

# Celebrate all Struggle heroes

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July 27 2011 at 09:00am



REUTERS

Former South African President Nelson Mandela smiles for photographers after a meeting with actor Tim Robbins at Mandela's home in Johannesburg September 22, 2005. Robbins is currently in South Africa filming. REUTERS/Mike Hutchings

'Whose Mandela is it anyway?' asks Busani Ngcaweni in his article "The true meaning of Mandela" (The Star, July 21). He concludes that Mandela belongs to all: "Mandela should be celebrated by the entire global community – progressives, tyrants, conservatives, public servants, etc."

Perhaps we should also consider the difficulty of the modern Mandela factor. This is the subject of this article.

The first and main difficulty is that it resonates with a colonial mentality wherein a white minority would handpick certain black people and deem them "unique" from the broader black collective.

In a condescending manner, they would say to one black guy: "You are not like them", or "You are different". It is for this reason, Ngcaweni, that the current Mandela factor is "depoliticised", and "decontextualised".

The politically contextualised Mandela is properly located within the liberation revolutionary discourse and tradition. As Ngcaweni noted, Mandela must be contextualised as part of the collective of the ANC: "Mandela cut his political teeth in the ANC Youth League, which he founded together with activists like Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo."

The celebration of a contextualised Mandela therefore, would lead to the celebration of black people as a collective. It would mean that the public discourse on Mandela would be couched in such terms as "liberation and revolution".



Oliver Tambo will be honoured by the post office  
*Ex-QDMS*

Now, this does not happen in white liberal dominated societies with remnants of institutionalised racism.

The liberal establishment has, throughout the transition, sought to control and influence the country's powerful institutions. These include the Reserve Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the public broadcaster and the meaning of Mandela.

In this scheme of control and influence, it became imperative to define a Mandela factor that the liberal establishment would be comfortable with, and make the whole lot of black majority to follow such a brand. This is the Mandela factor liberally branded after 1994 by the economically dominant minority.

This partly explains the source of Ngcaweni's question: "Whose Mandela is it anyway?" – it is a sense of alienation from the current Mandela factor. It is more like asking: who is this one now? It is the black cry for the liberation and revolutionary Mandela. It is a deep-seated longing for the Mandela who, together with his comrades, transformed the ANC into a militant disciplined revolutionary movement.

There is a good reason Ngcaweni would not ask: "Whose Sisulu, Tambo, Luthuli or Biko is it anyway?"

It is precisely because the white liberal establishment has not tampered with their liberation revolutionary identity and character. They have not been rebranded to suit a liberal establishment agenda.



Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela's mentor since the 1940s and the "quiet engine" of South Africa's struggle for freedom, is photographed on the eve of his 90th birthday at the Wits University of South Africa May 16, 2002. The snowy-haired patriarch has spent a dizzying week at speeches and parties in his honour and on Saturday, his birthday, 83-year-old Mandela will lead hundreds of South Africans in paying tribute to Sisulu in Johannesburg. REUTERS/Juda Ngwenya  
*REUTERS*

Ngcaweni decries that the current Mandela factor is “depoliticised”, but, in fact, he is not depoliticised. But rather “repoliticised”. The current Mandela factor has not been “decontextualised, but “recontextualised”. The current Mandela factor is repoliticised, and recontextualised away from the liberation and revolutionary tradition to Western liberal traditions of humanitarian, human rights, saint and charity. Hence, the West has accepted the Mandela factor within this context, but denounced him with the same freedom values as a terrorist.

Probably, Mandela is the only revolutionary from the Third World celebrated by the white minority and the West – on their terms.

Ironically, the second difficulty of the current Mandela factor is compounded by the ANC itself. The ANC has, consciously or otherwise, legitimised the current branded Mandela factor. The ANC has accepted the “non-racial” celebration of Mandela. And yet, it took issue with the DA barely a month ago for claiming to be inspired by the democratic values of Mandela, Tambo and Sisulu, among other liberation stalwarts.

Granted, it was in the height of local government electioneering, but the ANC should have assumed a moral high ground. It could have highlighted that while the political home of these Struggle stalwarts is the ANC, they nevertheless fought to free black and white alike – thereby exposing the DA’s electioneering opportunism without privatising freedom fighters.

Otherwise, to privatise all other Struggle stalwarts and accept that Mandela belongs to all, the ANC is also guilty of the colonial mentality that brands Mandela as unique from the whole lot.

This is symptomatic of the fact that the ANC has abandoned the battle of ideas, and influencing the public opinion. Hence, the liberal establishment minority through its media control now determines who are the heroes, and non-heroes. It determines who is celebrated or not.



Chief Albert Luthuli  
*Ex-QDMS*

It has determined to celebrate Mandela exclusively from other similar freedom fighters. Unfortunately, the rest of society, with the tacit approval of the ANC, has followed.

The last difficulty of the current Mandela factor as branded by the liberal establishment is that he has been afforded the status of the “alpha and omega” of South Africa’s democracy. Hence the dreadful “When Mandela goes...”

In fact, some reports indicate that some white right-wing groupings are running military training for “when Mandela goes”. Books have been written addressing “South Africa after Mandela”.

The salient message here is that this black majority cannot be trusted without this “unique special one”. Therefore, minorities must prepare themselves for the worst case scenario after Mandela goes.

This promotes the dreadful swart gevaar mentality and promotes the emergence of white right-wing groups; it brews a misconception of democracy as a one-man crusade, rather than the institutional and value system it is;

it goes against reconciliation and nation building; and it promotes, as has been the case throughout colonialism and apartheid, the white fear of the unknown.

In short, the current Mandela factor presents difficulties for black people as well as white, and the consolidation of institutional democracy.

Perhaps July 18 could be re-termed Heroes Day.

In this way, we will celebrate all the founding fathers and mothers of South Africa's democracy. We celebrate their collective commitment to building a just democratic society. We should also commit to uphold these, as a collective, for future generations.

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