

BOOK REVIEWS

The struggle for #FeesMustFall: We are no longer at ease

(Jacana Media, 2019, 201 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2678-2)

Wandile Ngcaweni & Busani Ngcaweni

Fezeka Gxwayibeni

University of KwaZulu-Natal

gxwayibenif@ukzn.ac.za

Picture a room filled with young voices lamenting, unabated and with no apology, concerns that many listeners and observers seem to have not begun to understand. This is what reading this book feels like. Edited by Wandile Ngcaweni and Busani Ngcaweni, the book encapsulates the writers' exhalations right from the foreword which cites Fanon's rationalisation of confrontation: "we revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe" (p. xi). Contextualising the #FeesMustFall Movement within global and historical dynamics, the foreword of this book espouses the notion that each generation at its youth has a purpose to serve for the greater good by contending that, "Young people have always been at the forefront of recent struggle" (p. xi). The struggle identified in the book relates to issues that entangle the notion of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation, such as the postcolonial condition of South Africa, the state of democracy and inequalities grounded in racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia, amongst others.

Structurally, the book is a four-part collection of poems and essays that comprehensively catalogue perspectives on the dynamics of the #FeesMustFall Movement. Part One entails the theorisation of the movement. The writings in this section boldly challenge what many have failed to challenge: a response to a privilege. Tlhabane Dan Motaung's essay locates the movement as non-partisan, expressing loss of faith in politicians as the drivers of the now imagined revolution. Adam Buch adds significantly to the discourse, writing as an insider on the topic of "white privilege" tackling uncomfortable truths regarding how, because of their privilege, many white people struggle to positively participate in the discourses of decolonialism in the dynamic South African space. Motaung performs the daunting task of untangling the misconceptions

on the #FeesMustFall Movement through an engagement with different theories relevant to understanding the movement.

Furthermore, Part One reveals the different faces of frustrations and challenges that the South African youth met throughout the #FeesMustFall protests. Without mincing words, Qhama Bona shows the inextricable link between the frustrations stemming from the failed promises of 1994 – such as the crisis of unemployment – and the challenges being confronted by the #FeesMustFall Movement. Qhama Bona lays the blame squarely on “1994 government and the white monopoly capital that still controls most of the country’s economy” (p.48). Bona further warns that the condition of the black South African youth is a brooding cloud which he foresees as a perfect recipe for social upheaval if the elite continue to ignore it. This helps to position the #FeesMustFall movement within a broader, national #MustFallMovement, thus showing how this movement will leave an indelible mark on South African history. Therefore, the book firmly establishes that the movement was not a mindless upheaval of reckless students.

Part Two engages with some of the limitations of the movement. One such limitation is the social marginalisation that was manifested throughout the student-led protests. For example, the patriarchy that transcended the microcosm of the protests in South African universities is well captured by the different voices from women’s and the LGBTQA+ community. The book also explains intersectionality as a branch of feminism in the space of politics and how it applies to leadership even in the space of student politics. Kneo Mkgopa shows how universities are a microcosm of the society, and how involving the different communities such as the Feminist and LGBTQA+ can dilute hypermasculinity.

Conceptualising the movement as “Fallist,” Part Three and Part Four come full circle to what the movement means and the discourses which it continues to propel from the points of view of both individuals and the South African institutions of higher learning. Overall, the section offers sincere insights through the lenses of those who have basked in their thoughts and considered the ideas on the Fallist movement.

While this book serves as a valuable and relevant collection for a rational perspective on the birth of the Fallist movement, an opportunity was missed. The Black Consciousness philosophy is not adequately used as a theoretical framework for the writings, yet the Black Consciousness

Movement continues to hugely inform the struggle of the post-apartheid South African.

Nevertheless, the book is a commendable read for the youth who wish to contribute meaningfully to their generational call. It is also for those who have longed to understand the fuss behind the Fallist movement. It challenges those who have doubted the intellectual ability of post-apartheid South African youth to contribute to the philosophical space.

Poverty, politics & policy in South Africa. Why has poverty persisted after apartheid?

(Jacana Media, Division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, South Africa: University of Cape Town, 2016., 333 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2426-9)

Jeremy Seekings & Nicoli Nattrass

Mlamuli Tabhu

University of KwaZulu-Natal

tabhu94@gmail.com

The basis of this book by Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass is to unravel why poverty has persisted in South Africa ever since the advent of democracy in 1994. The authors provide a class analysis in identifying who has and has not remained poor, how public policies reproduced poverty and why these policies were adopted. They conclude that the discourses of the South African welfare state, labour market policies and the growth path challenges of South African economy can be attributed to neo-liberalism.

This book has eleven chapters. However, my review stresses the chapters that are most important for proper conceptualisation of the persistence of poverty in South Africa. At the outset, the authors engage the concepts of neo-liberalism and social democracy and map out why they should be considered as the reason for the prevalence of poverty. Neo-liberal ideology is argued to be rested on the power of international and, to a lesser extent, domestic capital.

The illustration of the effects of neo-liberal ideology is revealed through the side-lining of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategy in 1996. Seekings and Nattrass view GEAR to be a neo-colonial project that sought to replace white capital with black

capital, using revolutionary sounding phrases as a way of soliciting sympathy from the working class, while usurping the power of the working class for the benefit of white capital. The book criticises the South African political milieu for having an economy that was growing at 3%, yet, instead of ensuring greater participation in the mainstream economy through genuine ownership and redistribution, they introduced Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and their blackness as a tool to shame white people into giving them shares.

The authors further argue that social democracy is a highly heterogeneous concept. At its loosest, it embraces any positions that advocate interventions in the market economy to reduce inequality and promote social justice whilst working through the institutions of representative democracy and rejecting revolutionary strategies. Simply put, in theory South Africa's social democracy appeared progressive, yet it was indebted to the discourses of liberalism. The critique is extended to political parties around the world that claim to be socialist democratic on this basis, and affiliate to the socialist international, but they cannot show evidence of real commitment to social justice.

This book offers an insight into poverty amidst affluence by illustrating how poverty persisted despite steady economic growth and growing affluence of a few. It shows how, in 1994, poverty rates were higher in South Africa than almost any other middle-income country, with only Brazil having a similar poverty rate. The authors do not limit the explanation of poverty to present-day government policies. They also provide historical explanations, based on three historical facts. Firstly, they argue that Africans were dispossessed of their land through Apartheid. As a result, the last vestiges of an independent African peasantry had been destroyed, both on white owned farms and in Bantustans. Secondly, they contend that working-age adults were unemployed for both personal and economy-wide reasons: they probably lacked the skills, credentials or connections required to get work in an economy with shrinking opportunities for less-skilled workers. Thirdly, the authors explain that African households had no claims on the state, in that none of their members were eligible for government grants. The main argument is therefore that both poverty and affluence were, in large part, the consequence of the Apartheid distributional regime-that is, of the combination of growth path and public policies.

The book further shows that with the historical imbalances in place, there was no political will to eradicate poverty except revolutionary sounding phrases with no implementation. Some of the implementations they suggest are that welfare states support citizens' income through distinct mechanisms such as social insurance, which entails state-run contributory schemes that pool risk within groups of working people, providing some combination of pension in old age and grants in the event of sickness, disability or unemployment.

The last significant chapter is titled, "The welfare state, public service and social wage". The book shows how, through the neo-liberal path taken by both central and local government, houses were built by private developers, municipal services outsourced to contractors, while municipal government emphasised cost delivery. It also shows how the better public schools charged substantial fees, and the private health care sector absorbed a small minority of the population.

Having read the book, the reader gets a good picture of the reasons for the persistence of poverty in South Africa. The authors' combination of the retrogressive historical factors and the present-day government policy and implementation provides a balanced explanation for poverty. However, as much as the post-apartheid government should be criticised, it should be noted that countries that have strong social policies have high levels of savings. For example, China has up to 50% of savings of their GDP. Yet the new post-1994 government was bankrupt and had to service the massive debt it inherited from the Apartheid government. Such a situation should, therefore, be considered as one of the significant historical factors that made the establishment of a social democracy almost impracticable.

The book by Seekings and Natrass deals with a critical issue in contemporary South Africa. It relates to how the colonial division of South African society into citizens (whites) and subjects (blacks) persists in the post-apartheid era because of the failure of the decolonisation process (Mamdani, 1996). This book is a worthwhile read in providing an overview of South Africa's welfare since the advent of democracy and anyone who wishes to understand post-apartheid South Africa from a historical perspective should consider reading it. It is a useful resource in understanding how historical change tends to be always associated with some form of continuity.