

South Africa's Resistance Press: Alternative Voices in the Last Generation under Apartheid, edited by Les Switzer and Mohamed Adhikari, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000. 472 pp.

The dissident voices are dead. Dozens of newspapers and magazines were vitally important in bringing about change in apartheid South Africa, but hardly any of them have survived into the post-apartheid era. The collection of articles in this publication focus on the variety of print media that emerged in a struggle against an authoritarian regime, but many of which have since lost their role in contemporary discussions on society and politics.

The texts are weighed towards the description of the politics and the struggle that shaped the fate of the newspapers. They convey vibrant images of the creativity of the media, the journalists and the editors in times of harassment, and as a result, less emphasis is put on argument and analysis. The analysis of the alternative press invites us to focus on the relationship between the political struggle and the media. It revolves around the ways in which the political struggle overshadowed the existence and dynamics of the press. This is different from an analysis of the popular press. For instance, with the popular press authors tend to focus on issues of culture, on assessing readers' attitudes in the consumption process, or on the media's use of illustrations. The analysis of the alternative press follows its own route and pursues the agenda of an established historiographic tradition.

The articles are based on the meticulous study of primary material. Most of the authors are familiar with a body of newspapers that relate to each other. They handle material from one main newspaper, its predecessors or successors, as well as from newspapers belonging to the same group of publishers. Mohamed Adhikari, writing about *South* regarding its "determination to break with the compliant reporting of institutionalised journalism" (p. 338), is the only author who, in addition, conducted interviews with former journalists and editors. These interviews help unfold an argument that takes his analysis beyond the interpretation into empirical analyses. The interviews add an extra-institutional perception that rescues the message of the article from the former clutches of apartheid. Keyan Tomaselli, dealing with "ambiguities in alternative discourse" (p. 378), eschews the dominant patterns of media analysis through the adoption of a comparative approach. He contrasts the *Sowetan*, a newspaper with a market-oriented approach, with *New Nation*, which was never in a position to survive on the market, and concludes that the laws of the market caused the end of the latter publication.

Some of the articles focus on the circumstances of the papers' production, and their continuous struggle for subsequent issues. Reminiscences turn some of the pieces into excellent reading. James Zug resurrects of the 1960s, the "fourth and final decade graced by the ink and newsprint of the *Guardian*" (p. 129). The majority of articles render overviews of the development and dynamics of the newspaper(s). Against this background, Peter Limb's contribution, which deals with representations of the labouring classes, takes up a special focus on class issues. He argues that the ANC spurred journalists' attention towards African workers' rights, and with the disbandment of the party in the 1960s, the topic itself dissolved in the press.

In general, however, there is only a subdued effort in the articles to provide provocative insights into issues of gender, generation, or theories of media representation in the humanities. In their article on representing blackness in the Black Consciousness Movement, Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane and David R. Howarth mention that the movement was "blind to some aspects of power relations, such as gender" (p. 203). One actually wonders whether this blindness must be perpetuated by current research trends. Certainly, and once again, the overarching burden of the struggle is felt through the texts. This may also explain the neglect of readerships and their impact on the survival of the various print media in the analyses. With the exception of circulation numbers, readers remain fundamentally ignored. Evidently, most of the media adopted a "sender-approach". So do the authors who describe the intentions, achievements and dynamics of the media. Ineke van Kessel, assessing *Grassroots'* ambitions to "POEM: Popularize, Organize, Educate, and Mobilize" (p. 284), stresses that "while communication between mainstream newspapers and their publics is largely a one-way street, community newspapers aspired to interact with their readership and to help shape, rather than only report, events" (p. 283). The neglect of readers in contemporary analyses is therefore amazing.

It is interesting to see that so many people from outside South Africa contributed to the collection of articles in this volume. In fact, the study of South Africa's alternative press was not an exclusively South African issue. The articles, usually mention countries outside South Africa in connection with funding. Jeremy Seekings reminds his readers of the UDF media's strategy to "liaise with ... overseas media" (p. 233). George Claasen includes a reference to the *Suid-Afrikaan* procuring funding from Germany (p. 415). Franz Krüger argues that the drying up of overseas donor funds caused the end of several independent media projects after the end of apartheid (p. 271, p. 274). Christopher Merrett and Christopher Saunders refer to the *Weekly Mail's* temporary collaboration with the British *Guardian* (p. 478). These are reminders that the alternative press, so much a social movement in South Africa, resonated on the international scale.

Les Switzer has compiled an array of articles explaining the important role of the resistance press in South Africa. The use of illustrations is a great benefit. They give a feel of the time and of the conditions under which journalists and editors worked. The book shows that scholars and practitioners from various backgrounds can collaborate on a project that reflects and combines different styles of writing, thematic foci, and professional careers. The book has an almost reference-like character, and it is of use to anyone interested in the history of the alternative press in South Africa as well as the driving forces and motivations that lend themselves to the production of the alternative press.

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