

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Nelson Mandela: The Struggle is My Life, by IDAF Publications

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8ds379d8>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 18(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Dandridge-Perry, Cheryl

Publication Date

1990

DOI

10.5070/F7181016849

Copyright Information

Copyright 1990 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

BOOK REVIEWS

NELSON MANDELA: THE STRUGGLE IS MY LIFE. Third edition. London, IDAF Publications, Ltd., 1990. 281 pp.

The cry goes forth, Mandela is free! But Nelson Mandela is free only to fight again for his freedom, within limits. For in many ways the South African Government still has the upper hand. It has reaped propaganda benefits abroad from the release of Nelson Mandela, and it is still freely able to shoot black protesters, even since the Old Man's release! Yet the South African government has limits, too, for it cannot control its own monster, the South African Right, which is strong in the police and security forces, and among a civilian population the government itself helped to arm. F.W. de Klerk's task is to retain his white constituency, just as Mandela's challenge is to consolidate the fractured African resistance to apartheid.

Mandela's release shifted him from being a national and international symbol of struggle to being, for some, a mere man, for others, one of the top leaders of a major South African political party. Back in the activist field, Mandela and the ANC (African National Congress) have had to adjust to the swiftness of events which have resulted in ANC and PAC being unbanned and expectations for significant change rising in the African population.

These are difficult times, however, for now concrete definitions of a new society need to be brought forward, and Mandela and the ANC need to reassure both capitalist and anti-capitalist sentiments lodged within different but significant portions of the society. Not only is the economic base of the future society under debate, there is also much internal disagreement on strategies to regain an **African** national identity for the country. This must take place on the philosophical and cultural levels, and is probably the most threatening to both the government and its Western allies.

It becomes more important now to know who Mandela is, both as a man and a politician. The timely third edition of *Nelson Mandela, The Struggle is My Life* includes all of the speeches and articles by Mandela from the second edition, as well as documents prepared by Mandela for his meetings with both P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk, in addition to speeches he made at rallies after his release.

The book elucidates the current platform of the ANC in the light of its history and emphasis is placed upon the public side of Mandela. A chapter on his wife, Winnie, is omitted from this edition, with explanation that the book *Part of My Soul Went With Him* tells her story. This clarifies Mandela's position as an ANC member, but it

Nomzamo Winnie Mandela has played a significant, if controversial, role in recent years and her uncompromising militancy has gained her much grassroots respect, even among people who are not ANC supporters. An update on Winnie's political role, albeit unofficial from the point of view of ANC, would nevertheless increase our understanding of the complexity of the current situation.

One comprehends when reading *The Struggle is My Life* that Mandela the activist has always been in the thick of things. Even in prison Mandela was not passive. The last section of the book provides a profile of Mandela as a dynamic man, continuing to sharpen his organizational and leadership skills while working out strategies for survival and resistance in prison.

Michael Dingake, an ANC prison comrade of Nelson's who is careful in his essay not to detract from the achievements of the other prisoners, writes about how rigorous discussion sessions with Mandela in prison were not aimed at reaching consensus; rather the aim was to learn from each other. This taught Dingake to look at both sides of the question and find the courage to admit that sometimes one has to come to conclusions which one feels are correct, but which are unpopular. To Dingake, jail did not change Mandela:

Comrade Mandela's attitude and conduct was that physically he was in prison, but psychologically he was free. That was why he could seriously tell Colonel Aucamp, the head of security in gaol, that he demanded the right to correspond with O. R. Tambo and exchange views on the liberation struggle! (p. 259)

What emerges in this book is not only the stature of Nelson Mandela as spokesman for the ANC, but also a pattern of consistency in articulation and policy. Faced with the difficult task of dealing with the foreign interests that are influential in the South African situation, Mandela reiterates frequently the independence and appropriateness of his programme to the South African situation and to the need for developing a democratic African state. Mandela has nevertheless no illusions that the most important arena is the internal one.

In a context where all sectional interests are seen as oppositional, Mandela has tried to present an image of the common interests of all South Africans, especially the black majority, being served within the broad goals of the ANC, which includes some nationalization of industry and democratic acceptance of the South African Communist Party.

This constitutes a very delicate area, because how it develops will be the measure of how representative of the African population the ANC will turn out to be. While Mandela and the ANC command considerable support, the African constituency is not supermalleable,

composed as it is of different generations of thinking people who have been in active resistance and who want to forge themselves an identity that is not dictated by the West. It is of vital importance, therefore, that the ANC be structured flexibly, in a way that will genuinely heed debate within African society, leading to a viable response to the current aspirations of the African majority.

With many useful appendices and cross-references, this new edition of *Nelson Mandela, The Struggle is My Life* is a primary resource for any understanding of the role of Mandela, and indeed it is a must for any study of South Africa.

Cheryl Dandridge-Perry