeal to independent judiciary courts was replaced by an internal Appeal Board based in Pretoria, an idea initially proposed in the Cronjé report. The Publications Appeal Board (PAB) was composed of 14 members appointed by the State President. JH Snyman was appointed as chair of the new PAB. The Directorate required that the list of banned titles and the rationale behind these bans be gazetted (2009:60). Another novelty, the new Act made provisions for outlawing possession of banned books, as per Section 9(3).

The division between politics and literature was entrenched through the creation of distinct literary and security committees, who sometimes worked in collaboration to achieve decisions. As McDonald observes, pieces by Black Consciousness members that entered the censorship system were for the most part submitted by police officers, and read by security censors, systematically overlooking any literary value whatsoever (2009: 64-65).

As a dynamic institution, censorship fluctuated over the years. From a situation where the mere appearance of the word ‘communism’ could warrant a ban, as per the Suppression of Communism Act 44 of 1950 applied by the Ministry of Interior, the censorship discourse refined itself with the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 25 of 1963. The Act of 1963 provided a space for literary considerations to be articulated against the backdrop of a developing hegemonic apartheid ideology imposed in the social sphere in general and on the literary field in particular. While aiming at protecting the interests of those closer to the centres of power, the Act of 1963 was eventually put to the test when dissensions on its fundamental principles emerged, leading to a reform of the system with the stricter Publications Act No. 42 of 1974.

Adopting a more direct political approach, the Act of 1974 extracted the censors’ literary considerations to the profit of an increasingly political reading of publication submitted, which once again led to major divisions within the Afrikaans intelligentsia’s ranks. In a bid to appease protests from within, the Publications Amendment Act 109 of 1978 proposed a reformist approach advocating the evaluation of the undesirability of a publication in light of its likely readership, thus reintroducing a certain measure of literary reflection to the censorship discourse. Although these amendments were passed in 1978, they initially mainly served white writers, and were fully

implemented in the 1980s.

Various literary notions and conceptions of readers emerged throughout the fluctuating history of censorship in South Africa, ranging from the ‘subversive reader’ to the ‘literary reader’ to the ‘likely reader’ figure. The notion of likely reader, which turned out to have significant influence on the way publications were evaluated by censors, was first introduced in the Publications and Entertainments Act No. 25 of 1963. It was discarded and replaced with the figure of the ‘average man’ in the Publications Act 42 of 1974, and later reintroduced and refined with the Publications Amendment Act 109 of 1978. Needless to say, these notions of ‘likely reader’ and ‘average man’ were defined vaguely and were open to suggestive interpretations.² The impact of a publication under scrutiny was judged in relation to its likely readership, which was determined by censors who based their decisions on factors such as authorship, linguistic sophistication, price, themes addressed, and so on. In a nutshell, the more limited and educated a likely readership, the lesser the chances of a publication being banned.

Sourcing, storage and dissemination of banned publications

Official post-publication censorship in South Africa ensured that South African publications – books, magazines, journals, etc – were most likely disseminated before censors pounced. A publication could remain on someone’s bookshelf for some time before it was declared illegal, although publications by authors likely to be deemed subversive by authorities were often dealt with a similar sense of urgency as were banned ones. As far as imported books went, some were blocked at customs whilst others found their way to South Africa before they were identified by the authorities, or simply slipped through the censorship nets. While librarians and booksellers generally knew whether the books on their shelves were banned or not, the complex nature of the censorship system made it quite challenging for readers to be fully cognisant of the status of publications in their possession.

The *Government Gazette* published in Cape Town was the official government newsletter. It listed items found undesirable in South Africa on a weekly basis, and included both imported and local publications. Librarians consulted these gazettes in order to remove banned books from their library’s shelves before storing them in the banned book room (Jewel Koopman. Correspondence with author. May 22, 2007). The *Jacobsen’s Index of Objectionable Literature* was in some ways an informal privately

edited version of the *Government Gazette*'s listings. The *Jacobsen Index*, compiled by Jacobsen Publishing, was an updated guide throughout the ever-changing directory of publications prohibited from importation, and was available for consultation from bookstores and libraries across South Africa (Hachten and Giffard 1984: 165). The list was updated weekly with loose pages adding the newly found undesirable publications to the previous list. It concentrated mainly on written texts, although this list also enumerated various objects ranging from novelties and calendars to political tracts. Ironically, some progressive readers performed an unauthorised reading of these listings and used them as sources of information on potential reading material to be on the lookout for. Lindy Wilson, for instance, notes that the gazette became a marketing tool, and was 'the main source of information about relevant books ... that became required reading' (1991: 29).

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

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

We started sharing libraries, sharing books and also going to all these bookshops which had all these expensive books which we needed and, you know, finding a way to appropriate them. We started really

widening our vistas and our minds by reading books which the regime never possibly thought we'd lay our hands on, anything from the African Writers Series to, well, we read Marcuse, we read the existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre. There was Mphahlele and maybe some hidden copies by Alex La Guma, Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane. We read all that. (Wilson 1991: 29)

Interestingly, some informal book traders operated in black townships in Johannesburg, reaching readers where formal bookshops were not established (Chris van Wyk. Personal Interview. October 12, 2007). As Chris van Wyk recalls, these vendors would stock pamphlets, literary journals and books from Ravan's offices amongst others. Because publications were sourced directly from the publisher, in this case Ravan, the publications sold were not necessarily banned yet as censorship operated post-publication; however, some of the titles sold were at high risk of being banned if they ended up under the censors' scrutiny, as was commonplace with oppositional publishers' outputs. Chris van Wyk recalls how community writers worked closely with the publishing house, as they contributed to literary magazines such as *Staffrider* and Ravan's book lists – not only by writing but also by making copies of these publications available to readers in areas where other publications were not readily available, such as in Soweto:

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

A relation of trust and connivance grew amongst the various actors involved in the alternative literary circuit, as writers, readers, publishers and book traders worked in close collaboration to get these books read and shared by the largest number possible, even if at times they never physically met. As a writer and editor for Ravan and *Staffrider*, Chris van Wyk had privileged access to some publications that were published and subsequently

banned. He recalls how these publications often ended up being shared with other readers, giving a new life to otherwise doomed books:

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

The hand to hand network of distribution amongst readers was in itself a mode of sourcing banned texts for readers who otherwise had no direct contact with alternative publishers or access to independent bookshops and banned sections of libraries. Banned publications were regularly shared amongst readers, either in the interests of disseminating them to the greatest number of readers possible, underlying the need of spreading an important message, or out of fear of keeping them in one's possession for too long as they were illegal. This created a situation where books transited from one reader to another on a fairly regular basis and at a swift pace. Chris van Wyk recalls how readers casually swapped books amongst themselves, opening the door for a wider readership to forge itself in their path:

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

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

A copy of a book could also be shared amongst several readers simultaneously, through the practice of photocopying and disseminating a single copy. All interviewees unanimously recall photocopying from a banned publication. Amongst others, Brutus recalls that sometimes

photocopying happened for very practical reasons such as monetary constraints, and that it was also dictated by the ambient repressive intellectual climate inflicted by censorship:

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

South African Students Organisation (SASO) activist Papi Mokoena recalls how books were thus disseminated even in the most unexpected places, through a series of everyday exchanges taking place in the informal literary space. Mokoena speaks of a 'mobile library' in the Orange Free State (now Free State) through which books would constantly circulate amongst a network of readers: 'we even had a mobile library – books which moved from hand to hand amongst selected people' (quoted in Merrett 1994: 96). Brutus recalls how books were shared randomly and not in a premeditated fashion:

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

While some readers were on the lookout for banned books, others came across banned literature through mere chance. Brutus comments on how he first got hold of Alex La Guma's novels in the early days of the apartheid regime by chance and through word of mouth:

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

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

act of reading, whether the book was procured accidentally or on purpose. Ndebele recalls the thrill and the feeling of privilege felt when reading banned or likely to be banned books from his newly found box:

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

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

Some books and publications, by local, continental or international authors, were endorsed by a political or intellectual opinion-maker, who would recommend, praise, and encourage other readers to read it. This informal publicity expanded the existing readership beyond initial expectations. The implicit authority of an opinion-maker was sometimes decisive in constructing the reputation of a specific publication. Public figures, such as Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko, played an opinion-maker's role by virtue of their natural leadership abilities through their public speeches and essays. Biko's charisma was renowned beyond academic circles and university precincts, and some Black Consciousness literature rapidly reached a wider and more 'popular' audience, either in its written or oral form. Social analysis derived from readings filtered through a wider common readership, composed of community activists and students, amongst

others.

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

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

Word of mouth undoubtedly played a role in terms of dissemination of banned or likely to be banned publication's messages and ideas. Some publications were discussed and debated, entering oral networks and thus given a new life form. From the written form, books' messages entered the oral circuit to join a greater and more inclusive pool of readers of various literacy levels. By bringing a book's message forward, readers not only extended the scope of dissemination, but also extended its readership by creating an audience that would coexist side by side with the readers who read the books themselves, once again blurring the traditional oral versus written, elite versus common readers, literate versus semi-literate dichotomies. The combination of oral and written cultures constituted an alternative way of reading that could be called 'oral reading' (Lyons and Taksa 1992: 35). These social networks ensured the diffusion of a printed message in various forms and to an otherwise marginalised readership. As Lyons and Taksa point out, 'book historians should not ... measure a book's popularity solely by its circulation figures. Oral testimony may suggest the true extent of distribution and open a way into the "unknown public"' (1992: 190).

The example of *Work in Progress* illustrates to a certain extent this aspect of circulation and dissemination of banned texts in South Africa. Students at the University of the Witwatersrand founded *Work in Progress* in 1977, with the objective of disseminating unavailable papers in the academic space and beyond. The periodical was a small-scale publication venture, aiming to foster an intellectual climate conducive for debates on a wide range of socio-political issues. Essays and articles discussing the latest global and local theories and intellectual trends were thus made available to alternative South African reading communities. *WIP* often ran into trouble with the censorship board, as is recalled by co-founder and editor Glenn Moss in a special edition marking the tenth anniversary of the

magazine:

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

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

Reading modalities in the alternative circuit

In this hostile censorship climate, reading a banned publication could be a secret experience. Banned books could for instance be read when everybody in the household was asleep, then hidden away and picked up again when an opportune moment presented itself. Chris van Wyk recalls the sense of adventure and mischief felt when reading a book by an author judged subversive by authorities:³

I used to read it [*Down Second Avenue*] in my room and hide it under the mattress or in a cupboard somewhere away from other books, even though I was not somebody that police would focus their energies on then. (Personal Interview. October 12, 2007)

Readers active in the alternative circuit would often meet to discuss their readings and in the process encounter new ideas and potential reading material, activating meanings and processing subversive ideas, theories and ideologies with like-minded fellow readers. These groups played a role in both alternative politics and alternative literature and were labelled under different appellations by readers themselves, amongst others 'study groups' (Brutus 2007), 'discussion groups' (Brutus 2007, Dick 2007), 'working groups' (Wilson 1991) and 'debating societies' (Newell 2002).

Through these groups and texts read, readers created a space where their opinions could be articulated and find currency and legitimacy. As Belinda Bozzoli points out, such a subculture found the space to be created as a result of the sequestration and isolation imposed by apartheid on South Africans in general and on black urban township dwellers in particular (2004: 329). The climate of isolation typical of the apartheid era and of

ensorship, Bozzoli notes, allowed these secretive sub-cultural spaces to protect and nurture the inflow of illegal ideas, contributing to the development of a locally brewed consciousness, political culture and spirit of protest (2004: 329). In an argument alluding to Alexandra township in Johannesburg but applicable on a national scale, she further proposes that:

The illicit ideas flowing into the country and the township were able to take hold on the society within mainly through the actions, ideological creativity, legitimacy and particular characteristics of the internal radical intelligentsia. Radical thinkers of varying degrees of sophistication existed within a variety of strata of township society – ranging from the semi-literate leaders of the comrades, through much more educated adult thinkers, to the key nationalist intellectuals of the time. (2004: 332)

From Bozzoli's observations, one can note the range of individuals involved in resistance politics, and the extent to which censorship might have inadvertently fuelled resistance within the opposition ranks. Bozzoli discusses how readers engaged with illegal texts and ideas, and how these in turn served as catalysts for local activism. Through her concept of 'translation' of the illicit into the legal performed by thinkers and intellectuals, in other words, by the highly literate readers, illegal literature was processed and adapted to suit the readers' immediate environment, and to suit the readers' own individual circumstances:

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

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

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

Bozzoli exemplifies the translation concept by alluding to the ways in which African-American literature influenced Black Consciousness intellectuals in the development of a uniquely South African ideology, propagated through literature and discourses. Whilst inspired by highly intellectual concepts, the Black Consciousness movement aimed at reaching an audience at a grassroots level, to inspire the 'reawakening of black people in South Africa' (Mothlabi 1984: 111). In its mission of integrating voices marginalised and silenced by the apartheid system, from the intellectuals to the grassroots readers, a literary trend inspired by Black Consciousness challenged the perceptions of poetry and literature as being elitist and exclusively for highly literate readers, while recognising the evocative power and reach of oral literature (Mzamane 1991: 189). Jeremy Cronin points out that poetry and mass struggle were thus closely linked, with oral poetry being included in students and workers demonstrations (quoted in Mzamane 1991: 189).

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

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

ideal' (2007: 11-16). Chapman further explains the stylistic characteristics of this poetry and its impact on readers as a mobilising factor around BC principles:

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

Nadine Gordimer discusses how this 'new black poetry' came into being as a shift from prose, which had been vulnerable to censorship and played its part in the great gap in South African literature:

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

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

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

Archie Dick notes this interaction between politics and literature, citing amongst others, the radical group called the Fifteen Group, which used libraries for political debates and discussions (2007: 17). He also refers to some resource centres, which were established in black townships to complement poorly stocked libraries or to replace destroyed libraries, as incubators of political resistance through the usage of illegal ideas and banned material. While these resource centres served as documentary centres contributing to the development of the political consciousness of activists, 'some activist groups also used municipal libraries in townships

to plan protests, debate political strategy and exchange banned material' (2007: 20). These 'reading tactics', as Dick words it, spoke of the 'art of the weak using the space of the powerful in inventive and resourceful ways' (2013: 5).

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

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

Subversive literature and banned ideas often led to larger debates focusing on the South African status quo. For instance, Brutus recalls a community hall in the 1950s, which also served as a cultural centre in Port Elizabeth, where he would coordinate cultural evenings showcasing various events that invariably integrated literary and political discussions:

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

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

We had a regular study group that met maybe once a month, and consisted mainly of activists and possibly their wives.... The stuff we

read were not so much standard classical political texts – I think one of the books we discussed the most during our surveillance, and we were very careful, very tense and had a lot of debates about it, was a contemporary novel, whether it was William Green or even something very light like Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* which discussed the South in the United States, and slavery and so on. (Personal Interview. May 25, 2007)

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

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

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

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

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

We used to have parties on weekends at which we drank beer and sat around in the smoke-filled room of one of the members of the group, talking politics, listening to Malcom X’s speeches on tape, as well as those of Martin Luther King, discussing banned books which were

secretly circulated amongst friends, sharing jokes, and also singing and dancing. (1995: 58)

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

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

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

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

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

Readers as creators of an alternative social order

The question as to whether censorship hindered the development of an alternative movement or, on the contrary, provided leverage for the radicalisation of resistance involves a discussion of what readers did with what they read. However, within the scope of this article, one can only point towards clues and hints of how banned reading was in fact used, albeit not necessarily on a large scale, to enhance a dynamic of resistance and to

provide leverage for an anti-apartheid discourse to emerge and be disseminated, as discussed above.

Robert Escarpit suggests that public readings are a means of distributing texts. In this sense, they become a mode of publication as they promote the ideas contained in a text to a new pool of readers (1971: 48). In the case of public readings such as those revolving around Soweto poetry, the new readership thus reached was an alternative counter-public, to borrow Michael Warner's terminology (2002). Texts fuelled arguments that entered debates and discussions, by the same token actualising the meanings created out of these texts and generating more literature. Readings were dissected to re-engage with daily life, and this public literary platform allowed readers to interact and discuss books in an otherwise repressive society, where their views were not accommodated in the official public domain. As Dick Cloete points out, this trend of expressing political positions through poetry was also a way to circumvent censorship: 'oral poetry was an ideal medium as it could not be banned and required minimum resources' (2000: 47). McDonald echoes this when noting that unpublished revolutionary poetry disseminated in manuscript form from hand to hand and through public performances was a way of bypassing censorship and white paternalism prevailing in the literary industry at the time (2009: 133).

Politically engaged readers used banned publications – novels, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and newsletters, etc – as an expression of a shared ideology, in a kind of pleasure of recognition (Fiske 1987). This usage transferred books from their purely literary aspect and physicality to enter the domain of ideology and practicality, as it created a platform for alternative thinking to be nurtured and disseminated. The ways in which books were used as focal points in poetry readings and political meetings, amongst others, speak of a translation of ideas into political activism. Banned books were not merely entering the literary circuit as commodities in the traditional sense, but rather existing in a parallel and customised network of production, distribution and consumption. In a context of censorship, the importance of readers in the lifecycle of banned books cannot be underestimated. Readers 'socialise the work' (Escarpit 1971: 19), and it is through them that the text has meaning (Chartier 2002: 134). South African readers of political publications socialised these works by integrating them in the public sphere through oral networks and by discussing them.

Alternative literary platforms became spaces for the articulation of

personal experiences, and to showcase alternative discourses. In this sense, in opposition to the censor's discourse, a 'counter discourse' emerged (Warner 2002a). The relation between the alternative reading public and the discourses they internalised, analysed, shared and produced operated both ways. When rejecting the dominating discourse, readers made their own voices heard explicitly and implicitly. This readership was an audience ready to absorb, filter, and localise alternative discourses thus produced, participating in the edification of an alternative culture within a uniquely South African context. This internal organisation, characteristic of any kind of public, is described by Warner as 'the self-organisation of the public as a body of strangers united through the circulation of their discourse' (2002a: 59).

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

Publications, whether books, magazines, journals, poetry, essays, and so on, had a socio-political purpose, in addition to their literary character. Reading banned texts was an integral cultural and political experience linking the reader to his milieu, to his environment and to the broader socio-political context. Roger Chartier (2002) refers to this process as 'actualization', where the meaning is performed and interpreted by readers to suit their reality. South African readers undoubtedly read foreign literature, banned and not banned, and their comprehension was developed from a South African viewpoint, and the ensuing discussions articulated this integration of foreign theories into local realities.

Through their usage of texts, readers became social agents, and books conversely became agents of change through the uses readers made of them, creating sub-cultural spaces. Utilitarian readers, to borrow on Escarpit's

expression (1971: 90), extract from their reading what befits their reality. This practice is reminiscent of Michel de Certeau's notion of 'poaching' (1984). The notion of 'poaching', underpinned by concepts of reader's agency and resistance, implies that reading is the moment where, as Chartier describes it, the world of the reader meets that of the text (1989). In other words, reading could be understood as the point where the socialised individual meets the socially construed text in a particular social context. However, texts are not devoid of external connotations and values. In the case of South Africa, censors were often the 'supreme' readers of texts, or de Certeau's 'manipulative elite reader' (Chartier 1989), as they had the final word over the official status of books, and thus channelled readers towards a set of pre-determined and authorised meanings and canon of authorised texts. Through their literary experiences, readers created a situation where the 'cultural liberation [became] inseparable from political liberation' (Chapman 2003: 328).

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

The act of reading in this context could be perceived as being closely linked to socio-political issues. De Certeau emphasises this relation, explaining: 'the creativity of the reader grows as the institution that controlled it declines' (1984: 172). This ability to circumvent the censors' imposed reading is precisely where the power of readers in a context such as apartheid South Africa lay, where censorship was synonymous with a hegemonic political power and control. The plurality of possibilities contained in texts opened a space for a plurality of interpretations and practices, as de Certeau explains: 'by its very nature available to a plural reading, the text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve, the pretext for a law that legitimises as 'literal' the interpretation given by socially authorised professionals and intellectuals' (1984: 157).

Gradually, the exchange of ideas occurring in the literary space links up to the broader socio-political space. As Dick has it, 'the history of reading

can tell us about the history of ideas that shaped historical events in South Africa' (2006: 4). As Njabulo Ndebele emphasises, the struggle involves people, not abstraction (1991). By internalising and socialising meanings from texts, readers placed books as factors of social and political change in South Africa.

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

By simultaneously being at the receiving end and being a driving force behind alternative literature, the counter public that was shaped through banned literature participated in creating another canon of 'national literature', as understood by Fanon as the literature that does not merely react, criticise or denounce the oppressors, but rather as a literature whereby the 'writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people' (1994: 47). Although much has been said about the protest and reactionary character of some alternative South African works of that period, some authors, through novels, plays, poetry, essays, etc, did not give censorious readers precedence over alternative readers as their intended readers, and as such defied the power relations existing between readers, authors and censors, and as mediated by mainstream publishers.

Conclusion

Readers of banned material were involved at different stages in the country's socio-political affairs. It was a relatively restricted readership. In addition

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

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

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

Considerable activities occurred at the readers' stage of the circuit, as readers had to be creative and polyvalent in their approach in order to obtain the prohibited reading material. Readers were themselves active distributors as they exchanged publications, and also took on the role of 'printers' when photocopying reading material because of restrictions in terms of accessibility and availability. As banned publications were circulated by readers, either as photocopies, texts or extracts, their passage towards the next phases of the life cycle of books was facilitated. Traditional roles were

therefore blurred and altered, due to the external systems impacting on the literary industry. Some readers took on an active role in the communication circuit followed by banned books and reading material in general, as readers contributed to their existence at every stage of the circuit, and facilitated their passage between the various phases through their assertive role and strategies.

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

Notes

1. This article focuses on readers involved in the alternative politics/literary sphere. Further details concerning other actors involved in the literary industry under apartheid, ranging from the censors themselves to authors, publishers, librarians, etc can be found in the full version of the author's thesis.
2. For more details and examples of application of this likely reader notion, see Chapter 3 of the author's thesis.
3. For a full account of the censors' lengthy reviews of *Down Second Avenue*, which was ultimately not banned in its novel version but banned in its comic version, see Chapter 6 of the author's thesis.

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