

Love in the Time of Treason: The Life Story of Ayesha Dawood

A Book Review

by Karina Magdalena Szczurek

Lucidly written and well-researched, *Love in the Time of Treason: The Life Story of Ayesha Dawood*, is an important contribution to the vast pool of South African life-writing. In this remarkable biography, Zubeida Jaffer tells the moving life story of Ayesha Dawood and her family from the time Dawood actively entered the anti-apartheid struggle to the moment of her return from forced exile in India. A story of romantic love and political upheaval, it has followed Jaffer for almost three decades, surfacing in articles and interviews, until she sat down to write this book.

Love in the Time of Treason is divided into two parts. The first is skilfully narrated from the alternating perspectives of Ayesha Dawood and her future husband Yusuf Mukadam before they finally seal the incredible bond between them. They first meet in India when Ayesha, on her first ever voyage beyond South African borders, is visiting her Indian family. The resolute young woman makes such an indelible impression on Yusuf that he resolves, after her return to her native South Africa, to find her again and marry her at no matter what cost. To achieve his goal, he trains to be a cook and finds employment on board of a ship, travelling the world in the hope that one day his ship will dock in one of South Africa's ports.

In the meantime, Ayesha becomes more and more involved in the struggle for liberation in the apartheid-ravaged South Africa. Her activism brings her into conflict with the police and she is repeatedly arrested and detained until she ends up as one of Mandela's co-accused in the first infamous Treason Trial. In her late twenties, she almost gives up on the idea of a relationship and domestic stability: "Here she was, in and out of prison, how on earth was she going to marry and have a family."

The second part of *Love in the Time of Treason* describes the path she and Yusuf have to travel in order to eventually become husband and wife and fulfil their personal dreams as well as to make their visions for a just South Africa a reality. It is the journey of a love constantly endangered by the treacherous politics of the country. In the end, Ayesha is offered a choice between loyalty to the cause or to her husband. Because she cannot betray either, she and her family are forced into decades-long exile.

Zubeida Jaffer's account of these events takes us into the heart of her characters' intertwined lives and the communities – South African and Indian – which formed them. The story is framed by a prologue and an epilogue. The first describes the long-awaited moment of Ayesha's first opportunity to meet, after many years, the man whose destiny has shaped her own: Nelson Mandela. The Blue Train he is travelling on is about to stop at the station in Worcester. It is 1997, and Ayesha, now an elderly woman, is among the spectators, eagerly awaiting his arrival. The book's epilogue continues with this beautiful episode in which the lives of these two remarkable people, who both in their own way have sacrificed so much for what they dared to believe in, touch once more, even if only briefly.

Love in the Time of Treason could have done with some more severe proofreading and editing, but it is an inspiring story of a brave and dedicated woman who should not be forgotten by history.

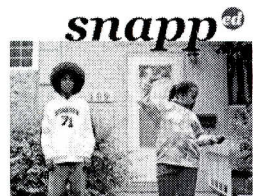
Love in the Time of Treason: The Life Story of Ayesha Dawood
by Zubeida Jaffer
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Karina Magdalena Szczurek is a writer and literary critic. She lives in Cape Town with her husband, author André Brink, and their three cats: Mozart, Salieri and Glinka.

E. contact Karina Magdalena Szczurek

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