Celebrating the centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth and his nationalist humanist vision

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Busani Ngcaweni*

Abstract

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, charismatic and iconic, is a product of his time and can only be understood within the context of the social movements that he belonged to and led. Thus, this article locates Mandela within the local and global context in which he emerged while at the same time making sense of his instrumental interventions and nationalist humanist vision of life, peace and justice. This article situates Mandela's political life within the broader context of the third humanist revolution, which was a response to the inimical processes of racism, enslavement and colonisation. In its centenary celebration of Mandela, the article re-articulates how he embodied alternative politics founded on the will to live as opposed to the will to power; the paradigm of peace as opposed to the paradigm of war; political justice as opposed to criminal justice; as well as pluriversality as opposed to tragic notions of racial separate development known as apartheid. What is fleshed out is a 'Mandela phenomenon' as founded on strong progressive politics albeit predicated on the unstable idea of the potential of advocates and victims of apartheid undergoing a radical metamorphosis amenable to the birth of a new pluriversal society.

*   Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni is Professor and Acting Executive Director of the Change Management Unit (CMU) in the Principal and Vice-Chancellor's Office at the University of South Africa. Busani Ngcaweni is the Head of Policy and Research Services in the Presidency (RSA) and Non-Resident Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Busani Ngcaweni

Keywords: Nelson Mandela, nationalist humanism, politics of life, paradigm of peace, pluriversality, South Africa

Introduction

In his keynote address at the Centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth in 2018, former United States President Barack Obama strove to situate Mandela within the global epochs and contexts in which he was born, persecuted, practised politics and led South Africa. This was done in the interest of understanding how Mandela attained such an iconic status in global politics. In his acclaimed *Black Prophetic Fire* (2014), the leading Black American philosopher Cornel West also underscored the link between charismatic leaders and social movements:

> But I want to point out that any conception of the charismatic leader severed from social movements is false. I consider leaders and movements to be inseparable. There is no Frederick Douglas without the Abolitionist movement. There is no W.E.B. Du Bois without the Pan-Africanist, international workers', and Black freedom movements. There is no Martin Luther King Jr. without the anti-imperialist, workers', and civil rights movements. There is no Ella Baker without the anti-US-apartheid and Puerto Rican independence movements. There is no Malcolm X without the Black Nationalist and human rights movements. And there is no Ida B. Wells without the anti-US-terrorist and Black women's movements (West 2014:2).

Mandela is no exception; hence this article situates him within the third humanist revolution without ignoring the local African and South African contexts. We revisit the life of struggle and the legacy of Mandela mainly because this year (2018) marks one hundred years since Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in Qunu, South Africa. Mandela was an embodiment of the politics of life, which privileges co-existence of human beings irrespective of their race. Mandela sought to lead both perpetrators and victims of apartheid colonialism as 'survivors' into a new political formation known as the 'rainbow nation' of equal and consenting citizens.

He became an active leader in the epic struggle for liberation, and endured 27 years of imprisonment, 18 of which were spent at the notorious Robben Island. It was the violence and brutality of apartheid colonialism that forced Mandela and others in the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to embrace violence as a tool of liberation. Mandela was so committed to opposing the injustice of apartheid, with its logic of racism and colonialism and its paradigm of war, that he was prepared to die for the cause of democracy and human rights long before these values were globally accepted as part of the post-Cold War international normative order.

This set him apart as a leader who was fully committed to a decolonial ethical humanism that underpins the will to live. Even after enduring years of incarceration, Mandela avoided bitterness and preached a gospel of racial harmony, reconciliation and democracy. This character of Mandela emerges poignantly even within a context of a highly dynamic and ideologically eclectic environment of anti-colonial politics of the twentieth century. Mandela's leadership role during the transition from apartheid to democracy inaugurated a paradigm shift towards political reform and social transformation. When he became the first black president of a democratic South Africa in May 1994, Mandela practically and symbolically made important overtures to the erstwhile white racists, aimed at including them in a new, inclusive, non-racial, democratic, and *pluriversal* society – a world in which many worlds fit (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016:43; Mignolo 2011).

This article celebrates Mandela's centenary by analysing the 'Mandela phenomenon' as an encapsulation of humility, integrity, generosity of spirit, wisdom and servant leadership. This interpretation identifies Mandela as an advocate of decolonial humanism informed by what Dussel (2008: xvi) terms 'obediential power' to lead and command 'by obeying'. While in prison Mandela linked his personal freedom with that of the oppressed people of South Africa and, until his death in 2013, he consistently expressed how obedient he was to the ANC.

Mandela as a visionary leader in a humanist revolution of decolonisation

Mandela's life of struggle and resulting legacy form part of what the philosopher and decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008a:115) termed 'a third humanist revolution that has existed alongside the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, always pointing to their constitutive exclusions and aiming to provide a more consistent narrative of the affirmation of the value of the entire human species'.

In decolonial theory, the first humanist revolution was during the Renaissance where a 'shift from a God-centred worldview to a Man-centred conception of selves, others, and world' was initiated (Maldonado-Torres 2008a:106). The second was the Enlightenment humanism, which Immanuel Kant (1996:58) celebrated as mankind's emergence and liberation from 'self-incurred immaturity' which resulted in the creation of modern institutions. Of these modern institutions, nation-states became key examples (see also Maldonado-Torres 2008a:109).

The third humanist revolution is driven by thinkers, activists and intellectuals from the Global South who have experienced the 'dark side' of modernity, which included enslavement and colonisation, and is therefore inevitably predicated on decolonising and *deimperialising* the world. Its horizon is the regaining of the ontological density by black people and a new post-racial *pluriversality* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2016:42–44). By ontological density we mean black people reclaiming their *being* after centuries of dehumanising colonialism and apartheid.

The 'Mandela phenomenon' is cast as a direct challenge to the paradigm of war that Friedrich Nietzsche in his *The Will to Power* (1968) articulated, insisting that war was the natural state of things and that human beings were destined to rarely want peace and, if they did so, it was only for brief periods of time.

Broadly speaking, Mandela's life of struggle, and his legacy, challenge the paradigm of war and its ability to turn those who were involved in the

liberation struggle against such monstrosities as imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, and coloniality to end up becoming monsters themselves. We deploy a critical decolonial ethics of liberation to propose a new understanding of the meaning of the Mandela phenomenon, and suggest that he stood for a paradigm of peace. In this account, his life of struggle became an embodiment of *pluriversal* humanism – which is opposed to the racial hatred that emerged at the dawn of a Euro-North American-centric modernity.

The apartheid regime that came to power in South Africa in 1948 was a typical manifestation of this other side of modernity. It survived the early decolonisation processes of the 1960s and it continued to defy the global anti-apartheid onslaught until 1994. Apartheid existed as a constitutive element of the paradigm of war and coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b).

Mandela's political struggles as encapsulated in his autobiography and as demonstrated in his actual leadership of the ANC during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) as well as his presidency collectively signify a consistent push for the decolonial turn that Maldonado-Torres (2008b:8) articulated as including 'the definitive entry of enslaved and colonised subjectivities into the realm of thought at previously unknown institutional levels'.

Mandela and the politics of life

The will to live was at the centre of Mandela's preparedness to walk through the shadow of death towards freedom. The will to live is the nerve centre of the paradigm that Mandela's life of struggle and legacy embodied. Mandela was opposed to the paradigm of war even though the intransigency and brutality of the apartheid regime forced him to embrace violence and war as a protection for those who were victims of the apartheid system (Ngcaweni 2018).

The rise of Euro-North American-centric modernity enabled the birth of a modern subjectivity mediated by race as an organising principle.

A unique modernist consciousness that manifested itself in terms of a radical ontological unevenness between Euro-North Americans and non-Europeans emerged. A world system that Ramon Grosfoguel (2007, 2011) characterised as racially hierarchised, patriarchal, sexist, hetero-normative, Euro-North American-centric, Christian-centric, capitalist, imperial, colonial and modern was also born.

At the centre of this Euro-North American-centric world was what Maldonado-Torres (2007:245) described as the imperial Manichean Misanthropic Scepticism that was naturalised through the use of natural science to produce scientific racism. Constitutively, the paradigm of war is fed by racism and is inextricably tied to 'a peculiar death ethic that renders massacre and different forms of genocide as natural' (Maldonado-Torres 2008a:xi).

Mandela was not the first leader emerging from the Global South to embrace and articulate critical decolonial ethics of liberation as the foundation of a new politics of life as opposed to an imperial politics of death. Such previous decolonial humanists like Mahatma Gandhi, Aime Cesaire, William E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Albert Luthuli, Thomas Sankara, Kenneth Kaunda, and many others, were opposed to the paradigm of war (Cesaire 1955; James 1963; Du Bois 1965; Fanon 1968; Falola 2001; Rabaka 2010). Decolonisation and *deimperialisation* were considered to be essential pre-requisites for a planetary paradigm of peace to prevail. It had to be followed by the return of humanism as a foundation of socialist society where there was no exploitation of human beings by others.

Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, like Senghor, understood humanism in terms of African socialism, which he tried to implement in the form of *Ujamaa villages* (Nyerere 1968). Mandela understood humanism as *ubuntu* as a foundation for a rainbow nation (Mandela 1994).

The paradigm of peace is therefore inextricably linked with decoloniality. It is made possible by the decolonial turn. Du Bois in 1903 announced the decolonial turn as a rebellion against what he termed the 'colour line' that was constitutive of the core problems of the twentieth century.

By the problem of the 'colour line', Du Bois was speaking of increasing racism and forms of resistance and opposition that it was provoking. Broadly, the decolonial turn embodies a critical decolonial ethics of liberation:

> It posits the primacy of ethics as an antidote to problems with Western conceptions of freedom, autonomy and equality, as well as the necessity of politics to forge a world where ethical relations become the norm rather than the exception. The de-colonial turn highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity (Maldonado-Torres 2008b:7).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1993) expressed the decolonial turn in terms of 'moving the centre' (from Eurocentrism-*Europhonism* to a plurality of cultures) towards 're-membering Africa' – addressing Africa's fragmentation and restoring African cultural identity. It therefore becomes clear that the decolonial turn is rooted in struggles against racism, the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. But as noted by Maldonado-Torres (2008b:7), the decolonial turn 'began to take a definitive form after the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the wars for liberation of many colonised countries soon after'.

Critical decolonial ethics of liberation differ from post-colonial approaches that became dominant in the 1990s in a number of ways. Genealogically, decoloniality and critical decolonial ethics of liberation are traceable to the anti-slave trade, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-apartheid thinkers originating from the Global South, whereas post-colonialism is traceable to thinkers from the Global North such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Antonio Gramsci among many others who were not necessarily post-colonial theorists. Decoloniality grapples with what Grosfoguel (2007) terms *heterarchies* of power, knowledge and being that sustained an asymmetrical modern global system.

In terms of horizon, decoloniality seeks to attain a decolonised and *deimperialised* world in which a new *pluriversal* humanity is possible. Post-colonialism is part of a 'critique of modernity within modernity', which is genealogically building on Marxism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism (Wallerstein 1997). These critical interventions do not

directly address what decolonial theorists termed coloniality as the dark side of Euro-North American-centric modernity. The coloniality of being that took the form of hierarchisation of human races and the questioning of the very humanity of black people is one of the major departure points of decolonial approaches.

Mandela's life of struggle, and his legacy, is an embodiment of a consistent and active search for peace and harmony. In his autobiography, Mandela stated that:

> I always know that deep down in every human heart, there was mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to assure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished (Mandela 1994:609).

Mandela, typical of the decolonial ethics of liberation, interpreted the anti-colonial/anti-apartheid struggle as a humanistic movement for restoration of human life. This is how he put it:

> This then is what the ANC is fighting for. Their struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. *It is a struggle for the right to live* (my emphasis) (Mandela 1994:352).

This paradigm of peace marks a radical humanistic-oriented departure from the paradigm of war. It is premised on a radically humanistic phenomenology of liberation aimed at rescuing those reduced by racism to the category of the 'wretched of the earth' through recovery of their lost ontological density and epistemic virtues of intellectual integrity and freedom. Thus, what one gleans from Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* is that, in the face of apartheid's official and institutionalised racism as well as brutality and intolerance of dissent, he emerged as the advocate of decolonisation, a fighter for freedom, and the face of a new non-racial

inclusive humanism. It would seem that Mandela was ahead of his time. This is evident from his clear articulation of the discourse of democracy and human rights long before it became a major global normative issue. For many political actors and leaders, the discourse of democracy and human rights became a major issue at the end of the Cold War. But Mandela had already vowed to die for democracy and free society as long before as the 1960s.

Interestingly, Mandela also credited his Xhosa traditional society's mode of governance, which he described as 'democracy in its purest form' where everyone irrespective of societal rank was allowed space to 'voice their opinions and were equal in their value as citizens' (Mandela 1994:20). At the same time, Mandela described himself as 'being something of an Anglophile' and confessed that 'While I abhorred the notion of British imperialism, I never rejected the trappings of British style and manners' (Mandela 1994:48). Should we therefore not understand Mandela as a liberal-nationalist-decolonial humanist? Does Mandela fit into the line of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King's type who strongly believed in non-violent civil disobedience?

The answer is both yes and no. Mandela was instrumental in the formation of *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation) and became its commander-in-chief. This was the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC). The fighting forces had to adhere to a strict ethical conduct of only engaging in destabilisation and not in killing people. Even when Mandela was being tried for treason, he continued to tower above the apartheid system's provocations, brutality and violence, and was able to invite the architects of apartheid to return to humanity in a moving speech delivered during the course of the Rivonia Trials (1963–1964):

> During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realised. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die (Mandela 1994:352).

His liberation struggle was also aimed at the liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressors from the cul-de-sac of racialism in the truly Freireian resolution of the oppressor–oppressed contradiction created by colonialism and coloniality (Freire 1970). On this, Mandela wrote:

> It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I know anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity (Mandela 1994:611).

This set him apart from other African nationalist liberators like President Robert Gabriel Mugabe of Zimbabwe who ended up frustrated by the policy of reconciliation and finally reproduced the colonial paradigm of war of conquest predicated on race.

Mandela's practising of the politics of coexistential life

Various lives of Mandela are indeed discernible within which his political formation and making emerged and crystallised. Danny Schechter's *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* (2013) dramatises the various lives of Mandela. The historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2013:10) posited that the political formation of Mandela and the meaning of his politics as well as legacy 'cannot be fully understood through the psychologizing and symbolic discourses preferred in the popular media and hagiographies'. Zeleza emphasised that Mandela was a political actor within the broader drama of African nationalism and decolonial struggles and concluded that:

> Mandela embodied all the key phases, dynamics and ideologies of African nationalism from the period of elite nationalism before the Second World War when the nationalists made reformist demands on the colonial regimes, to the era of militant mass nationalism after the war when they demanded independence, to the phase of armed liberation (Zeleza 2013:10).

Zeleza (2003) distilled five important humanistic objectives of African nationalism that are visible in Mandela's life of struggle. These are: anti-colonial decolonisation, nation-building, development, democracy, and pan-African integration and unity. In another publication he added that:

> Reconciliation was such a powerful motif in the political discourses of transition to independence among some African leaders of the imperatives of nation building, the second goal of African nationalism. It was also a rhetorical response to the irrational and self-serving fears of imperial racism that since Africans were supposedly eternal wards of whites and incapable of ruling themselves, independence would unleash the atavistic violence of 'inter-tribal warfare' from which colonialism had saved the benighted continent, and in the post-settler colonies, the retributive cataclysm of white massacres (Zeleza 2013:12).

Mandela was, however, not the only African humanist who decried both racism and reverse racism. Mahmood Mamdani in his *Define and Rule* (2013c:112) documents how Julius Nyerere of Tanzania introduced an alternative model of statecraft that sought to dismantle both tribalism and racism in the same manner that Mandela sought to dismantle apartheid colonialism. Like Mandela, Nyerere in 1962 sought to create an inclusive citizenship. Nyerere even stated publicly that:

> If we are going to base citizenship on colour we will commit a crime. Discrimination against human beings because of their colour is exactly what we have been fighting against […] They are preaching discrimination as a religion to us. And they stand like Hitlers and begin to glorify the race. We glorify human beings, not colour (quoted in Mamdani 2013c:112–113).

However what emerges poignantly about Mandela's life of struggle are various challenges cascading from exigencies of navigating complex but fading African and strong racial colonial realities. The first issue facing Mandela during his political formative years was how to rise above his parochial cultural identity. Mandela was born into a Xhosa family in Eastern Cape. Therefore, Xhosa custom, ritual and taboo shaped his early life in a profound way. Inevitably his mentality was shaped in Eastern Cape

where he was born and grew up. Mandela's formative political consciousness was influenced by what was happening at the 'Great Place' (royal place) of Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo, the acting regent of the Thembu people. This is clearly articulated by him in his autobiography: 'My later notions of leadership were profoundly influenced by observing the regent and his court. I watched and learned from the tribal meetings that were regularly held at the Great Place' (Mandela 1994:19).

Chief Jongintaba had become Mandela's guardian after he lost his father. Mandela therefore grew up as part of a royal family, knowing that he was a Thembu first, and a Xhosa second. He did not know that he was a South African. It was only when he went to school that he felt a change: 'I began to sense my identity as an African, not just a Thembu, or even Xhosa. But this was still a nascent feeling' (Mandela 1994:36).

Mandela admits that he had to learn through travel and exposure that he was a South African who was experiencing racial discrimination and domination. Mandela also mentioned in his autobiography that some prisoners criticised him of always keeping the company of Xhosa speaking prisoners. He had to grow from this ethnic parochialism.

The second issue Mandela had to deal with was that of his political consciousness. Mahmood Mamdani once argued that 'without the experience of sickness, there can be no idea of health. And without the fact of oppression, there can be no practice of resistance and no notion of rights' (1991:236). Mandela's explanation of his political formation and consciousness seems to confirm Mamdani's argument. Mandela stated that:

> I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicised, when I knew that I would spend my life in the liberation struggle. To be African in South Africa means that one is politicised from the moment of one's birth, whether one acknowledges it or not. An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an African Only area and attends Africans Only schools, if he attends school at all (Mandela 1994:89).

However, Mandela admits that when he left the University of Fort Hare, he was advanced socially but not politically. He only developed politically when he reached Johannesburg, 'a city of dreams, a place where one could transform oneself from a poor peasant into a wealthy sophisticate, a city of danger and opportunity' (Mandela 1994:56).

What is worth noting is that Mandela's early political consciousness was deeply nationalistic. He rejected communism. He also rejected involvement of Indians and whites in African politics. As he puts it: 'At the time, I was firmly opposed to allowing communists or whites to join the league' (Mandela 1994:94). He elaborated that during the heyday of the ANC Youth League:

> I was sympathetic to the ultra-revolutionary stream of African nationalism. I was angry at the white man, not at racism. While I was not prepared to hurl the white man into the sea, I would have been perfectly happy if he climbed aboard his steamship and left the continent on his own volition (Mandela 1994:106).

The third issue confronting Mandela was to decide what was entailed in being a freedom fighter. Besides his activism and leadership within the ANC Youth League, by 1952 Mandela had become part of the ANC leadership when he was appointed First Deputy President to Chief Albert Luthuli. It was also a time for Mandela to reflect and revise some of his political convictions. He began to study works of Marxism and Leninism which resulted in him changing his opposition to communism without changing his nationalist bona fides.

His frontline leadership included the drawing up of the M-Plan, which would ensure the continued existence and operation of the ANC in the event it was banned. Part of the M-Plan included political lectures on 'The World We Live In', 'How We are Governed' and 'The Need for Change' (Mandela 1994:135). Mandela also took the initiative to critique the strategy of non-violence. His idea was that 'non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there was no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon' (Mandela 1994:147). Mandela strongly believed that

'To overthrow oppression has been sanctioned by humanity and is the highest aspiration of every free man' (Mandela 1994:151). It was the experience of how the apartheid government responded to the Defiance Campaign that prompted Mandela to see no alternative to armed and violent resistance. His conclusion:

> A freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire (Mandela 1994:155).

Mandela was therefore not a typical Gandhi character, though his struggle had deep elements of Gandhism. The intransigence and violence of apartheid could not be dealt with using only Gandhian tools, which can be seen in Mandela's role in the establishment of *uMkhonto we Sizwe* as a military wing of the ANC in the post-Sharpeville period.

The fourth issue to deal with was the meaning of being a symbol of resistance. The long imprisonment of Mandela inadvertently contributed in a big way to the making of a global icon. Mandela became a microcosm of the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle as a whole. In prison, he continued to play a leading role as the spokesperson for all the prisoners. Mandela spent 18 years on Robben Island and he used that time to develop an even deeper understanding of the problems facing South Africa and the possible resolutions.

He entered prison as a radical nationalist and emerged from it as a radical humanist – a voice of reason and moderation. By the time of his release at the age of 71, Mandela had assumed a mythical stature within anti-colonial and anti-racist political formations. He became a 'living' martyr of the liberation struggle. On the impact of imprisonment on one's character, he wrote that 'Perhaps it requires such depths of oppression to create such heights of character' (Mandela 1994:609).

In justifying his individual initiative to initiate negotiations with the apartheid regime, Mandela stated that 'There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he

is leading his people the right way' (Mandela 1994:510–511). Opening up negotiations with the apartheid regime was very risky. Mandela risked being misunderstood by the ANC both inside and outside South Africa. The bigger risk was well captured by Schechter (2013:28): 'He was one man up against an adversary with a whole bureaucracy behind it'. But by standing on a high moral and humanistic pedestal, Mandela managed to gradually gain the confidence of his adversaries and support of the progressive world.

In initiating the negotiations, Mandela was in the process transforming his political identity from terrorist and prisoner to negotiator and facilitator of 'talks' between the ANC and the apartheid regime. Through his initiative, Mandela managed to pull off one of the most challenging, significant and unexpected transitions from apartheid colonialism and authoritarianism to democracy. It is important to analyse and evaluate how the negotiations that produced the transition to democracy in South Africa were informed by a new logic of justice that was superior to the post-1945 Nuremberg template.

Mandela and the transition to democracy

The paradigm of war gave birth to the Nuremberg trials as a template of justice. The paradigm of peace produces political justice. As argued by Mamdani (2013a; 2013b), the Nuremberg paradigm is predicated on the logic that violence should be 'criminalized without exception, its perpetrators identified and tried in a court of law'. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) paradigm of justice became predicated on a particular understanding of mass violence as political rather than criminal, which suggested a re-making of political society through political reform as a lasting solution (Mamdani 2013a; 2013b).

It would seem Mandela, working together with other stalwarts of the struggle like Joe Slovo, was fully committed to trying something new in the domain of transitional justice. In fact, the situation of a political stalemate needed political innovation and creativity to unblock. Mamdani (2013a:6) captured this situation as follows: 'neither revolution (for liberation movements) nor military victory (for the apartheid regime) was on the

cards.' Mandela led the ANC into CODESA fully aware that it was another 'theatre of struggle, subject to advances and reverses as any other struggle' (Mandela 1994:577).

History was not on the side of the apartheid regime. Apartheid had far outlived its life as a form of colonialism. If it survived the decolonial winds of change of the 1960s and 1970s, it could not survive the post-Cold War 'Third Wave' of democracy and human rights. One can even say the post-Cold War dispensation was more favourable to Mandela's initiatives. But the ANC had also lost its major ally in the form of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ramphela 2008:45).

These points are reinforced by Frank B. Wilderson (2010) who has argued that it took major tectonic shifts in the global paradigmatic arrangement of white power such as the fall of the Soviet Union, which was the major backer of the ANC, the return of 40 000 black bourgeoisie exiles from Western capitals and a crumbling global economy, 'for there to be synergistic meeting of Mandela's moral fibre and the aspirations of white economic power' (Wilderson 2010:8). Indeed, imperatives and interests of white capitalists who were experiencing the biting effects of sanctions and popular unrest at home played an important role in influencing the negotiators.

But it is clear that what Mandela wanted and demanded from the apartheid regime was the dismantlement of apartheid and commitment to a non-racial, democratic and free society. He sought to achieve this through the following strategy: 'To make peace with an enemy, one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes your partner' (Mandela 1994:598).

Building on Mamdani's argument (2013a) on how South Africa's transition to democracy was predicated on a paradigmatic shift from the post-Second World War Nuremberg form of justice founded on criminal justice, one arrives at a favourable evaluation of CODESA. It was not merely a time of betrayal of decolonial liberation struggle through compromises; CODESA embodied another form of justice, a reality well captured by Mamdani, who wrote that:

> Whereas Nuremburg shaped a notion of justice as *criminal* justice, CODESA calls on us to think of justice as primarily *political*. Whereas Nuremberg has become the basis of a notion of *victim's justice* – as a complement to victor's justice than a contrast to it – CODESA provides the basis for an alternative notion of justice, which I call *survivor's justice* (Mamdani 2013a:2).

Mamdani went on to elaborate on the differences between criminal justice and political justice in this way:

> CODESA prioritized political justice over criminal justice. The difference is that criminal justice targets individuals whereas political justice affects entire groups. Whereas the object of criminal justice is punishment, that of political justice is political reform. The difference in consequence is equally dramatic (Mamdani 2013a:7).

Indeed, the decolonial anti-apartheid struggle was not meant to punish the ideologues of apartheid but to destroy the edifice of apartheid itself. On the ashes of juridical apartheid, the ANC and Mandela envisaged a new post-racial and *pluriversal* political community founded on new humanism and inclusive citizenship. The ghost of apartheid had to be laid to rest. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was the chosen mechanism for 'laying ghosts of the dark past to rest with neither retributive justice nor promotion of a culture of impunity' (Ramphela 2008:46). Mamdani (2013a:13) credited the TRC for transcending the Nuremberg trap 'by displacing the logic of crime and punishment with that of crime and confession'.

Netshitenzhe (2012) explained the logic of the negotiations and the settlement from the perspective of the ANC thus: 'At the risk of over-simplification, it can be argued that a critical element of that settlement, from the point of view of the ANC, was the logic of capturing a bridgehead: to codify basic rights and use these as the basis for more thoroughgoing transformation of South African society' (Netshitenzhe 2012:16).

Perhaps a strong confidence in the morality of decolonial humanism made the ANC and Mandela naïve, even to the extent of expecting those who benefitted economically from apartheid to be immediately reborn into

new compassionate human beings who would acknowledge the historical grievances of those who were abused and dispossessed by apartheid, and voluntarily commit themselves to play an active role in the equal sharing of resources.

But Netshitenzhe reinforced the notion that decolonial humanism induced Mandela and the ANC to imagine a more inclusive post-apartheid South Africa. For him:

> The articulation of the ANC mission by some of its more visionary leaders suggests an approach that, in time, should transcend the detail of statistical bean counting and emphasis on race and explicitly incorporate *the desire to contribute to the evolution of human civilization. At the foundation of this should be democracy with a social content*, excellence in the acquisition of knowledge and the utilization of science and *a profound humanism* (my emphasis) (Netshitenzhe 2012:27).

Mandela is a child of this ANC decolonial humanism. But concretely speaking, the year 1994 marked not only the end of administrative apartheid, but more importantly the beginning of a difficult process of nation-building, which was always tempered with a delicate balancing between allaying white fears and attending to black expectations and demands. This reality became a major test of Mandela's politics of life.

The Mandela presidency and the practice of politics of life

At a practical level Mandela's politics of life found expression in refusing to diminish one's dignity through diminishing the dignity of others. Thus he avoided the humiliating of adversaries as he sought to create a new South Africa. When he became the first black president of South Africa in 1994, Mandela implemented a decolonial humanist vision of a post-racial *pluriversal* society. At the core of this vision was a departure from racism towards a deeper appreciation of the importance of difference.

In this vision, difference is not interpreted in terms of superior and inferior races. It is interpreted in terms of *pluriversality*. Maldonado-Torres (2008a:126) argued that the appreciation of human difference is informed

by a humanistic 'interest in restoring authentic and critical sociality beyond the colour-line'. This point is also articulated by Lewis R. Gordon (1995:154) who posited that 'the road out of misanthropy is a road that leads to the appreciation of the importance of difference'. Apartheid was a worse form of misanthropy founded on 'bad faith'. It had to be transcended by all means, including symbolic ways.

This is why Mandela's presidency was a terrain of the symbolic, which he used effectively to further welcome and entice the erstwhile racists into a new South Africa. Nation-building through use of symbolic gestures and other means, including sporting events, dominated Mandela's presidency. These involved him visiting the 94-year-old widow of Hendrik Verwoerd, who was identified as the ideologue of apartheid and its architect. Mandela also agreed to the erection of a statue in remembrance of Verwoerd. He visited Percy Yutar, who played the role of prosecutor during the Rivonia Trial in which Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment. He even visited ex-apartheid President P.W. Botha. While he was criticised in some quarters of bending too much to placate whites, his idea was to ensure that indeed the erstwhile 'settlers'/'citizens' and the erstwhile 'natives'/'subjects' were afforded enough room to be re-born politically into consenting citizens living in a new political society where racism was not tolerated (Mamdani 2001:63–70).

Conclusion and recommendations

This article attempts to understand the Mandela phenomenon as founded on strong principles opposed to the persistent paradigm of war and its founding charter of the will to power. Mandela is analysed as an embodiment of the politics of life that emerged within a modern world that was bereft of humanness, goodness, love, peace, humility, forgiveness, trust and optimism. It was a world dominated by the paradigms of war and racism.

Mandela provided an antidote to the paradigm of war. He introduced the paradigm of peace, reconciliation and racial harmony. He was

moved politically by profound humanism. He signified what Thandika Mkandawire (2013:3) has termed a 'sane relationship to power', a rare commitment to democracy and rule of law to the extent that 'In a sense … normalized the idea of democracy in Africa' (Mkandawire 2013:3).

Wilderson (2010:11–13) accused Mandela of being a sell-out who squandered the revolutionary potential of the ANC and ignored the Freedom Charter as he compromised with white and global capital. In the year marking one hundred years since Mandela's birth, 2018, we have seen this Mandela was a sell-out narrative being repeated in public discourse.

The rebuttal is that the balance of forces did not allow Mandela enough room to manoeuvre because he was dealing with an *undefeated* enemy. Mandela had to inevitably pursue a middle of the road strategy in the hope that in future white privileges and hegemony would be diluted through structural reforms that would bring about prosperity for the black majority. He made compromises fully cognisant of the need to balance the outcomes of negotiations for a win-win situation. He wanted to re-member the oppressed without necessarily dis-membering the oppressor (Ngcaweni 2018).

His vision of a post-racial *pluriversal* world remains powerful in a modern world that is trapped in a paradigm of war and the narrow Nuremberg paradigm of justice that is replicated by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Paul Maylam (2009:31) is correct to argue that Mandela 'stands out among world leaders of the last century as a person not obsessed with power, not entangled in the politics of manipulation and spin, not enticed into conspicuous consumption, but forever humble, honest and human'.

The challenge for leadership today, in South Africa and beyond, is to recall the teachings of Mandela and seek practical ways of developing a social order that brings economic freedom to the poor and the marginalised, an order that negotiates conflict and finds viable solutions, an arrangement that restores the dignity of the people, and societies that live in peace and justice. Further, the best tribute to Mandela would be responding to his call for the world's people to show unity, service and sacrifice, for not so often does the death of one mortal mobilise the international community to join hands in the advancement of an all-inclusive civilisation (Ngcaweni 2018).

Sources

Cesaire, Aime 1955. *Discourse on colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. New York, Monthly Review Press.

Du Bois, W.E.B. 1965. *The world and Africa: An inquiry into the part which Africa has played in world history*. New York, International Publisher.

Dussel, Enrique 2008. *Twenty theses on politics*. Translated by George Ciccariello-Maher. Durham and London, Duke University Press.

Falola, Toyin 2001. *Nationalism and African intellectuals*. Rochester, University of Rochester Press.

Fanon, Frantz 1968. *The wretched of the earth*. New York, Grove Press.

Freire, Paul 1970. *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York and London, Continuum.

Gordon, Lewis R. 1995. *Bad faith and antiblack racism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ, Humanities Press.

Grosfoguel, Ramon 2007. The epistemic decolonial turn: Beyond political-economy paradigms. *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2–3), pp. 211–223.

Grosfoguel, Ramon 2011. Decolonizing post-colonial studies and the paradigms of political-economy: Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality. *Modernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1 (1), pp. 1–39.

James, C.L.R. 1963. *The black jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo revolution*. Second edition, revised. New York, Vintage Books.

Kant, Immanuel 1996. An answer to the question: What is enlightenment? In: Schmidt, J. ed. *What is enlightenment? Eighteenth-century answers and twentieth-century questions*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson 2007. On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies,* 21 (2–3), pp. 240–270.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson 2008a. Lewis Gordon: Philosopher of the human. *CLR James Journal*, 14 (1), pp. 103–137.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson 2008b. *Against war: View from the underside of modernity*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood 1991. Social movements and constitutionalism in the African context. In: Shivji, I.G. ed. *State and constitutionalism: An African debate on democracy*. Harare, SAPES Books. pp. 236–237.

Mamdani, Mahmood 2001. When does a settler become a native? Citizenship and identity in a settler society. *Pretext: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 10 (1), pp. 63–89.

Mamdani, Mahmood 2013a, Beyond Nuremberg: The historical significance of the post-apartheid transition in South Africa. Unpublished 2013 annual inaugural lecture delivered at Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, University of Witwatersrand, 18 March.

Mamdani, Mahmood 2013b. The logic of Nuremberg. In: Wilmers, Mary-Kay ed. *London Review of Books*, 7 November. Bloomsbury, Nicolas Spice. pp. 33–34.

Mamdani, Mahmood 2013c. *Define and rule: Native as political identity*. Johannesburg, Wits University Press.

Mandela, Nelson 1994. *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. London, Little Brown.

Maylam, Paul 2009. Archetypal hero or living saint? The veneration of Nelson Mandela. *Historia*, 54 (2), pp. 21–36.

Mendieta, Eduardo 2008. Foreword: The liberation of politics: alterity, solidarity, liberation. In: Dussel, E. ed. *Twenty theses on politics*. Translated by George Ciccariello-Maher. Durham and London, Duke University Press. pp. vii–xiii.

Mignolo, Walter D. 2011. *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, Decolonial options*. Durham, NC, and London, Duke University Press.

Mkandawire, Thandika 2013. For my generation, the death of Mandela marks the end of Africa's liberation. Available from: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2013/12/06/for-my-generation-the-death-of-mandela-marks-the-end-of-africas-liberation-struggle-thandika-mkandawire/> [Accessed 9 December 2013].

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2013a. *Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity*. New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2013b *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization*. Dakar, CODESRIA Book Series, 2013.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. J. 2016. *The decolonial Mandela: Peace, justice and the politics of life*. Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1968. *The will to power*. New York, Penguin Classics.

Netshitenzhe, Joel 2012. Second keynote address: A continuing search for identity: Carrying the burden of history. In: Lissoni, A., J. Soske, N. Erlank, N. Nieftagodien and O. Badsha. eds. *One hundred years of the ANC: Debating liberation histories today*. Johannesburg, Wits University Press. pp. 13–27.

Ngcaweni, Busani 2018. *Righting writings on 'righteous' Mandela*. The daily maverick. Available from: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2018-07-18-righting-writings-on-righteous-mandela/> [Accessed 14 October 2018].

Nyerere, Julius K. 1968. *Freedom and socialism*. New York, Oxford University Press.

Rabaka, Reiland 2010. *African critical theory: Reconstructing the black radical tradition, from W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral*. Lenham and Boulder, Lexington Books.

Ramphela, Mamphela 2008. *Laying ghosts to rest: Dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa*. Cape Town, Tafelberg.

Schechter, Danny 2013. *Madiba A to Z: The many faces of Nelson Mandela*. Johannesburg, Jacana Media.

wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ 1993. *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms*. Oxford, James Currey.

Wallerstein, I. 1997. Eurocentrism and its avatars: The dilemmas of social science. *New Left Review*, 226, pp. 93–107.

West, Cornel 2014. *Black prophetic fire*. In dialogue with and edited by Christa Buschendorf. Boston, Beacon Press.

Wilderson, Frederick B. 2010. Obama and Mandela: The parallels and the differences. Unpublished paper presented at the Concerned Citizens of Laguna Woods Village, 2 February.

Zeleza, Paul T. 2003. *Rethinking Africa's globalization: Volume 1: The intellectual challenges*. Trenton, Africa World Press.

Zeleza, Paul T. 2013. Mandela's long walk with African history. *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 2013 (3&4), pp. 10–13.