

WAR IN WORCESTER: YOUTH AND THE APARTHEID STATE

Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014
 ISBN 978 1 86914 276 6; Price: R240.00; 256 pages
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The book *War in Worcester* by Pamela Reynolds captures experiences and exploits of young people in Worcester, Cape Town. Reynolds exposes how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the African National Congress (ANC) undermined the young people's contributions to the liberation struggle against apartheid because they were below the age of 35 in 1996. Even the Government's Special Pension Bill of 1996 compensated or rewarded those people who fought for freedom and who were 35 years or older in 1996, leaving out thousands of young people who were actively involved in the liberation struggle from within the country. The book exposes the failure of the TRC to recommend reasonable amounts of reparations, e.g. the author talks about a compensation fund of R1 400 - R4 200, which could not address the needs of the victims. The book exposes the unfairness of the notion of amnesty which lets perpetrators off the hook. When justice is served, justice in itself becomes the compensation for the victims, but when justice is not served, there is no atonement for the transgressions committed. It reminds of a famous South African saying: 'Justice delayed is justice denied.' When human beings are suppressed each time they raise up their heads, they sink in a pool of anger only to emerge later as a tinderbox of explosives. One wonders if the unresolved anger that thousands sit with and show through violent protests, are not manifestations of suppressed anger and helplessness encountered by 'people of colour' at the hands of the apartheid government.

On the other hand the book explores the courage and determination of young people to oppose and overthrow the oppressive regime. The book also exposes the shame of the apartheid government which destroyed information; archives which would have formed a rich history and heritage of a country emerging from a troubled past. Although one may be critical of the recent wave of destroying and vandalising statues in the country, one wonders whether history is repeating itself. There is an outcry to preserve statues that, to some, are the reminders of pain and oppression and yet there was no outcry between 1990 and 1994 when the then government was destroying numerous documents – part of the historical heritage of South Africa. Thus the highlight of this book by Reynolds is that of hanging the dirty linen that had been hidden for decades, thereby showing us that humanity has not really learned from the past mistakes.

Finally, *War in Worcester* is a product of Reynolds's efforts to create public but safe space for submerged voices and identities to come out; submerged in terms of forbidden stories which could not be told then for fear of victimisation; identities in terms of the young who were misclassified as victims by the TRC but who were indeed heroes in their own eyes and ours, especially as they looked the brutal regime in the eye in their quest for an alternative system of government. Above all, the book exposes the resilience of the human spirit to endure pain and suffering at the hands of fellow human beings, in particular fellow South Africans, who were determined to destroy them. When one sees the history of a small town such as Worcester, one cannot resist acknowledging that indeed a rainbow nation has come after a storm.