

Mamphela Ramphele (2008): Laying Ghosts to Rest

Tafelberg Publishers. ISBN 9780624045793 (288 pages)

The first section of this book is on "Dealing with the Past". The author discusses the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)* in some detail. She notes that when the TRC was set up a decision was made not to include socio-economic human rights violations - and to compound that (perhaps disrespectful) decision the reparations that should have been paid have never been disbursed. So she begins with the theme that she follows throughout: **the neglected constitutional rights of the poorest people in South Africa.**

In this complex, detailed examination of where we have come from and how things stand now, Ramphele's writing is clear and her arguments well structured (as of course one might expect from a person of her academic renown). Not only that, but she is quite fearless and has a number of surprising things to say. She is rational and fair to all.

Still looking at the past, Ramphele notes that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) has been either entirely sidelined - for example even Mandela failed to mention it or Steve Biko in his *Long Walk to Freedom* - or it has been perverted to a form of anti-white racism. The point of raising this issue is that those who have not benefited from the teachings of the BCM "have yet to confront the enemy within" and to be liberated from "the oppression that comes from believing racist myths". Insofar as there are still many who have not achieved this, **racism still haunts us**; its most serious consequence is to make people sensitive, and thus averse, to criticism; and, by extension, **unable to admit and correct mistakes.**

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In the section on "Stubborn Ghosts" Ramphele examines racism, sexism, ethnic chauvinism and authoritarianism. In clear essays she elucidates these "ghosts" for those who are new to the history or offers a quick refresher to those who think they know what it's all about.

Whereas she deals quite briefly with the abuse and disempowerment of women in her section on sexism, it is in her section on authoritarianism that she really confronts male dominance in South African society. She finds the roots of authoritarianism in the colonial administration, Calvinism, the South African Communist Party (Stalinism), the United Democratic Front ("stringent enforcement of solidarity") and in traditional systems of governance. She discusses the latter in relation to ethnic chauvinism, where she points out that "traditional leaders" have been phased out, with no dire consequences for the countries involved, in Mozambique and Tanzania. And she gives a list, compiled by Thandabantu Nhlapho, of **gender issues which "need to be resolved to enable us to align practices with the precepts of our Constitution"**. She argues against "romanticising" traditional leadership where it goes against the Constitution.

This is a review by Jane Rosenthal, published in the „Mail & Guardian“ dated 12.-18.09.2008.

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Having identified the most pernicious ghosts, she examines "Challenges of Citizenship" and "State Capacity to Govern". In the former she makes use of a list "progressive causes" enumerated in "The Stewardship Project" and which citizens should embrace as their was of "taking ownership of the gift of freedom". She begins to outline what people can do and one of these is not to remain silent when things are going wrong; not to sanction, by silence, criminality, disrespect for the law, extreme violence, police and ministerial ineptitude.

Going back to authoritarianism, she says there is a need to "reframe respect" to include criticism. This is her constant theme. She does a detailed critique of Christine Qunta's position of this. And she examines the meaning of the word "power" where she indicates it should mean "the capacity to act".

She is quite critical of denialism, affirmative action (which has had the unintended consequence - a phrase she uses often - of sending 20 000 highly skilled people a year into the new exile) and corruption. Failure to deliver in health and education because of lack of capacity in public servants is a violation of the rights of the poor.

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In her concluding chapter she addresses racism and sexism quite openly, but authoritarianism is approached obliquely via a surprising, or not so surprising given the rest of the book, brief vindication of the virtues of liberalism.

But Ramphela is full of surprises; from there she moves to last year's (2008) Polokwane conference where she says there was "a welcome break from the disconnection between leaders and grassroots members". This last refers to a quote from Chinua Achebe's *The Anthills of the Savannah* in which he says the worst that the people have to suffer is "the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country".

So Ramphela takes her argument back to socio-economic rights. She is still a champion of the global economy, which she explains in some detail.

It seems mean-spirited to carp, but she barely gives the arts a mention (not even in her list of progressive causes ...). And there is absolutely no mention of climate change. But the latter is not so much a ghost as a slow-moving tsunami, still below the horizon.

This is a good read and a most useful and important book for those interested in the future of our transformation project.

Jane Rosenthal.