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**Matteau-Matsha, Rachel. 2018. Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading under Apartheid. KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 230 pages.**

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Writers such as A. Brink, N. Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee, to name but a few, are among the giants of South African literature. Their work bears the mark of a constant criticism of the horrors and obscurantism of the racial discrimination that regulated both South African institutions and people's everyday life for decades. Matteau-Matsha's book explores this system by addressing the issue of censorship and its effects on the book industry under apartheid. The author unveils both the ambiguity and the perverse effects of censorship on writers, publishers, booksellers and readers.

Matteau-Matsha's study is based on a cross-sectional perspective that intersects with history, politics, literary criticism and the spirit of resistance of South African anti-racist activists. This book divides into four sections whose themes are intertwined while enlightening each other. It is relevant to mention the genesis and objectives of censorship in South Africa, the book industry, the South African readership, and the censors' imaginary.

Matteau-Matsha defines censorship as a strategy for both the control and the orientation of public opinion on behalf of the ruling institutions. Such a strategy has always existed in the history of humankind. For example, it was already at work through the European colonial project named the "Civilizing Mission." In this context, the censorship was used by religious institutions, among others, to promote the Christian faith and, to some extent, the African elite. It served as a mechanism to control the production of ideas and the diffusion of knowledge.

Censorship was introduced in South Africa following a combination of political and ideological factors, including the advent of the National Party and its policy of racial discrimination, as well as the struggle against communism. It had a twofold purpose: on the one hand, to serve as an institutional lever to restrain the imagination and the expression of the dominated populations; on the other, to foster the emergence of an orthodox (literary) culture, that means,

a culture or a state of mind consistent with the ruling ideology. In the South African context, censorship represented a central device in controlling the production of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas, also regarding the cultural and intellectual alienation of colonized populations (p. 52).

A wide arsenal of laws was set out to materialise and to improve the censorship system. By the early 1950s, the proliferation of legal devices aimed at such a purpose by restricting the freedom of non-white people and so-called communist protagonists. Matteau-Matsha (p. 14) observes in this respect that the ruling system “progressively consolidated its bureaucratic structure and hegemony in public and private spaces. In 1950 alone, the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Amendment Act, the Population Registration Act and the Suppression of Communism Act were passed. The Bantu Education Act of 1951, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1953 and the Public Safety Act of 1953” were promulgated.

With the same aim, various censorship commissions were created. The creation of the “Commission of Inquiry in Regard to Undesirable Publications,” known as the “Cronje Commission” after its principal leader, Geoffrey Cronje, can be seen as an illustration. This commission was launched in 1954 to investigate the production, possession and circulation of imported and local publications. It proposed “several recommendations with far-reaching impact on the development of subsequent censorship laws, from the 1960s onwards” (p. 17). In addition, this commission promoted an esoteric dialogue between censors and imagined readers through its approach to readership. The censorship politicised the South African public space and reinforced the repression of non-orthodox literature. In other words, it favoured elitist literature, a literature based on cultural and political prospects inspired by Afrikaner nationalism (p. 54).

For the sake of their financial profit, major South African publishers complied with the political and ideological guidelines regulating the social and cultural economy: the principles of apartheid. In this respect, the attitude of a range of publishing houses including Nasionale Pers (Naspers) and JL van Schaik and Perskorporasie van Suid Afrika (Perskor) are illuminating. These two giants of the local book industry set up canons of literature in harmony with the racist

ideology. Subsequently, they benefited from the monopoly concerning publications in local languages, principally in Afrikaans (pp. 54–56). Foreign publishers such as MacMillan, Penguin, Heinemann, Longman Green, to name but a few, developed an ambivalent editorial policy blurring the boundaries between commercial and ideological imperatives, investing much more in the importation of foreign books to South Africa than in publishing local writings (p. 58).

Other publishing houses, including various writers, opposed the segregationist logic by creating an alternative book industry. In doing so, they denounced a system that was considered unfair and disrespectful of human rights. They were fully aware of the risk they would face, including the loss of financial windfall from the sale of books and subsequent legal proceedings. Otherwise, they relied on various strategies ranging from personal awareness to the inventive ability to create alternative circuits of distribution of (potential banned) books. Writers such as A. Brink, B. Breytenbach, N. Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee count among those who consistently criticized segregationist censorship arguing for a broad political consciousness and inclusion (pp. 59–60).

South African readership included a wide range of actors shaped by various institutions and social relations (p. 100). In this context, the so-called “alternative readership” or “politically engaged” readership is worth mentioning. This readership relied on the criticism of the ruling system. Its protagonists considered literature as part of people’s resistance and a way to access an alternative system. It can be noted that this readership also represented a heterogeneous group that included individuals from different backgrounds. For some of them, particularly self-made men, reading was a way of accessing culture and not merely entertainment. For those already familiar with cultural, religious and political organizations, reading illuminated their commitment by extending the space for political and cultural debates. Such a readership relied and relies on the idea that culture brings seeds of opposition and can lead to structuring the liberation movement (pp. 99–100).

The debate on South African readership raises the question of the relation between literacy and political activism. In this respect, Matteau-Matsha (p. 101) observes that “readership is not a set of

technical skills learnt in formal education, but [a] social practice embedded in specific contexts, discourses and positions (...). These can range from a functional literacy strictly designed to fulfil minimal everyday requirements to higher levels that enable a reader to use highly intellectual and complex texts on ideological and theoretical levels.”

According to Matteau-Matsha, the consciousness of the link between reading and political activism contributed deeply to shaping both the censorship and South African readership. Prior to the 1960s, the laws were less specific about the readership profile. They aimed at a broad audience in the generic sense of the term. The Entertainment Censorship Act of 1931, for example, aimed at people who could access public exhibitions, movies, pictures and public entertainment. The law against communism targeted, among other things, both so-called communist literature and readers loving communist publications (pp. 148–149).

During the 1960s, the consolidation of censorship and subsequent debates generated by Afrikaner cultural nationalists unveiled the censors' imagination regarding their own representation of readership. First, it is worth reminding the idea of “intrusive readership” which, made by censors themselves on the basis of their mission and expertise, is interposed between the factual (real) reader and the text (pp. 150–152). Second, a list of various readerships was evoked including the “sophisticated readership” (supposed to enjoy literature in virtue of its aesthetic qualities and not likely to perform a politicised reading); the “enlightened reader” (people who appreciated literature on an apolitical aesthetic level); the “reactionary reader” or the “subversive reader” (the one in search of inspiration and motivation to challenge the status quo); the “vulnerable reader” (people who are part of a mass and susceptible to influence), etc.

The Censorship Commission's reforms of 1974 went beyond the anti-communist and literary preoccupations in order to highlight religious, moral and political characteristics. They identified readership as a set of decent, law-abiding, enlightened individuals with a religious (Christian) background. In other words, these reforms referred to privileged categories of people including white readers, Afrikaner nationalists, and supporters of the National Party policy. Matteau-

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Matsha illustrates their structuring philosophy by analysing Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein* case. The reforms that occurred in the final decade of the apartheid regime highlighted the idea of "repressive tolerance." They reflected the political ambiguity of a government oscillating between the cooptation of dissents and the repression of protests. This can be viewed as a prelude to the end of a system because more and more people were getting aware that black people did not have any representation in parliament, while white people should understand their problems as well as help to resolve them (p. 165).

Matteau-Matsha's book represents a *sui generis* study. Although introduced by the ability of Africans to read, that means, the problem of cultural practices of reading, this book discusses mainly censorship as such and its effects on the book industry in the context of South African racial segregation. It is worth noting that this is an unusual topic, which credits the author. The subtitle of the book expresses its contents and stakes better than the main title. The author's style is concise and clear. Her argumentation is based on a variety of sources, including the South African history of ideas, the political and ideological ups and downs of South African apartheid society, the culture and book industry, as well as the twists and turns of South African literature. This book provides rich insights into the global context in which many masterpieces of South African literature have been produced. It allows readers to fully appreciate their theoretical reach as well as their political and ideological significance. Matteau-Matsha's book is an important and high-quality contribution to the study of publishing, reading and censoring literature in modern Africa. It represents a valuable source of information for researchers, scholars, and South African citizens loving literature.

Albert Kasanda