

Mandela is very much with us!

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The illness of Nelson Mandela has been turned, by South Africa's media and politicians, into a spectacle of his "macabrely anticipated absence". In such a context, a historian and anti-apartheid activist underlines the rich legacy of Mandela's intellectual and political ideas and their continued relevance in the on-going struggle for a just South Africa.

If one believes media reports, Nelson Mandela is no longer with us. Yet, in more ways than one, he is. In the midst of the frenzy of soundbites and images that now circulate through the space left by his macabrely anticipated absence, there is danger that Mandela will be honoured, even monumentalised, but not meaningfully remembered. Part of the problem it seems is that the anti-apartheid struggle to which Mandela contributed so substantially has been recalled as an event, as a passing phase, not a sustained development of a thought that opened onto a concept of the post-apartheid.

Thankfully, Mandela is not yet and not quite comparable to a Mahatma, not at least in the shape that Shaheed Amin (1984) recalls in the figure of Gandhi with his saintly aura. Thankfully so too, in part because such a status would not be a product of a subaltern imaginary in South Africa, but of the mediated neoliberal imagery that gives you a quick fix. Rather than seek out Saint Mandela, we would do better to pay tribute to his legacy of dedicated struggle against apartheid by placing his thinking in a longer genealogy of anti-apartheid thought.

In the years to come, the struggle will surely be one that seeks to recuperate Mandela for the project of thinking our way out of the predicaments of apartheid, against the hype and hypocrisy of an apparatus that has reduced every principle and every thought to either ridicule or banality, if not pathos. Against the hollowing out of meaning, we may ask what continuities and disjunctures of thought were enabled by Mandela, so that we are compelled to rethink the concept of the post-apartheid. What might Mandela offer us as a resource for elaborating a concept of the post-apartheid that will also inflect our desire for the postcolonial in ways that exceed apartheid's construction of difference?

Understanding Apartheid

Mandela's significance can be understood in part through his ability to concede that the concept of the post-apartheid, like the critique of apartheid, could not be entrusted to messianism or figureheads. It required more sustained effort at unravelling the legacies of authoritarianism and racism. The demand for an expanded effort to understand and overcome apartheid flowed from recognition that apartheid represented something that anti-colonial nationalism had not foreseen, let alone imagined possible.

Two major political shifts marked the onset of this recognition amongst the generation of youth leaguers to which Mandela belonged. The turn to armed struggle in the 1960s represented an effort to align the anti-apartheid struggle with the anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in Africa. Beyond the search for alignments with movements of decolonisation, apartheid also served as a catalyst for a reorientation of thinking about race that resulted in intense debate about the nature of the South African state and theories of the South African Revolution.

These debates and theoretical perspectives were threaded through other constellations of thought as it brushed up against strands of Marxism, Pan Africanism, non-alignment, development of underdevelopment theory, and decolonisation. In each, something of a residual trace of apartheid's specificity, not to mention its intensifying grip over the black subject, meant that apartheid could not be fully grasped in terms of the left critique available through the struggles for decolonisation. It was apparent that apartheid was a form of the exercise of power hitherto unforeseen in the critique of colonialism.

Mandela, as we know, was associated with both the shift to armed struggle and rethinking the problematic of apartheid. Ultimately, his thinking on the meaning and implications of apartheid perhaps defined the project of the building of a post-apartheid society that he championed after 1990 upon his release from prison.

In conventional histories of the ANC, the militancy of the youth leaguers is emphasised over the continuities and discontinuities in their thinking. This of course aids the current hagiographic renderings of Mandela who cut his teeth in the Youth League. Mandela's resourcefulness rested with his political reasoning, historical sense, and astute ability at reading. Taken together, he was capable of picking up a strand of thinking from an earlier generation of nationalist thinkers about the dangers of trusteeship to show how it was at the very heart of the violence of apartheid. Trusteeship was a discourse for interpellating black subjects into the narrative of liberalism and the orders of a segregationist state. Mandela specifically offered a view that showed that apartheid was indeed the logical outcome of the trusteeship that undergirded liberalism's programme of fostering race relations in the 1930s.

Mandela's generation looked upon this horizon of apartheid in the aftermath of the Second World War, in much the same way that a generation of ANC intellectuals looked upon the threat of a race war in the aftermath of the First World War. Together with a burgeoning

intellectual circle educated at Lovedale College and Fort Hare University in particular, they developed a unique perspective on the pending threat of apartheid from the mostly rural Eastern Cape. From their vantage point, it was perhaps not too difficult to see the culmination of a barrage of racial laws culminating in the passage of the Promotion of Bantu Self Government Bill of 1959. In a consequential debate between Govan Mbeki and Nelson Mandela on strategies for resisting apartheid, it was clear that a view from the rural reserve would prove indispensable in anticipating apartheid's most devastating consequences. It would also prove critical to naming apartheid's specificity.

The Limits of Liberalism

In 1959, Chief Albert Luthuli, responding to the ultimatum to give up the presidency of the ANC or risk losing his chieftainship described apartheid as a form of 'domineering paternalism'. Luthuli tacitly revealed the paradox of apartheid that ushered in a new generation of nationalist thinkers, Mandela included, who were realizing that the concept of trusteeship professed by liberalism lay at the very heart of justifications for apartheid. 'Domineering paternalism' described apartheid in a manner that recalled the failure of liberalism to appease black aspirations for decolonisation while appropriating decolonisation that was taking root elsewhere in Africa to promote what it called self-government. If apartheid was a version of cynical reason in which liberal concepts of trusteeship and nationalist projects of decolonisation were appropriated to its own meaning, the programme of self-government was clearly its most damning symptom. This is how Mandela (1978: 14) summarised the situation by the 1950s;

As the African accepted none of the[se] measures to 'civilise' him without a struggle, the Trustees had always been worried by this prospect as long as the Cape Franchise remained. With little compunction, in 1936 the last door to citizenship was slammed in the face of the African by the Natives Representation Act which gave us 3 White men to represent 8,000,000 Africans in a house of 150 representing 2,000,000 Whites. At the same time a Land Act was passed to ensure that if the 1913 Land Act had left any openings for the African, then the Natives Land and Trust Act would seal them in the name of 'humanity and Modern Civilisation'. The 1937 Native Laws Amendment Act closed up any other loophole through which the African could have forced his way to full citizenship. Today, Trusteeship has made every African a criminal still out of prison. For all this we had to thank the philosophy of Trusteeship.

The worry with trusteeship had a longer history in ANC thinking. Only now, in the 1950s, Mandela's reference to it was not only a backward glance but a thinking ahead, onto the horizon where trusteeship promised to lead the black subject into the shadow of death.

The glance onto the past recalled the suspicion with British liberalism came to be viewed in the writings of ANC intellectuals such as Silas Modiri Molema after the First World War. In

his *The Bantu: Past and Present*, written in 1917 and published in 1920, Molema reflected on the dangers of naturalised concepts of race in the aftermath of the First World War in Europe where the limits of liberalism were becoming patently evident.

For those liberals who claimed amoral high ground offering solutions to the race question in South Africa, he reserved a few choice words:

In these things, we shall look, and look in vain, for the much vaunted 'Western Liberalism.' In vain shall we search the actions for the so-called High Political Morality. Liberalism and Morality are hollow meaningless words and egregious tricks, then as well might a thirsty traveller expect to get water from a mirage as the Bantu hope to find emancipation by that morality and modern Liberalism. British Liberalism is offering nothing to the Bantu of South Africa except such morbid creations and fancies as 'the Native Problem'.

Set alongside each other, the texts of Molema and Mandela have much in common - with one small but consequential difference. Mandela's generation was left with imagining what lay ahead, with the tightening grip of apartheid in which the liberal philosophy of trusteeship was lodged. If in the heyday of liberalism in South Africa in the 1930s, trusteeship was a philosophical ground, under apartheid, it became a legal foundation. Its legality was founded not only on the basis of its persuasiveness and presumed rationality, even philosophical elaboration, but on administrative rationality that had no qualm in appropriating the tide of decolonisation sweeping through Africa to its own repressive ends.

Imagining the Post-Apartheid

Hendrik Verwoerd's plans for making trusteeship the legal basis for so-called self-government in the dreaded Homelands, was backed up by a history lesson from the Minister of Bantu Affairs and Administration in 1959, de Wet Nel. Paling in comparison to Mandela's reading of history, de Wet Nel spoke with the confidence of a Trustee (Kruger 1960):

We hear so many provocative remarks about Bantu nationalism and Black nationalism, but it is my conviction that there is nothing of the kind. If it exists, then there is also something like White nationalism. But what does exist is the hatred on the part of the Black man for the White man. That is the monster which may still perhaps destroy all the best things in Africa. But I want to ask whether this monster has not to a large extent been created by the white man himself? The fact that he has ignored their own forms of government and their own cultural assets, has led to the growth of this monster, and that is the reason why we plead that this monster must not rear its head in South Africa. That is why we want to give them the opportunities for self-government.

Self-government, in the cynical reason of Verwoerd and de Wet Nel, was supposedly in keeping with the spirit of decolonisation in Africa, even averting its force in South Africa. It

was also in keeping with the benevolent gesture of trusteeship, aimed at finding a solution to the native problem that liberalism had promised, but on which it failed to deliver.

The horizon of apartheid prompted the youth leaguers into action, realizing the intensifying grip over black subjectivity that trusteeship held out in South Africa. Looking over their shoulders to draw together earlier strands in the critique of trusteeship, and looking ahead into the abyss of possible death, Mandela and his generation produced some of the most profound thinking on race and racism. As trusteeship emerged as a legal precedent of South African governmentality, Mandela in particular entrenched himself in the thought of law by receiving its force and returning it.

Nelson Mandela is around like never before. The time of his thought has not yet arrived. Perhaps, his anti-apartheid thought was in excess of his own capacity to actualize that thought - institutionally and otherwise - after 1994. What Mandela bequeaths to us is precisely this excess. The thought that he leaves in his wake is of considerable importance for elaborating a concept of the post-apartheid. Trusteeship, as we now know, has proven more resilient than imagined in the struggle against apartheid. As the struggle to understand newer scripts of trusteeship in neoliberalism unfolds, Nelson Mandela gives us reason to pause, to think again, in these thought-provoking post-apartheid times.

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