

Janice Warman, *Class of '79: The Story of Three Fellow Students who Risked their Lives to Destroy Apartheid*

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The role of journalism in the recording and interpretation of history is a source of much interesting discussion. Notable, for example, is the involvement of Antjie Krog during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, resulting in her much acclaimed work *Country of My Skull*. According to Warman, in setting out the rationale for her own book, "*Class of '79*, began ten years earlier in 1999, when I opened my new copy of Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, her excoriating, illuminating, incandescent tale of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (p xiii). While both historians and journalists concern themselves with narratives of past events, there is a distinct methodology and set of dynamics to the fruits each bear. It should be noted that sterling contributions are made by journalists every day towards documenting events of historical significance, and despite the different tone that their books often carry, these publications continue to be of historiographical interest and value.

Warman's *Class of '79* documents the stories of Marion Sparg, Guy Berger and Zubedia Jaffer, and as it takes *Country of My Skull* as its departure point, the text flows in much the same vein as that of Krog's. Apart from sharing an involvement in the struggle against apartheid, what links the three individuals is that all three studied journalism at Rhodes University in 1979. The tales are a vivid and painful reminder of South Africa's divided past and the sacrifices made by individuals for political emancipation. The first to be explored is the story of Marion Sparg, who is said to be "only the third white South African woman ever convicted of treason, and the very first convicted of terrorist acts" (p 31). Throughout the book, Warman explores the psychology behind the three convicts and what motivated their involvement in the struggle. Apart from interviews with the three subjects, the author also consulted with relatives of the three former students, incorporating these perspectives into the text.

Despite the very grim nature of these stories, *Class of '79* is in many ways a celebration of the endurance of the human spirit. The book is divided into three "parts", with each of the three subjects assigned one. All three of the subjects were detained for their involvement in politics in the 1980s, and the text explores many of the harrowing details of their activities. "The whole system", notes Zubedia Jaffer, "is there to break you down. What they didn't realise is that at that stage of the struggle, any such action would only bolster your resolve to fight the system. It made people more determined." (p 135). *Class of '79* does not stick solely to the subject of apartheid brutality. Again, building on the model of *Country of My Skull*, Warman incorporates herself and her own experiences and insecurities openly in the text. These are however kept to the minimum and do not interrupt the historiographical feel of the text. Another feature of the book is interpreting the painful legacy of these stories against current developments in South African politics. While a critical approach is taken in this regard by the subjects, there does not appear to be a consensus. According to Guy Berger "South Africa is still boiling, it's still bubbling, but the steam can escape. The water remains in the pot, it's not going to burst out" (p 98). Zubedia Jaffer however comments that "If you ask the average person, they will say that they were better off under apartheid" (p 140).

Oral history forms the most important part of this publication's research methodology, effectively giving voice to the subjects in their own words frequently during the course of the narrative. Although a set of endnotes accompany the work, these cannot be said to add any academic credibility to the work. Of the 84 endnotes provided, 66 are explanatory footnotes, much of which is information which might be considered as general knowledge by some, but which will most certainly assist a reader unfamiliar with South African cultures and history. The remaining 18 endnotes refer the reader to newspaper articles, books and internet sites, amongst which is included the dreaded Wikipedia. Apart from the endnotes, the reader is also provided with a set of photographs that accompany the text. These include records produced on toilet tissue by Zubedia Jaffer during her detention. These photographs provide the text with greater accountability given the lack of referencing.

The subject matter of *Class of '79* makes it a noteworthy contribution. Many precious records from this period have been lost, and this publication is valuable in securing some of these stories for posterity. Rich sources of oral history abound in our communities and it is important for practitioners in the history and heritage related fields to try and capture as much of these as possible, while it is still possible. Warman can be commended for succeeding in doing so. Although *Class of '79* cannot be said to be a conventional history book, because its tone is more reminiscent of popular magazine articles, the work's greatest attribute is that it gives voice to these victims of apartheid in their own words.

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