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Censorship and book banning: My experiences as a high school learner and a student teacher during the 1980s

**Presentation to the Dept of Library Services' Banned Books exhibition
Merensky 2 Library Auditorium, University of Pretoria.**

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Presentation Outline

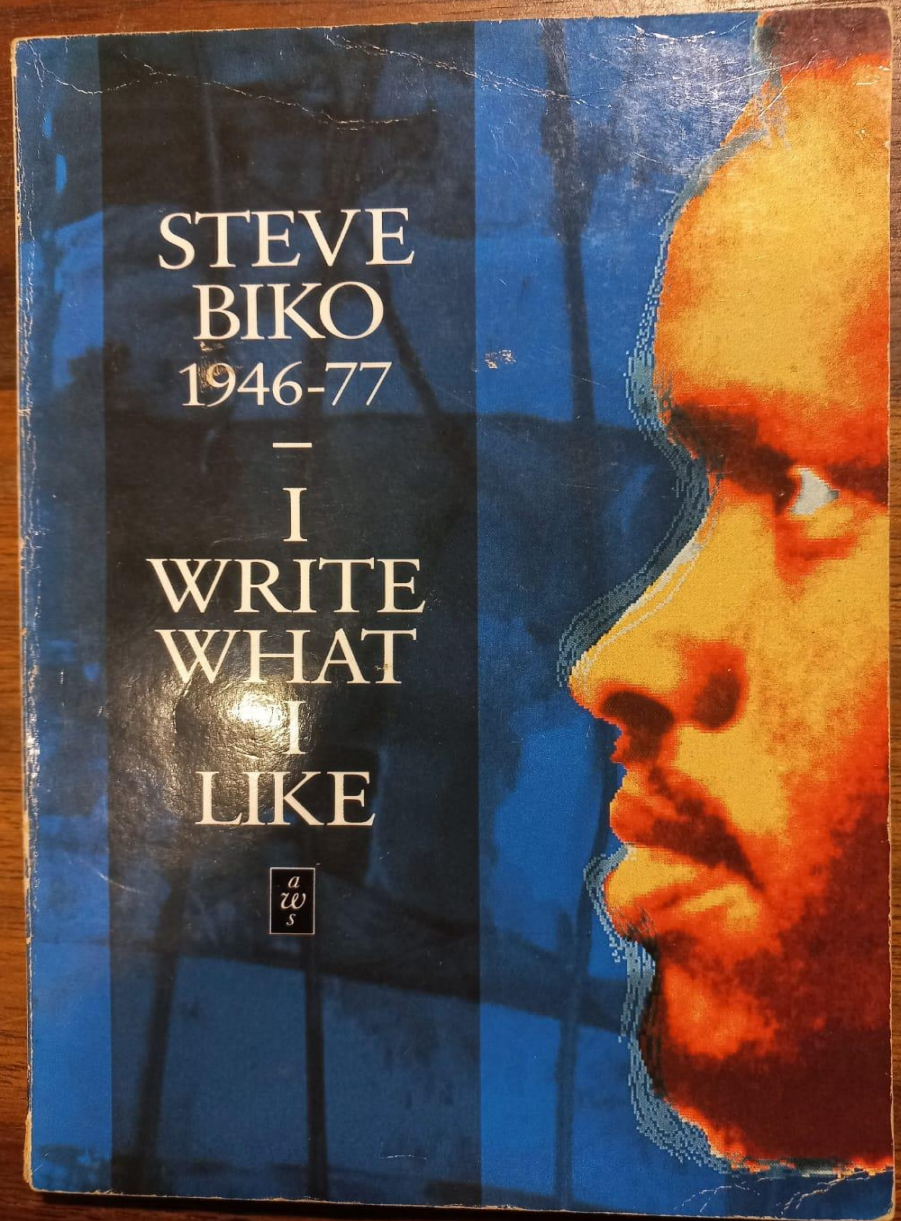
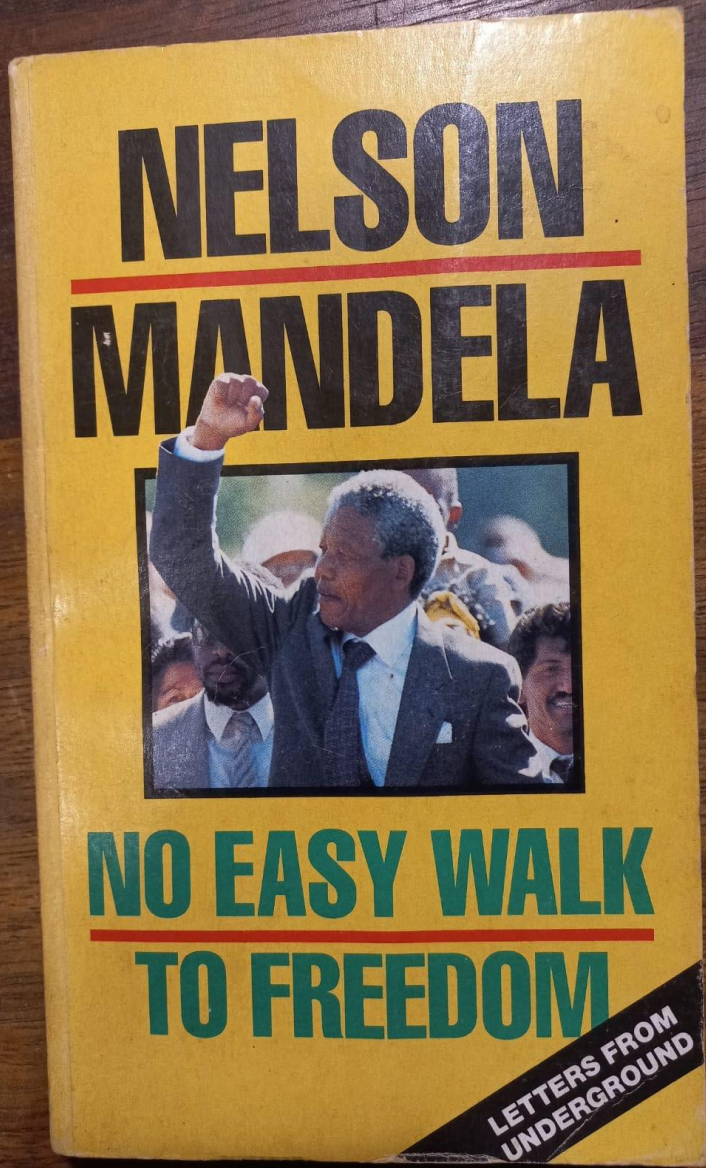
- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ The influence of our teacher-librarian.
- ❖ Experiences of censorship and book banning in the 1980s.
- ❖ Access to banned literature.
- ❖ My student-teacher days and introduction to the 'Alternative history'.
- ❖ Conclusion
- ❖ Q & A
- ❖ Reference works

Introduction

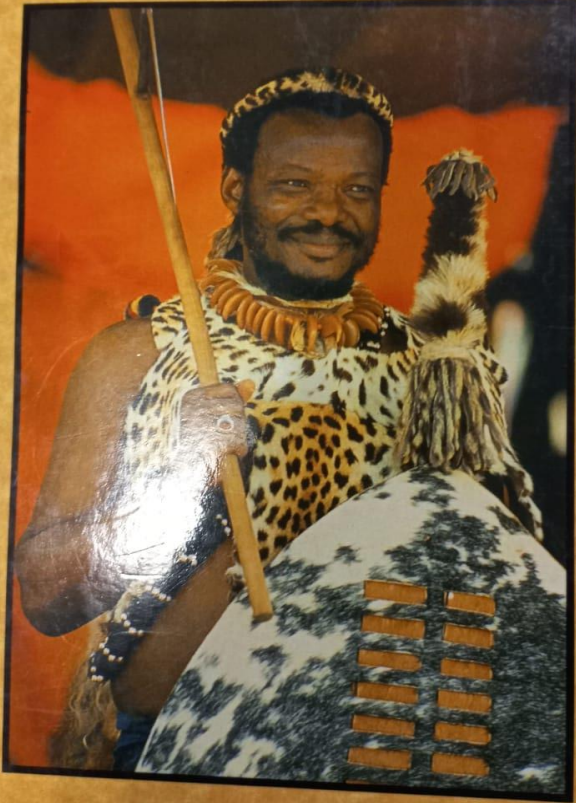
- ❖ In this talk, I will focus on my experiences of censorship and book banning during my formative years as a high school learner in Durban and as a student teacher in Pietermaritzburg in the 1980s.
- ❖ It will also clarify how we accessed banned literature, defied the censorship laws and learnt 'alternative history'.
- ❖ The talk will conclude with a critique of the current Constitution's Section 16 (Freedom of expression).

Introduction

- ❖ Grew up and attended schools in Durban townships.
- ❖ One became politically aware very early in life. I remember the excitement and inspiration we had in 1980 when Zimbabwe gained its independence. I was in Form 2 (Grade 9) at the time.
- ❖ Our library had a series called the African Writers Series and we competed for these scarce books which inspired us greatly (Chinua Achebe – Man of the People; The World of Nat Nakasa- Essop Patel; Ellen Khuzwayo – Sit Down and Listen; Frantz Fanon – The Wretched of the Earth; Ngugi Wa Thiongo – Decolonising the Mind; The Trial of Dedan Kimathi - Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo).
- ❖ In between, our activist teachers threw in banned books such as Nelson Mandela's No Easy Walk to Freedom; Steve Biko's I Write What I Like; Mzala Nxumalo's Gatsha Buthelezi – Chief With A Double Agenda; Stephen Ellis & Tsepiso Sechaba's Comrades against Apartheid; etc.



**GATSHA
BUTHELEZI**
CHIEF WITH A DOUBLE AGENDA

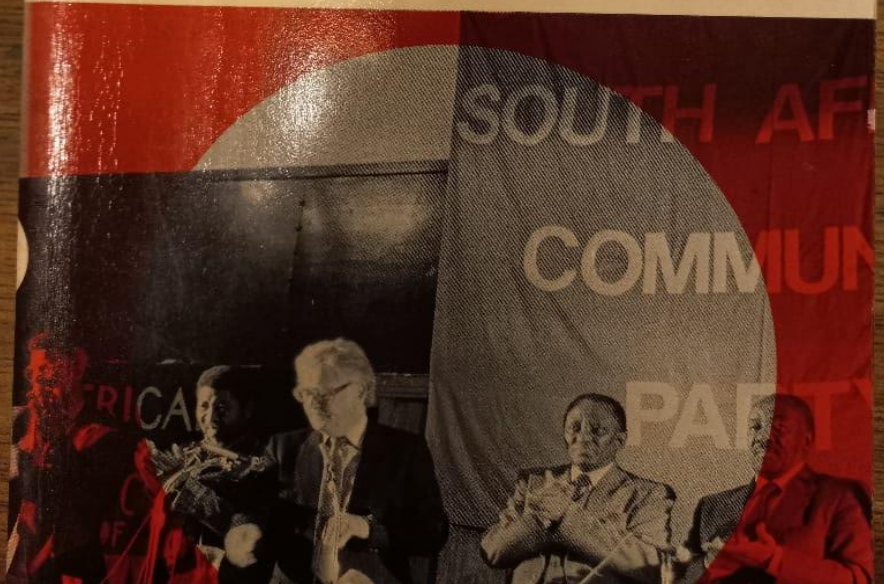


MZALA

**Comrades
against
Apartheid**

The ANC & the
South African
Communist
Party in Exile

**& STEPHEN ELLIS
& TSEPO SECHABA**



Teacher training years

- ❑ After Matric, one went to a teacher training college in Pietermaritzburg. This was the period of much violence and killings in the Natal Midlands and Durban.
- ❑ Newspapers were also censored in how they reported the stories.
- ❑ Immediately after admission to the college, as History students, we realised the propaganda we were being fed in the lecturer rooms.
- ❑ To counter this propaganda, we formed a History Society and it was at these meetings, we had covert access to banned literature and were also introduced to 'Alternative history'. Community activists came and addressed us.

Banning and censorship

- ❑ Maasdord (2018) has described censorship as one of the insidious strategies used by the Apartheid government to maintain its power over a racially segregated SA population.
- ❑ Similarly, Kunene (2014) has described censorship as “... the monopoly of propaganda enjoyed by a regime and upheld by force.”
- ❑ The govt had an agency called the Publications Control Board which determined what we could read (books and newspapers) and see (films and magazines).

Banning and censorship

- Gordimer (1994) in her article “Apartheid and Censorship”, states that control of information is merely one of the functions of censorship; its ultimate purpose as a political weapon of apartheid was to bring about a situation where there was no communication between South Africa and the world of ideas that might cause South Africans to question their way of life; and no communication within society between sections of the people carved up into categories of colour and language.
- Censorship was self-defeating in that it robbed a whole generation of S. Africans of the opportunity to be exposed to a world of ideas (intellectual isolation), and without insight into the lives and aspirations of their fellow countrymen/women.

Conclusion

- ❑ Section 16 of the SA Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996 guarantees freedom of expression to all citizens.
- ❑ However, the banning of *Inxeba* (The Wound) raises fears that South Africa could return to the Apartheid-era censorship.
- ❑ Further, the level of self-censorship we observe seems to suggest this right is not fully enjoyed as expected.

Thank you!

References

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