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Censorship is considered in the South

African political context and the relevant

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libraries and the

librarian. Two models derived from this

problem of

situation portray the librarian as victim

and as collaborator. They show that

censorship

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librarians have been unimaginative and

have ignored international standards.

Both universities and the profession have

failed to take significant corporate action

while censorship has tightened under

successive states of emergency. For

human rights librarians, it is concluded,

the only effective way forward is a new

professional body in the democratic

tradition.

BACKGROUND

South Africa is a paradigm of the censored state in which a complex and

overlapping set of statutes and regulations has created massive limitations

on human freedom. The existence of censorship in South Africa is no

accident: as in many other countries it is the tool of those whose political

power depends upon the control of ideas and information. In this

particular case it is an institutionalized pillar of apartheid ideology. The

need for what Kundera describes as lotganized forgetting (1, p. 235) is

explained by one of South Africzfs foremost creative writers: 1N0 social

system in which a tiny minority must govern without consent over a

vast majorityi, argues Nadine Gordimer, I can afford to submit any part of control of communication (2, p. 26). The objectives of censorship in South Africa may therefore be summed up as the reinforcement of the racist basis of apartheid by restrictions on the flow of knowledge and ideas from one community to another; the denial of factual and theoretical tools to an intelligentsia which has a propensity to ridicule and oppose apartheid in a most effective way; and the diminution of the liberatory potential of education.

Censorship is undeniably a government tool. During the 5-year period 1980/1 to 1984/5, 7651 original submissions were made to the Directorate CHRISTOPHER MI'IRRETT is a graduate of Oxford and Shetheld Universities. He has lived in South Africa since 1975 and worked at Natal Society Library and the University of Cape Town. He is currently Deputy University librarian, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and Honorary Secretary, University Teachers' Association of South Africa.

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of Publications and 51.9 per cent of cases ended in bannings. From 1981/2 to 1984/5 90.5 per cent of all original submissions (6539) were made by agents of the state (customs and excise 25.4 per cent, police 58.0 per cent and the directorate itself 7.1 per cent) and only 9.5 per cent by the private sector (publishers 5.6 per cent and the public 3.9 per cent) (3; 4). It is thus not a popular policy; however, it must not be forgotten that 82 per cent of the white South Africans who cast a vote in the General Election of 6 May 1987 did so for parties openly espousing police state methods including censorship (5).

The authorities have a particular and justifiable fear of the printed word. The electronic media are inherently easy to control and inaccessible to millions of black South Africans; and state education, except in a few private multiracial schools, is rigidly formulated. The printed word is cheaply and easily produced, durable and transportable, especially across borders. In short it has innate liberatory characteristics. Both mmizdat (underground) literature (such as Taurus's publication of Andre Brink's A dry white reason and Breyten Breytenbach's True confusion: of an albino terrorist) and tamizdat (exile) literature (such as the African National Congress publication Secbaba) are important components of the literary scene. The status quo is continually challenged by the alternative press# Weekly Mail, Snwetan and New Nation, for example-and publishers with a commitment to democracy. The most prominent are Ravan (which grew out of SPROCAS, the Study Project on Christians in Apartheid Society), whose offices were bombed in March 1987, presumably in response to a policy of publishing work that challenges apartheid ideology and furthers the struggle for a democratic classless society, (6); and Skotaville (which has a Black Consciousness heritage and whose editorial director, Jaki Seroke, is currently detained under the Internal Security Act).

Just as apartheid is a flexible political response to the challenge of mass-based, democratic movements so the tactics of censorship vary with time. Well-known white writers are now hardly affected by censorship: the press as a whole, and the output of progressive and student organizations and of black writers are now the main targets. The process has become more sophisticated and selective, in contrast to the 1960s which were described by Christopher Hope as the doldrum years, when nothing moved, and if it did they tried to ban it, (7). The current policy of the Publications Control Board is that of assessing the likely leader and creating a (science, of censorship: in this fashion the more academic works of radical thinkers are deemed to be harmless to academics and incomprehensible to revolutionaries-a viewpoint, in the opinion of

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Gilbert Marcus of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, which is symptomatic of the total onslaught mentality (8). The banning of Matteta's One time brother is linked to its folder-type format, readily accessible to an impoverished township proletariat (9).

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THE 1-1e AND ITS DEMANDS

The system as a whole presents a formidable challenge to the academic relevance of a South African university. As an institution, censorship comprises a number of legal provisions which operate at different levels. The current (1987/8) State of Emergency is governed by regulations (10) is: a under the Public Safety Act which reinforce the aims and objectives of the National Security Management System (NSMS). Amongst its regulations are draconian press restrictions. Security clauses in legislation dealing with a wide variety of topics ranging from the police to uranium, and catch-all provisions in the Prohibition of Information Act and Laws on Co-operation and Development Act have for a long time restricted the flow of information to that supplied by official spokespersons. This has a wide-reaching effect on libraries, which is being investigated elsewhere (11). Two specific Acts, however, inhibit the use of material already published. (A more detailed account of the provisions of these two Acts is given by de Jager (12).)

The Publications Act of 1974 empowers the Publications Control Board, which is outside the jurisdiction of the courts and whose decisions can only be reversed by its own Appeal Board, to gazette the titles of books banned under sections 47 (2) and 9 (3) (see Appendix A). The First category allows for banning of material under the headings of obscenity, blasphemy, group rights, race relations and state security. Such material

may be possessed but neither circulated nor displayed. Libraries have blanket permits to lend as long as the books are normally held under lock and key, a register of usage is kept, a separate catalogue is available, consultation takes place under supervision in restricted conditions unless on loan to a postgraduate or member of staff, and no copying is allowed. Under section 9, however, titles are designated lpossession prohibitedi and are kept and consulted only with written consent of the directorate for each title and each consultation. Between 1 January and 18 December 1987 587 objects and publications were banned under the Publications Act, 69.3 per cent apparently for political reasons. Fifty emanated from the African National Congress/United Democratic Front and their trade union allies, 46 from other anti-apartheid organizations and 39 from J. Librarianship, 20 (3) July 1988 183

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Namibian liberation organizations. Only 5 were published by extreme right-wing parties. Furthermore, 63 were banned for possession, 71.4 per cent for apparent political reasons (13).

Under the Internal Security Act of 1982 three further categories can be recognized. All the work of banned and listed persons has to be restricted. At present 331 persons are affected: 105 listed as members of the South African Communist Party and Congress of Democrats and the remainder banned as exiles, convicted prisoners or ex-detainees (14). Listed persons remain affected even after their deaths (see Appendix B). Again material may be freely possessed as in the case of ordinary bannings under the Publications Act, but a register of usage must be kept for scrutiny by the security police, undergraduates are denied access and quoting and copying are not permitted. University libraries have thus found themselves in the bizarre position of locking up the theses of their own graduates. The works of banned organizations, or works reflecting their policies, may only be possessed by libraries if permission is granted by the Director of Security Legislation and the same applies to consultation. Under section 5 the minister is further empowered to ban those titles which he feels further the aims of communism: possession and consultation are dependent upon ministerial permission. The Internal Security Act introduces a number of new concepts into the censorship equation: e.g. the aims of the security state; and the idea of statutory communism; in other words, work is deemed arbitrarily by the authorities to be communist and therefore a threat to state security. Taken together the effect of these statutes is to render corporate bodies and individuals nonexistent in a literary sense. About one third of a small university library banned collection fell into possession prohibited, categories although there is confusion arising from the simultaneous banning of material under both Acts. A number of important factors are, however, quite clear. First, the required registers of users are an intimidatory measure bearing in mind that the purpose of a police state is not simply the extraction of information but the sowing of fear and confusion amongst its opponents. Second, a bureaucracy answerable to a particular ideology is able to control the flow of information to and within specific groups. Third, the librarian is required by law to become an agent of the security state.

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THE IMPACT OF CENSORSHIP

In a survey conducted in 1985 among lecturers in the humanities and social sciences at the University of Natal, 50 per cent of respondents 184 J. Librarianship, 20 (3) July 1988

claimed that their research and teaching had been adversely affected by censorship; 43 per cent mentioned limitations on access to factual data, 30 per cent to theoretical concepts, and 27 per cent reported obstacles to the framing of research questions (15). It thus appears that censorship interferes with the link between university researchers and teachers on one hand and the needs of the mass of the people on the other. Socially relevant research is heavily penalized in the social sciences while there is no evidence to show that radical scientific and technological research, which is often heavily funded and supports the status quo, has ever been hindered. Among humanities and social science researchers who need access to published data, and who wish to have their own work published, those who have voluntarily or involuntarily gone into exile are at an advantage.

There is little doubt that research has consequently become affected by privatism: some academics have taken refuge in non-contentious or highly theoretical and esoteric lines of inquiry, although in the 1980s as the progressive movement became more confident so there emerged an emboldening among researchers. However, the censorship system still encourages assumptions about real or imagined bibliographic dead ends which separate the researcher from stimulating material. In scientific discovery there must be freedom to choose not only the method but also the question, as very often the most difficult step is to get an idea of a good question (16, p. 59). In South Africa, Garson notes, there is the temptation simply to cease asking the questions that can only be answered by using the censored material (17, p. 6).

The existence of censorship has given rise to a number of debates within South African academic circles: whether a true university can exist alongside censorship is an important point in the argument. Brink (18) and van den Berghe (19, p. 10) have suggested that a moderately repressive environment and a state of gross socio-economic inequality stimulate

creative work. While this describes the condition of South Africa and may well encourage socially and politically aware literature, it is less convincing where academic research which challenges orthodox assumptions is concerned. The areas particularly badly affected are the theory and philosophy of politics, the history and politics of Africa and especially southern Africa, theology, literature and the sociology of education. The existence of censorship on such a scale has been noted by persons advocating the isolation of South African universities especially in view of the largely ritualized protest indulged in by those institutions.

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THE POSITION OF THE LIBRARIAN

There are two contrasting angles from which to consider the position of librarians. The first model sees the librarian as a victim, compelled by law to act as a state agent. This is a common problem in apartheid society. However, some professions_e.g. doctors, lawyers and teachers_have produced breakaway organizations specifically formed to challenge this role, a development yet to be seen in librarianship. There are also examples of writers challenging the legitimacy of the system: Nadine Gordimer, for instance, refused to appeal against the ban on Burger's daughter forcing the Publications Appeal Board to appeal against the decision of its parent body. The tendency of universities to evade the problem and delegate it under the cover of departmental autonomy to the administrative brief of the university librarian is another reason for a sympathetic view of the librarian in a South African academic community. The debate within universities has largely been that surrounding the treatment of specific titles rather than an assessment of the institution of censorship as a whole.

However, the fact that 69 per cent of respondents in the University of Natal survey reported above put the view that librarians exacerbate an already difficult situation suggests that a second model is also apposite. Some respondents went as far as to describe librarians as intellectual policemen and a fifth column in the universities. An alternative model may, therefore, be based on the concept of the librarian as collaborator. There can be little doubt that a majority of South African librarians are tainted by a tendency to obey the law rather than question its morality or legitimacy; and many sublimate this beneath the apathetic assumption that censorship is another occupational hazard like dust and bookworm. In general there is a collective state of mind which accepts the system and invests it with an aura of peril, a phenomenon not restricted to librarians. Some have called for greater administrative tidiness which would, ironically, inhibit the seekers of legal loopholes; others have pursued the unbanning of specific titles without attacking the basis of the system or questioning its purpose in society; and all who administer the system, even under extreme protest, through the process of formalising in an inevitably bureaucratic atmosphere, extend legitimacy to it.

There is no doubt that the collaboration of librarians is vital to the success of the system: it is difficult to imagine a hard-pressed and often inefficient bureaucracy maintaining the system or the state systematically confiscating library holdings, although under the State of Emergency the 186 J. Librarianship, 20 (3) July 1988

unimaginable has proved possible. There is circumstantial evidence that some librarians have in the past actively assisted the censorship process by interpreting the law in a literal way, surrounding access procedures with bureaucratic obstacles, searching actively for banned material and excluding works which might be banned in future at the book selection stage. It is also possible that active collaboration with the security police has taken place in terms of user surveillance.

If the . . . library is not a place for the dissenting, the heretical, the unorthodox, the critical . . . it is not the right kind of place (20, p. 360). It is clear that a combination of state policy and professional compliance has produced in South Africa libraries which are the wrong sort of place.

There is certainly scope for a more imaginative approach than that generally experienced by borrowers. The law is not monolithic and contains potential for evasion; the petty bureaucratic aspects of the system are virtually unenforceable; and at the very least librarians could embark upon a programme of public and vociferous opposition.

There are a number of long-standing alternative models to enable librarians to identify parameters of human freedom and define a combative response to those who seek to restrict it. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts forward the view that Everyone has the right of freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, (21). This opinion is echoed in South Africa's Freedom Charter: All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands, (22, p. 265). Such ideals have been encapsulated in the policy of the American Library Association which has adopted an uncompromising attitude to censorship (23, p.

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The American Library Association opposes any use of governmental prerogatives which leads to the intimidation of the individual or the citizenry from the exercise of free expression. ALA encourages resistance to such abuse of governmental power and supports those against whom such governmental power has been employed.

These sentiments should form the bedrock of a professional response to censorship in a repressive society such as South Africals.

It would be unrealistic to expect individuals to court a librarianship martyrdom and confront the system alone, but a powerful institutional response might reasonably be expected from universities and the profession as a whole. The universities have presented no real challenge and J. Librarianship, 20 (3) July 1988 187

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have even harboured those who have applied the law harshly. The irony of supporters of censorship laws operating under the umbrella of academic freedom is absolute. Similarly, unquestioning acceptance of limited privileges which are not extended to society as a whole suggests a willingness to support the separation of freedoms, to ignore the plight of the intelligent person in the street and forget the traditional role of universities in confronting the excesses of the state. In contrast, the four Iopenl universities (Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand) have chosen to break the provisions of the Group Areas Act in respect of student residences in recent years.

The position of the professional body, SAILIS (South African Institute of Library and Information Science), and its predecessor, SALA (South African Library Association), is questionable. No leading figure in its hierarchy has made a significant statement about censorship for more than 30 years, since Douglas Varley wrote of the need to Iresist at every turn all attempts to curb the freedom of the individual to think and act for himself, (24). Papers at conferences and in the literature concentrate on non-controversial and apolitical matters in the areas of professional status, management and computerization. In general the crucial area of document delivery, including state interference, has been subordinated to that of the creation and exchange of bibliographic data. At the 1987 SAILIS conference, in the context of growing pressure, internal and external, to boycott the organization, a policy statement was issued. It declared that censorship was in conflict with professional ethics and opposed it lwhere it unnetermri/j curtails the full utilization of recorded information for the benefit of all, (my italics) (25). This still falls far short of international standards and is open to a wide variety of illiberal interpretations; and the institute,s statement makes no mention of any corporate action with regard to censorship except to maintain an amiable relationship with the perpetrators of the system.

From time to time there is a reminder that the professional body might be adopting a position more directly supportive of the ruling ideology. A past president was, for example, reported as saying that lthe information policy of a country must be bound to and form part of its economic, educational, sociological and industry policyl (26). In South Africa that policy is called apartheid: its effect on the mass of South Africans has been widely reported. In a standard textbook on librarianship in South Africa (27) censorship receives one mention in a section on" profes-sional codes: further sections on ethics, morality, duties and obligations in the profession and on free access to information ignore the matter altogether.

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PRESENT AND FUTURE

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State intervention is clearly an important variable in the functioning of all South African libraries. The passing of each year in the past four decades has seen a tightening of the grip of censorship upon South African society and an increasing monopolization of the formal channels of social and political discourse by one ideology. The current State of Emergency has far-reaching implications for South African libraries, even though they appear to be exempt from prosecution for possessing and lending material deemed to be subversive (28). Under the Emergency regulations the Minister of Home Affairs and Communication may ban periodical publications and their continuations, a clear threat to the alternative press. The Emergency regulations are aimed at preventing the gathering and publication of data and opinion embarrassing to the state (29). For example, a collection of pastoral letters from bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) in the Bishops Speak Series could not be published in 1986 as their contents, delivered during the period 1981 to 1986, were now considered by lawyers to be Isubversive, in terms of the Emergency regulations (30).

The Emergency not only affects the day-to-day administration of pre-existing library material as already described but threatens censorship of a more general, all-pervasive nature. For example, regulations aimed at the alternative press simultaneously endanger important library reference sources which in many cases represent the only readily available document-ation on crucial areas of South African life. Similarly, they threaten to devalue the ability of libraries to collect the documented experience of all the people of the nation: there is an increasing tendency for the library,s potential to disseminate the documents of the South African

democratic movement, and thus contribute to dialogue, to be undermined. In general the Emergency is a reminder of the fact that the full potential of censorship at the disposal of the state has yet to be realized, while libraries are already heavily implicated in the censorship/propaganda nexus. The possibility of the Emergency degenerating into full martial law needs anticipatory thought by librarians. An archivist/librarian working with the material of progressive South African organizations for a university collection was detained in June 1986, psychologically maltreated and later deported to Sweden. Her experience highlights the extent to which libraries and librarians are increasingly finding themselves involved in the struggle between forces of repression and extra-parliamentary democracy in South Africa.

It has already been suggested that librarianship as a profession has

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failed to rise to the challenge of combating censorship, which, if it had been accepted, would have given it a well-deserved international credibility and a role within the South African democratic tradition. The reasons for this professional failure may be found in South African society as a whole: the tendency, for example, for members of the middle classes to connive with repression for the sake of personal, short-term benefit; and the brainwashing effect of constant government propaganda which either subverts rational thought or encourages apathy. After decades of authoritarian rule and no sign from the professional body that it opposes, for example, the State of Emergency, it is too much to hope that there will be any radical change in this direction, although there are signs that the universities will take a more decisive line on the issue of government interference in their affairs.

This places in an invidious position the individual librarian who supports international librarianship standards and the exercise of basic human rights by all citizens. It has already been suggested that a victim model may be applied to South African librarians. Many such librarians are playing an important part in the move towards democracy in South Africa: those who work in trade union and progressive organization resource centres, or who are involved in library skills programmes for under-prepared students, spring readily to mind. As individuals these librarians can and have been able to do little about censorship, which requires confronting not only a vast bureaucracy but a powerful and well-established ideology. The problem lies within the existing socio-economic order and its political structures. An individual who responds to the needs of a researcher rather than obeying the law, is in effect confronting the might of the South African state. The only way democratic librarians can hope to do this successfully is to set up an institution which is founded upon the principle of opposition to authoritarian structures and use that to press for more space for human and intellectual rights. This in turn would bring a group of librarians into the mainstream of democratic politics in South Africa and make the profession part of the move towards the establishment of an educational system for all South Africans, geared to the attainment of social, economic and political equity.

APPENDIX A

Publications Act 1974

Section 47 (2): a publication may be deemed to be undesirable if it:

(a) is indecent or obscene, offensive or harmful to public morals;

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(b) is blasphemous or offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the RSA;

(c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the RSA into ridicule or contempt;

(d) is harmful to relations between sections of inhabitants;

(e) is prejudicial to the safety of the state;

(f) discloses certain judicial proceedings.

Such publications as gazetted may not be imported, circulated, sold, displayed or loaned without a permit.

Section 9 (3) prohibits possession of certain titles.

APPENDIX B

Internal Security Act 1982

All the work of listed and banned persons and proscribed organizations is banned:

8.16 (1): persons convicted of terrorism, treason and other offences.

8.16 (2): persons lived as members of the South African Communist Party and Congress of Democrats.

8.19 (1): persons restricted to given magisterial districts.

8.20: persons prohibited from gatherings.

§.23: persons in exile.

8.28/29/31/50: persons detained.

NB Listed persons are not banned but may not be quoted.

8.56 (1) (t): 32 organizations proscribed under proclamations relating to the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), Unlawful Organizations Act (1960) and Internal Security Act (1982).

8.5: titles banned by the minister for furthering the aims of communism and proscribed organizations.

Examples of persons harmed under the Internal Security Act: Dennis Brutus, Theo Kotze, Ronald Segal, Oliver Tambo, Donald Woods (all under 5.23).

Examples of persons lived under the Internal Security Act: Brian Bunting,
Ruth First, Helen Joseph, Alex la Guma, Govan Mbeki, Eddie Roux,
jack Simons, Joe Slovo (all under 5.16 (2)).

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Examples of organizations harmed under the Internal Security Act:

South African Communist Party (SACP), 1950
African National Congress (ANC), 1960
Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), 1960
South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), 1962
African Resistance Movement (ARM), 1964
Defence and Aid (now IDAF), 1966
Christian Institute (CI), 1977
South African Students Organization (SASO), 1977
Soweto Students, Representative Council (SSRC), 1977
Congress of South African Students (COSAS), 1985

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