

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

Once a week I meet up with a group of students from war ravaged Ukraine and their teacher, via zoom. It has become increasingly more difficult to meet, even to meet the same group of students as power cuts because of targeted attacks on infrastructure by the Russian forces across the country which affects any kind of connectivity. Every week I am reminded of the face and cost of war, it meets me on the screen of my students via zoom some who have lost parents to the war, who have lost their schools, who can no longer attend school in person. But who continue to want to meet to talk, smile, be curious together, philosophise together, think together and choose to be in a community of philosophical enquiry. I am moved by their strength.

When I think about South Africa I have come to realise we are also at war which can be seen as a **state of hostility, conflict, or antagonism**. We do not have a foreign country attacking, us rather we are under siege right here from within from our own government, so we do not recognize it as war. We are in a different war here in South Africa, a war about who and what can be loved in South Africa. I do not think war is the absence of love, rather it is the presence of a love for something that hurts those who can be hurt. In South Africa's case corruption, capitalism, neoliberalism has made it acceptable that 40% of people in South Africa live in extreme poverty. This accounts for about 18 million people and the majority of these people are racialized as black. There are also those for whom simply living is made even more difficult by the relentless power cuts currently being enforced – because of corruption and an inability to care for those who need it the most. Load shedding affects us all, but not all in the same way. Our sick need hospitals free from load shedding. There are children for whom it is a matter of life and death if their neighbourhoods are plunged into darkness. There are people who still do not have any electricity ever. There are thousands of people for whom electricity reduction by Eskom is a way of life as they cannot afford to pay for electricity, and this deeply affects their standard of living and life. How is it that we live in a country with such disregard for the needs of those who do not have the means to survive?

And yet, our ruling party, the ANC, hosting its national elective conference this weekend has an exemption from load shedding and as I wrote this prayer last night the president declared that the army would be deployed to strategic Eskom plants. This is a strange time for we are at war.

I ask that we draw on the words of Arundhati Roy who wrote a scathing and passionate indictment of the Indian government's disregard for the individual in 1999 when she wrote her book [The Cost of Living](#) and ask that we offer her wisdom as a prayer, to draw strength from... (the quote from Arundhati Roy is in bold)

Dear Lord hear this prayer: help us **to love and to be loved. To never forget our own insignificance, for this is what makes us powerful. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around us.** In South Africa this is everywhere all the time. Dear God help us to **continue to seek joy in the saddest places and to pursue beauty to its lair. May we never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple.** Help us to respect strength, never power and above all to watch and notice and pay attention. **To try to understand. May we never look away and never, never to forget.** Hear this prayer, help make it our prayer. And now let us pray the prayer for Africa:

God bless Africa and all the world
Guard our Children
Guide our Leaders and
Give us Peace
Amen