

THE SUBSTANCE AND POLITICS OF NELSON MANDELA'S RECONCILIATION EFFORTS DURING THE MANDELAN DECADE

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Abstract

The history of the first ten years of post-apartheid South Africa is essentially the history of the numerous efforts that Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela made to achieve reconciliation between the beneficiaries and victims of apartheid. His historic inauguration on 10 May, 1994 as the first-ever fully democratically elected president of South Africa closed the darkest period in that country's history. Apartheid, which came to an end with his presidential inauguration, was a state policy of racial segregation, and has existed only in South Africa. Racial segregation, of course, has existed in other countries such as the United States, but not as a state policy. Interestingly, the abolition of apartheid created another serious problem---how to navigate the deeply-divided country through the tricky, treacherous terrain of transition from white minority rule to



black majority rule. Mandela, upon whose shoulders this task fell, faced certain difficulties as he tried to help the country come over its unpleasant past. The major difficulty was how to appease the victims, without alarming the beneficiaries, of apartheid. Those ten years of his centrality in his country's politics viz. 1990-1999 are referred to in this paper as the "Mandelan Decade". This study, through the intricate application of fact, sympathy and understanding took time to gather and garner evidential facts made bare by quantitative and qualitative information. In the light of this, the paper duly, exemplarily upholds Mandela's political attributes, but recommends it for global emulation for peaceful coexistence in racially-divided societies. The Mandelan Decade in South African annals remain a good referral.

Key words: Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, South Africa, apartheid, Mandelan Decade, Segregation.

Introduction

Historians quarrel over sundry issues. Among the issues is the role which the individual, the environment, or chance plays in history. The intellectual dispute over the role of the individual in history has been raging since Thomas Carlyle said that history is nothing but a record of the deeds of great men. This assertion immediately provoked Thomas Spencer's counter-assertion that history is produced by a confluence of environmental factors. Carlyle's assertion which is of the spontaneous and creationist defines history as "the biography of great men." Spencer's, on the other hand, is of the cumulative and evolutionist and sees history as a product of the antecedent environmental conditions that paved the way for the emergence of Carlyle's "great man." The kernel of Carlyle's argument is that

Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men...the modellers, patters, and in a wide sense creators, of whatever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may be justly considered, were the history of these.¹

In contradistinction, the kernel of Spencer's is that

[T]he genesis of the great man depends on the long series of complex influences which has produced the race in which he appears, and the social state into which that race has slowly grown. If it be a fact that the great man may modify his nation in its structure and actions, it is also a fact that there must have been those antecedent modifications constituting national progress before he could be evolved. Before he can re-make his society, his society must make him. So that all those changes of which he is the proximate initiator have their chief causes in the generations he descended from. If there is to be anything like a real explanation of

these changes, it must be sought in that aggregate of conditions out of which both he and they have arisen.²

In his attack on Carlyle's theory, Spencer said that "the theory breaks down completely" when asked: "whence comes the great man?"³ If the great man to whom Carlyle and his intellectual soul mates have given disproportionate attention in their conception of history-making is "natural", and not "supernatural", then the attention should be withdrawn since the great man "must be seen as a product of all the other phenomena in the society that gave him birth. These other phenomena are his antecedents, without which he cannot be. He is a resultant of an enormous aggregate of forces that have been co-operating for ages."⁴ Spencer finds an ally in G.V. Plekhanov who said that "General historical circumstances are stronger than the strongest individuals."⁵

Mandela, who dominated South African politics during the first ten years of the post-apartheid era, is affected by these two opposing contemplations of role-making in history. But he is affected more by the former, for while he was "a leader, a modeller, a patter [patternner], a creator of the much of the inter-racial toleration that have sustained post-apartheid South Africa," he did not allow the antecedent circumstances of the apartheid decades to shape his responses to the post-apartheid circumstances, as Spencer would, of course, logically have expected him to do. His

responses deflated Plekhanov's assertion more than it did Spencer's. If Plekhanov was still alive to see how Mandela treated reconciliation and forgiveness as articles of faith after his release from prison, he would be most likely to have felt a necessity to revise his assertion on the influence of environmental circumstances upon the individuals. Mandela did say that "Most men... are influenced by their background."⁶ Yet, he did not allow his own experiences under apartheid to influence his perception of racial relationship before and after his prison years. Of course, his long imprisonment stint did have moderating influence on him as he confessed in the following words:

The cell is an ideal place to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the process of your own mind and feelings. In judging our progress individuals we tend to concentrate on external factors such as one's social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education. These are, of course, important in measuring one's success in material matters and it is perfectly understandable if many people exert themselves mainly to achieve all these. But internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being. Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others---qualities which are within easy reach of every soul---are the foundation of one's spiritual life. Development in matters of this nature is inconceivable without serious introspection, without

*knowing yourself, your weaknesses and mistakes. At least, if for nothing else, the cell gives you the opportunity to look daily into your entire conduct, to overcome the bad and develop whatever is good in you. Regular meditation, say about 15 minutes a day before you turn in, can be fruitful in this regard. You may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative features in your life, but the 10th attempt may yield rich rewards. Never forget that a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.*⁷

This role issue is germane to the present examination of the efforts Mandela made during the ten years of his active involvement in the national politics to help South Africans come over the deep animosities of apartheid. That Mandela, as a great man whose actions largely shaped the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa's politics, must have benefitted a lot from the companionship of other great compatriots, Desmond Tutu and FW de Klerk validates Boris Pasternak's contention that "No single man makes history."

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) is arguably one of the world's most celebrated political figures. He was a moral legend of the status of Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Ghandi, and Martin Luther King jnr. He was the first black president of South Africa. He is the only individual to have a day celebrated in his honour by the United Nations (18 July). Monuments have been erected to his memory in

many different parts of the world. He was a Nobel Peace laureate. He spent twenty-seven years in prison for fighting to overthrow apartheid and has been called “prince of political prisoners.”⁸ One account described him as the world’s most popular brand after Coca-Cola.⁹ Another account described him as “a secular saint,”¹⁰ even though he had had told his wife Winnie that “a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.”¹¹ The BBC described him as “perhaps the most generally admired figure of our age.”¹² Barack Obama in his Foreword to *Conversations with Myself* wrote: “Even when faced with the temptation to seek revenge, he [Mandela] saw the need for reconciliation, and the triumph of principle over mere power...Underneath the history that has been made, there is a human being who chose hope over fear---progress over the prisons of the past.”¹³

Mandela’s fame was one of the unintended consequences of apartheid. Mandela did not become famous as a result of “our yearnings for perfect heroes.”¹⁴ Neither did he attain fame specifically for the role he played in the abolition of apartheid in South Africa or for becoming the first black president of his country. Rather, he attained fame for his ability to restrain himself

and fellow victims of apartheid from avenging themselves for the apartheid injustices, even when he could have contrived to use the apparatuses of state power to attempt retributive justice. Without his moderating presence, a civil war might have broken out from a possible attempt by the “Young Turks” of the ANC to seize white-owned properties and drive out the whites out of the country.

He was not the only one who fought against apartheid. There were many other people--- both black and white--- that fought against it. Some of them like Steve Biko, Robert Sobukwe, and Rick Turner even died in the struggle. Also, he was not the only one that served a long prison term. Govan Mbeki served twenty-four years; Walter Sisulu, twenty-five years; Ahmed Kathrada , twenty-six years, just one year short of Mandela’s twenty-seven years. So what made Mandela a global icon was not actually his long prison years, but rather the decisions he took not to avenge the apartheid injustices.

Mandela, who spent the ten years of his post-prison political life on trying to help South Africans to overcome their deeply scarred past, inherited some complex political, economic and social challenges when he became president of South Africa in 1994. Apartheid had sustained itself on policies of contrived political, economic, and social deprivations of the black majority. The transfer of political power from white to black was begrudged by the ultra-nationalist elements of the Afrikaner population, who saw it as a self-signed death sentence by the whites. Whites, who found it exceedingly difficult to reconcile themselves to the fact that they had lost the political power which they might not be able to recover even in the most distant future, needed iron-cast assurances of a blanket amnesty for apartheid crimes and loss of

economic predomination acquired under apartheid in the new dispensation under black majority. But while it would be easy to guarantee protection of the political rights, it would be difficult with the economic. These demands were at odd with the blacks' demands for restorative, distributive and retributive justice. The world watched with bated breath as Mandela ascended power because the decisions he would make would determine the future of post-apartheid South Africa.

Fortunately, only a tiny percentage of the black population demanded retributive justice. Most of the veterans of the liberation struggle only demanded restorative/distributive justice. But these two demands were tricky. The first one could not have been gratified without triggering a civil war; and the second one, if maladroitly handled, could have led to a major economic crisis viz. an exodus of the sinews of the economy comprised of white entrepreneurship, capital, and skills. An exodus would have led to the type of the economic crisis that happened in neighbouring Zimbabwe following Mugabe's land reforms. Mandela defused the tension that welled up over black demands with the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the launch of black economic empowerment programmes.

Mandela, who until his release from prison, did not renounce his belief in the use of targeted violence to achieve the establishment of a society in which skin colour would not be a basis for political and socio-economic advancement, appears to have not yet been given his rightful place in the post-apartheid history of South Africa. The debate as to who he was---was he a peacemaker who sought and achieved reconciliation from the conviction that it had

to be done even though it should have come after justice had been done or was he simply a coward who ran away from genuine demands for justice for apartheid crimes rages on.

This paper attempts to x-ray Mandela's efforts to help South Africans come over their deeply-scarred past. Its verdict is that even though the efforts succeeded at the expense of justice, they should be commended for midwifing the most delicate period in the transition from minority to majority rule in South Africa. The epochal compartment of this study, the 'Mandelan Decade' (the ten years of Mandela's active engagement in South African politics), is divided into two periods viz. 1990-1994 before Mandela took office as transitional president, and 1994-1999 when he was in office.

The Pre-Presidential Period (1990-1994)

The efforts which Mandela made to help his compatriots come over the bitterness of their past preceded his release, on February 11, 1990, from his twenty-seven- year imprisonment. He initiated, without the consent of his party and at the risk of losing the confidence of his colleagues, negotiations with the apartheid government on how to non-violently abolish apartheid and install multi-racial democracy while he was still in prison. According to him,

I chose to tell no one of what I was about to do. Not my colleagues upstairs or those in Lusaka. The ANC [African National Congress] is a collective, but the government had made collectivity in this case impossible. I did not have the security or the time to



discuss these issues with my organization. I knew that my colleagues upstairs would condemn my proposal, and that would kill my initiative even before it was born. 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.¹⁵

Mandela wanted peace, but not at the expense of compromising his convictions. Hence, he repeatedly rejected offers of conditional release from prison. His demand for unconditional release was meant to ensure that the transition was irreversible as well as to save complications that could possibly develop from a breach of the terms of the transition from minority rule to majority rule. A possible breach of the terms by either side was bound to throw everything and everyone back into the status-quo ante. The apartheid regime could have viewed any move by the anti-apartheid movements as a threat and a violation of the conditions under which their leaders were released in the first place. In fact, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the movements not to have alarmed the regime after their release from prison. It was highly possible that whatever agreement that would have been signed would be breached even before the ink with which it was signed had dried. The movements would have negotiated under duress and would likely repudiate whatever agreements they signed sooner rather than later.

Mandela engaged both the establishment and the individuals in his reconciliation efforts. One of the major problems with the pre-

presidential period of the Mandelan Decade was that then neither the ANC nor the apartheid government of President Frederick de Klerk had firm control over the direction and momentum of the reconciliation efforts. Hence, the two sides depended a lot upon outsiders---individuals and organizations---for guidance and exhortation. The transition to multi-racial democracy was almost scuttled by miscommunication of intentions, breakdown in communication, occasional loss of temper, and contrived intrigues. For example, Mandela once lost temper with de Klerk for the latter's allegation that the ANC and its allies were the guilty parties in the ANC-IFP [Inkhata Freedom Party] black-on-black violence that almost scuttled the transition. In his reply to the allegation, Mandela said:

In the face of the two critical issues which stand in the way of the transition to democracy, you have chosen to raise other issues as matters requiring urgent negotiations. Instead of addressing the critical issues with the statesmanship they require your entire letter takes the form of a party political reply. Perhaps this confusion on your side is understandable in the context of your being the head of the NP government. But it is inexcusable in the context of your persistent claims based on the right to govern and your position as State President. Your charges against the ANC and its Allies are part of the baggage of apartheid ideology. We reject with contempt your propagandistic version of what is supposed to be happening inside the ANC and the Alliance. It has been the tradition of successive National

Party regimes to try to discredit our Movement on the basis that you know black people better than black people know themselves. With the right to peaceful demonstration goes our inherent right to determine its nature and aims. The dangers of further violence must be laid at the doors of those who are resisting change. Successive NP regimes have always sought to crush our mass campaigns by raising the spectre of violence and disruption as being inherent in our campaigns. This was so in the case of the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the Freedom Charter Campaign of 1955, the Alexander Bus Boycott of 1957, the numerous national stay always, etc, including those of the recent period. But the record is clear; wherever and whenever violence raised its head, it has been initiated and provoked by the government side. And in the more recent cases they include your surrogates. Given the party political nature of your reply, we would urge you to desist from this course in addressing our demands. Find a way within yourself to recognise the gravity of the crisis. The starting point for this is that you stop deluding yourself that it is the ANC and its Allies programme of mass action which is the cause of the crisis. It would be a grave mistake if your government thinks that resorting to repression and the use of the military and police power that it commands can be a means of resolving the conflict. Find a way to address the demands we have placed before you with regards to the negotiations deadlock and those relating to the violence so that negotiations can become

*meaningful and be vested with the urgency that the situation requires. Failure to respond in this way can only exacerbate the crisis. You may succeed in delaying, but never in preventing, the transition of South Africa to a democracy.*¹⁶

He accused the apartheid government of trying to use the IFP to scuttle the transition.¹⁷ That allegation carried a lot of weight when examined against the backdrop of the apocalyptic prediction that “South Africa... would, under black rule, descend into internecine chaos and simply go the way [of] the rest of Africa.”¹⁸

Perhaps, no African country faced a greater possibility of a civil war on the eve of independence than South Africa did when Mandela assumed the presidency. Angola which faced a less complicated scenario fought a civil war from the eve of its independence in 1975 to 2002 when rebel leader Jonas Savimbi was killed. So, it was worth celebrating that South Africa was able to escape a civil war after the demolition of the apartheid edifice. The ANC’s allegation that the apartheid government was aiding and abetting the black-on-black violence can have been partly fed by the fear that “the NP [National Party] in an alliance with the IFP, and the colored and Indian communities, who believed they

had more to fear from the perceived threat of future African domination than the actual domination by whites they were presently subjected to, and with the support of homeland and TBVC leaders who were either despised by the ANC as collaborators with the ruling regime or not co-opted by the ANC, would be properly positioned to outvote the ANC in an election held on the basis of a universal franchise.”¹⁹ Mandela could not have launched institutional efforts about reconciliation because he was not yet in a position to do. Consequently, he had to wait to do that after his inauguration as president in 1994.

The reconciliation efforts also included the efforts Mandela made to achieve personal reconciliation with both the linchpins of apartheid and the black leaders who were operating outside the mainstream of the anti-apartheid struggle. He made personal phone calls to, paid private visits to, and organized what he called ‘a reconciliation lunch’ with, leading black activists like Mangosuthu Buthelezi, apartheid linchpins like Constand Viljoen (an ultra-nationalist Afrikaner who had travelled all over the country organizing “armed resistance units” between 1983 and 1985) and Percy Yutar (who, as the prosecutor in the Rivonia Trial, did all he could to have the court pronounce the death sentence on Mandela), and widows of former apartheid leaders like Hendrick Verwoerd, “the architect of apartheid.” He always rang to wish Both happy birth day every year. Among the first persons he called immediately after his release from prison was Buthelezi, the IFP leader and Zulu chief who is anathematised by most South

Africans for being “a notable collaborator of the Nationalist Government”, especially after his split from the ANC in 1979.

Presidential Period (1994-1999)

The reconciliation efforts Mandela initiated after his inauguration as transitional president rested upon the institutional framework of the post-apartheid period. His historic inauguration as president on 10 May, 1994 to lead a government of national unity meant that he and the ANC, unlike between 1990 and 1994 when the transition was being negotiated, now had tremendous influence upon the direction and momentum of national politics and so would be held accountable for whatever might go awry. Before the inauguration, the ANC could so easily blame the NP for instigating and abetting the black-on-black violence that almost wrecked the transition. Now, the ANC would be held responsible for such violence. Being sufficiently aware of this danger, Mandela did not slacken his efforts to achieve reconciliation among the different racial and interracial groups. He noted in his autobiography that

From the moment the results [of the 1994 general elections] were in and it was apparent that the ANC was to form the government, I saw my mission as one of preaching reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence. I knew that many people, particularly the minorities, whites, Coloureds, and Indians, would be feeling anxious about the future, and I wanted them to feel secure. I reminded people again and again that the liberation struggle was



*not a battle against any one group or color, but a fight against a system of repression. At every opportunity, I said all South Africans must unite and join hands and say we are one country, one nation, one people, marching together into the future.*²⁰

Martin Meredith said that “Mandela from the moment of his inauguration he strove to establish a new racial accord, constantly reassuring the white minority of their wellbeing under majority rule and stressing the importance of building a ‘rainbow nation’...To his old political adversaries, he remained magnanimous...He was assiduous in cultivating right-wing Afrikaner politicians, determined to avert the risk of right-wing resistance.”²¹

Two deputy presidents, one black, one white were elected to serve under Mandela in the government of national unity. The leader of the largest opposition party in the parliament was entitled to election as one of the vice-presidents. de Klerk, as leader of the National Party which was the largest opposition party, served alongside Thabo Mbeki as deputy presidents. The dual vice presidency was dropped after Mandela left office.

The hallmark of the reconciliation efforts Mandela pursued within the institutional framework of his presidential incumbency was

the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995. The four objectives of the Commission were:

- establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period from 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date, including the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations, as well as the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives of the persons responsible for the commission of the violations, by conducting investigations and holding hearings;
- facilitating the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective and comply with the requirements of this Act;
- establishing and making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims, and by recommending reparation measures in respect of them;
- compiling a report providing as comprehensive an account as possible of the activities and findings of the Commission contemplated in paragraphs (a) (b) and (c) , and which contains recommendations of measures to prevent the future violations of human rights.²²

The idea of establishing a commission to investigate apartheid crimes was not actually Mandela's, for the 1993 Interim Constitution had implicitly contemplated its existential framework in its final clause:

The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimisation. In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. To this end, Parliament under this Constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date, which shall be a date after 8 October 1990 and before 6 December 1993, and providing for the mechanisms, criteria and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed.”²³

So, what Mandela actually did was to give the idea its material essence during his presidential incumbency. The idea was not well received by the whites, and the attempts made by the second deputy president Frederick de Klerk to block the establishment of the Commission created a gulf of misunderstanding between him and Mandela. According to Martin Meredith,

The honeymoon period [between Mandela and de Klerk] came to an end over differences of how to deal with South Africa's violent past. Mandela was determined that human rights violations during the apartheid era should be investigated by a truth commission, not for the purpose of exacting retribution but to provide some form of public accounting and to help purge the injustices of the past. Unless past crimes were addressed, he said, they would 'live with us like a festering sore. De Klerk, a deputy president in Mandela's government of national unity, denounced the whole idea, arguing that a truth commission would result in a 'witch hunt' focusing upon past government abuses while ignoring ANC crimes. It was, he said, likely to 'tear the stitches of wounds that are beginning to heal'.²⁴

De Klerk, like most whites, were afraid that the Commission would be used to witch hunt the beneficiaries of apartheid. So, Mandela had to strain himself to reassure the whites that the Commission would not be so used. One of the steps he took to reassure the whites was to appoint nearly as many whites as blacks to the



membership of the Commission. According to Dorothy Shea, “although the commissioners’ racial and gender composition was not strictly proportional to that of society at large, the selection process clearly reflected a deliberate political attempt to achieve a high degree of representivity.”²⁵ Mandela said that the appointment of the commissioners was carried out in a way that could guarantee national unity.²⁶ Some blacks like Winnie Mandela opposed it too.

The Commission was established by the “Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995.”²⁷ Mandela was able to weather Afrikaner opposition and to repel the attempt made by some ANC extremists to institute Nuremberg-style trials. He was particularly interested in creating an outlet for bottled-up grievances. He was not interested in making the perpetrators of apartheid crimes pay for the crimes. He hoped mere confession by perpetrators should be enough to mollify the victims. He ensured there was equity in the composition of the Commission’s membership.

The Commission faced further resistance when its findings were released in 1997. Now, the ANC, the South African Communist Party, and IFP joined the New National Party (NNP) and certain individuals like Winnie Mandela in attacking it. All of them faulted its findings on their respective responsibility for certain crimes

committed during apartheid. Mandela, like most ANC veterans, did not like the TRC findings on their party; but he opposed the party's decision to ask the court to stop the presentation of the findings until they had been purged and sanitized.²⁸ In his address to the national parliament's debate on the Commission's findings, he described the findings on the ANC as "an artificial even-handedness that seemed to place those fighting a just war alongside those who they opposed and who defended an inhuman system."²⁹ He also lamented the levity with which the apartheid linchpins treated the Commission:

Many who lost loved ones or who lived through terror that seemed incomprehensible in its cynical inhumanity will wonder at what seems to be the dismissal of the existence of a "third force": the fact of the existence of a deliberate strategy and programme by the powers-that-be as they then were, to foment violence among the oppressed, to arm and lead groups that sowed death and destruction before and especially after 1990...We should take note of the difficulties it [the Commission] faced as a result of what it saw as a lack of response to the spirit of generosity and reconciliation embodied in the establishment of the commission, on the part to those who were part of, or who benefited from, or who

acquiesced in the apartheid state. We note this not out of any vindictive spirit of pointing fingers.”³⁰

Mandela’s denunciation of the findings on the ANC did not only echo his party’s position on the findings, it also showed his refusal to admit the thesis that the ANC used terrorism to pursue its liberation vision. He nonetheless believed the Commission’s findings would help the efforts to achieve reconciliation in the post-apartheid period. He said: “South Africans cannot abdicate their responsibility for reconciliation by shifting it to the TRC, or gloating at its perceived weaknesses. Nor can the task of reconciliation be confined to narrow legalese. Long after the Commission has folded and its offices closed, political leaders and all of us in business, the trade union movement, religious bodies, professionals and communities in general shall have to remain seized with the matters that the TRC process brought to the fore.”³¹ Mandela did not testify before the commission; but his two deputies Thabo Mbeki and de Klerk did.

The Constraints on the Reconciliation Efforts

Mandela’s reconciliation efforts faced three major constraints. One of them was the influence of party politics. Mandela hardly took decisions without the sanction of the ANC. The only known occasion on which he did otherwise was when he secretly initiated contacts with the government when he was still in prison.

However, once out of prison, he allowed the party to micromanage almost all his public-interest actions. For example, he aborted plans to meet with paramount Zulu chieftains viz. Zulu King and Mangosuthu Buthelezi, because of opposition from the party. The meeting with Buthelezi over the black-on-black violence was cancelled because he “found out that such a meeting was anathema to ANC leaders in Natal.”³² That decision was one of the weak, low, points in the narrative of the Mandela legend. Mandela in the grip of party politics made some regrettable mistakes. His shunning of the Zulu chieftains merely aggravated the animosity between the ANC and IFP. Had that meeting taken place, the bloodbath that occurred in the Kwazulu/Natal province in the black-on-black violence might have been avoided. But due to that violence, “more South Africans – almost 14,000 were killed ... during the four and a half years following the release of Mandela in February 1990 and his inauguration as President of South Africa in May 1994 than had been killed in the previous 42 years of the apartheid.”³³ de Klerk, while ascribing the black-on-black violence to that abortive meeting, said: “If Mandela was so concerned with violence why would he not agree to meet with Chief Buthelezi to try and resolve the issue?”³⁴ Nonetheless, Mandela managed to have one-on-one meetings with Buthelezi after the abortive meeting.

The ANC shielded Mandela from Buthelezi. Buthelezi had followed in the footsteps of Albert Lithulu who was also anathematized (but

less than Luthuli) for his appeasement policy towards ANC's anti-apartheid struggle during his presidency of the ANC. Luthuli and Buthelezi were Zulus; and the ANC pioneer leadership was dominated by Zulus such as Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme who was founder of the party, John Langalibalele Dube who was the pioneer president, and Luthuli. Buthelezi was determined to fight off ANC's attempts to sideline him from the post-apartheid politics. He may also have seen the Zulu pedigree in the anti-apartheid struggle as a patrimony to defend. According to Alex Callinicos, "The political realignment in 1992-1993 drew the ANC and the NP together, and left the IFP relatively isolated... Inkatha's leader, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chief Minister of the KwaZulu Homeland, therefore threw his lot in with various other political forces threatened by the end of apartheid. These included principally the white far right."³⁵

The ANC leaders restricted Mandela's contact with Buthelezi and IFP because they not only wanted to marginalize them in the transition negotiations, they also wanted to preempt loss of electoral support to a possible alliance between the NP, PAC, IFP, and other black and Indian/Coloured parties. Thus, were the attempts, some violent, made to break IFP stranglehold on the Kwazulu/Natal province. The IFP, by dividing black electoral strength, was a big threat to the ANC in the immediate years of post-apartheid politics. In 2002, Mandela publicly admitted: "We have used every ammunition to destroy Buthelezi, but we failed. And he is still there. He is a formidable survivor."³⁶ The Goldstone

Commission said that "It remains clear that a primary trigger of current violence and intimidation remains the rivalry between, and the fight for territory and the control thereof by, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress."³⁷ Buthelezi, despite his obvious weaknesses, had, as Mandela himself confessed, demanded that Mandela should be released and the ANC unbanned before he could engage in talks with the apartheid government.³⁸ But party politics constrained Mandela's desire to integrate him into the mainstream of the post-apartheid politics.

Two groups existed within the ANC *vis-à-vis* Mandela's reconciliation---moderates and hardliners. The moderates led by the majority of the veterans of the liberation struggle supported the reconciliation efforts. Some of them like Mbeki who Mandela did not want to succeed him as president in the immediate years of the post-apartheid politics, however, denounced the TRC's findings on the ANC. The moderates, however, schemed to micromanage his decisions on reconciliation. For example, in 1994 they opposed his suggestion that "Die Stem van Suid-Afrika", the apartheid-era national anthem, should be allowed to exist alongside ANC anthem as alternate national anthems. They again opposed, but failed to kill, his suggestion that lyrics of "Die Stem van Suid-Afrika" should be included in the new national anthem that was adopted in 1997. John Calvin noted,

It was Mandela's idea to juxtapose the two, his purpose being to forge from the rival tunes' discordant notes a

powerfully symbolic message of national harmony. Not everyone in Mandela's party, the African National Congress, was convinced when he first proposed the plan. In fact, the entirety of the ANC's national executive committee initially pushed to scrap "Die Stem" and replace it with "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika." Mandela won the argument by doing what defined his leadership: reconciling generosity with pragmatism, finding common ground between humanity's higher The big truth is that Mandela, like Lincoln, achieved the historically rare feat of uniting a fiercely divided country. The feat is rare because what ordinary politicians have always done is seek power by highlighting difference and fueling antagonism. Mandela sought it by appealing to people's common humanity.³⁹

He also got the new national flag to embody both ANC colours and the colours of the apartheid-era flag. The national flag which Frederick Brownell had designed on the eve of his inauguration in 1994 was adopted on interim basis and could be changed after five years in the final draft of the Constitution. But he ensured the design remained unchanged at the expiration of the transitional period. He also made symbolic gestures of reconciliation with the decision to ensure "that statues, monuments and streets names commemorating events and heroes from Afrikaner history remained untouched."⁴⁰ While he apologized to all victims on



behalf of the state, Thabo Mbeki his first deputy said the party had “serious reservations” about the TRC’s reports.⁴¹

The hardliners were those who were implacably opposed to all forms of reconciliation. They were led by Mandela’s former wife Winnie Mandela. They were unhappy that Mandela did not push “for some type of retributive justice and financial compensation for blacks suffered during apartheid,”⁴² and “blamed [the reconciliation] for having aborted a revolution pursued over decades of struggle. Right at the end, the weight of struggle, aspiration, and expectation seemed to peter out in sentimental declarations of love and forgiveness across the nation ... yielding a great deal of shared anguish,”⁴³ and argued that Mandela devoted greater effort to reassuring whites than to addressing black grievances.”⁴⁴ They might have felt somewhat placated if Mandela had made good his support for the commitment the ANC made in 1990 to nationalize the key sectors of the national economy such as “mines, banks and the monopoly industries.” Winnie Mandela expressed her discomfiture thus:

I am not alone. The people of Soweto are still with me. Look what they make him do. The great Mandela. He has no control or say any more. They put that huge statue of him right in the middle of the most affluent "white" area of Johannesburg. Not here where we spilled our blood

and where it all started. Mandela is now a corporate foundation. He is wheeled out globally to collect the money and he is content doing that. The ANC have effectively sidelined him but they keep him as a figurehead for the sake of appearance... Mandela let us down. He agreed to a bad deal for the blacks. Economically, we are still on the outside. The economy is very much 'white'. It has a few token blacks, but so many who gave their life in the struggle have died unrewarded...I cannot forgive him for going to receive the Nobel [Peace Prize in 1993] with his jailer [FW] de Klerk. Hand in hand they went. Do you think de Klerk released him from the goodness of his heart? He had to. The times dictated it, the world had changed, and our struggle was not a flash in the pan, it was bloody to say the least and we had given rivers of blood. I had kept it alive with every means at my disposal... Look at this Truth and Reconciliation charade. He should never have agreed to it...What good does the truth do? How does it help anyone to know where and how their loved ones were killed or buried? That Bishop Tutu who turned it all into a religious circus came here...He had the cheek to tell me to appear. I told him a few home truths. I told him that he and his other like-minded cretins were only sitting here because of our struggle and ME. Because of the things I and people like me had done to get freedom.

The second constraint was the resistance mounted by ultra-nationalist Afrikaners who shuddered at the prospect of living under black rule and so prepared for a civil war. They were those Desmond Tutu said had promised to disrupt the first multi-racial election that held in 1994.⁴⁶ Their most prominent leader was former president PW Botha who remained unswervingly opposed to reconciliation till his death in 2006. Botha refused to testify before the TRC which he had described as a “circus.” and a “witching.” His refusal to appear before the TRC whether in public or in camera led to a legal suit that resurrected the fragility of racial relationship. The fact that the magistrate court judge who convicted him of contempt was black, while the appeals court judges who overturned the conviction were whites introduced an ominous dimension to the reconciliation efforts. The Commission discontinued the legal suit so as to stem the damage it was doing to its work.

The third constraint was mounted by the Inkhata Freedom Party, ANC’s arch-rival. Buthelezi’s attempt to beat off the ANC’s attempts to banish the party irrelevant to the sidelines of the post-apartheid politics caused a hemorrhagic effusion of trust among blacks. Hence, all the orthodoxy in his approach to perceived threats to his relevance in his stronghold of Kwazulu/Natal region. The black-on-black violence that almost wrecked the country before and after the transition complicated things for Mandela. Before he became president, Mandela could blame the apartheid government for instigating the violence. However, he had to

grapple with the violence after he assumed office. The IFP dripped with tribal aspirations, and so was a big obstacle to his vision of a non-racial, non-tribal, non-sexist post-apartheid country. Buthelezi saw the ANC more as a tribal party than as a national party, and the ANC-IFP rivalry as an unspoken ethnic rivalry between the Xhosas and the Zulus.

Assessing the Reconciliation Efforts

The reconciliation efforts of the Mandelan Decade took place in indescribably tricky circumstances that were greatly influenced by Nelson Mandela's personality. Mandela faced a highly delicate situation when he became South Africa's first fully democratically elected president on 10 May, 1994. No any other national leaders have faced similar circumstances upon ascension to power, since South Africa is the only country in the world where racial segregation has ever existed as a deliberate state policy. Racial segregation actually existed in places like the United States, but not as a state policy. A good number of those circumstances that were akin to the one Mandela faced when he became president have slipped out of gear, leading to incalculable crises.

Mandela is a "consensus hero" because he is arguably one of the few men that have achieved greatness with minimum controversy. The consensus on his greatness has not been eroded since it was built during his long years in prison. He remains great, despite the fact that some people, particularly South Africans have accused him of trading justice for the expediency of reconciliation. But he cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a coward who ran away from fulfilling the great expectations of his presidential

incumbency. He was a transitional leader, without whose involvement the country might have moved straight from apartheid to a civil war. He stood between these two unpleasant possibilities. He approached the reconciliation efforts with preconceptions all of which were about achieving a society in which race would not be the yardstick for judging people's abilities. His capacity for policy adjustment helped him to realize most of his dreams. For example, he jettisoned his initial support for ANC's decision to nationalize mines, banks and monopoly industries when it became obvious that nationalization would have incurred fierce reaction from the white bourgeoisie.⁴⁷

Mandela was able to strike a balance between his commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle and his commitment to reconciliation between the perpetrators and victims of apartheid. He was able to not alarm the whites who had grudgingly relinquished political power to the black majority and convince the blacks that he was not trading reconciliation for the aspirations that had inspired and sustained their decades of struggle against apartheid. His ability to reassure the whites of safety alarm over the occasional fiery statements of commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle was evidence of his uncanny ability as a communicator. Two of such speeches were made immediately after his release from prison in 1990. One of them was about ANC's determination to carry on armed struggle until it became reasonable to discontinue it.⁴⁸ The other one-- a riposte to de Klerk's allegation about the ANC's refusal to dissolve the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* or handing over their

weapons---stated that dissolving the armed wing of the ANC or surrendering weapons to security agencies still controlled by whites would be tantamount to committing suicide.⁴⁹

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the hallmark of Mandela's reconciliation efforts, created a post-apartheid South Africa where rancorous litigations over past grievances would have impinged upon the economy, exacerbated racial animosities, delayed the amelioration of the past grievances, and impinged upon the integrity of the judiciary by sucking the judiciary into the vortex of racial politics. The Commission prevented a civil war that might have resulted from some blacks resorting to self-help to redress the injustices they must have suffered under apartheid. As David B. Ottaway noted, "[Mandela] singlehandedly averted a civil war."⁵⁰ The Commission has been emulated in different forms in many other countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and Canada.

However, four weaknesses nearly ruined Mandela's credentials as a peace seeker. One of them was susceptibility to party manipulation. So, it was self-indictment that Mandela accused de Klerk of not looking at matters "from the point of view of the National Party and the White minority in this country, [but] from the point of view of the population of South Africa."⁵¹ The cancelling of meetings with the Zulu leaders as a result of his

acquiescence to party objection helped to prolong the black-on-black violence. The other weakness was his decision to turn back on the country's politics once he left office in 1999. The decision to isolate himself from politics starved the country of the fatherly guidance it needed from him. He merely watched with benign neglect as Mbeki and Zuma quarreled publicly. The isolation happened despite his promise: "Though I shall not be seen as much as I have been, I shall be amongst you and with you as we enter the African century; working together to make a reality of our hopes for a better world." ⁵²

The third weakness was the break-up with his wife, Winnie. The circumstances surrounding the break-up may never become totally known to the public. Whether the break-up resulted from Winnie's alleged infidelity or from an obsession by Mandela to keep his distance from Winnie's apartheid crimes is an issue that historians should further investigate.

The fourth weakness was that his reconciliation efforts were pursued at the expense of restorative justice. Sufficient attention was not given to restorative justice. Mugabe said Mandela was "too much of a saint [who went] a bit too far in doing good to the non-black communities, really in some cases at the expense of [blacks]." ⁵³ He made efforts to empower blacks economically, anyway. The flagship of those efforts was the Black Economic Empowerment which was "the set of legislative measures the government put in place to ensure that Black South Africans can

participate on an equitable base in the economy in terms of ownership, income sharing and decision-making.”⁵⁴

All in all, Mandela was a great man. The monuments that were erected to his memory in different parts of the world, the awards that people fell over themselves to give him during his lifetime, and the tributes that clogged up the airwaves at his death attest to his enviable place in history.

Conclusion

The ten years of South African history that were dominated by Mandela will remain a reference point in the history of South Africa for centuries. Those years were characterized by the efforts that he made to get the citizens to come over the animosities carried over from the centuries of apartheid. The efforts first started off with negotiation between Mandela and the apartheid regime before he became president on 10 May, 1994. He carried on with his reconciliation efforts after he became president. But the efforts were constrained by party politics, black-on-black violence, some weak personal decisions, and white opposition. He made efforts to appease each of the three main groups that were involved in the struggle for political power in the post-apartheid era viz. his own party ANC, Inkhata Freedom Party, and the whites, particularly the Afrikaners.

One of the things that made Mandela an enigma was the fact that it was humanism rather than the exhortations of religion that made him want to reconcile with his oppressors. Mark Mardell

thus described him as “the closest the world has to a secular saint.”⁵⁵ He demonstrated selflessness by rejecting pressures to cling to power, even when he could have effortlessly got his people to elevate him to emperor.

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