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NELSON MANDELA: SPEAR OF THE NATION

- 1918 Born
- 1944 Formed the Youth League of the African National Congress
- 1952 With Oliver Tambo formed the first native law firm in South Africa
- 1956–1961 Five-year trial for treason
- 1961 Formed Spear of the Nation
- 1963 One of eight convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the government
- 1964 Sentenced to life imprisonment
- 1990 Government released Mandela and legalized African National Congress
- 1993 Awarded Nobel Peace Prize
- 1994 Elected President of South Africa

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is the most important black figure in the campaign for racial justice in South Africa. He was born into the royal family of the Tembu tribe in 1918. After college and law school in England, he joined two other native activists, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, in forming the Youth League of the African National Congress in 1944. In 1952 he helped organize the defiance campaign against the government's racial policies. He was arrested but given a suspended sentence.

In 1956 Mandela, among a throng of political leaders, was indicted for treason. Following a five-year trial, all were found not guilty. After police opened fire against unarmed demonstrators at Sharpeville in 1960, Mandela first turned to violence.

In 1963 Mandela and several other men, in prison with him, were tried for sabotage, treason, and violent conspiracy, after police discovered quantities of arms at the headquarters of the African National Congress's military wing, called "Spear of the Nation," of which Mandela had been one of the founders. He admitted the truth of some of the charges and on June 11, 1964 was sentenced to life in prison.

He was kept in a maximum security prison until 1988, when he was

hospitalized for tuberculosis. His imprisonment became a cause célèbre in the international community, which disapproved of apartheid. Finally, the South African government released him from prison early in 1990. On March 2, 1990, he was chosen deputy president of the ANC. In 1993 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Mandela was elected president of South Africa in 1994.

The Struggle Is My Life

NELSON MANDELA

The following passage, from Mandela's autobiography The Struggle Is My Life, is taken out of a statement made by Mandela explaining his decision to continue his political work underground. In it he recognizes a nationwide three-day strike against the South African government and summons his people to further efforts. He claims that at last he and his party have become a force to be reckoned with in South Africa. He goes on to announce new plans for a second fight against the government and for a National Convention. He knows that there is another warrant for his arrest and calls upon all the native people to join him to assert their aspirations. "For my part I have made my choice. I will not leave South Africa, nor will I surrender."

Issued by Mandela on 26 June 1961 from inside South Africa, explaining his decision, in accordance with the advice of the National Action Council, to carry on his political work underground.

Published by the ANC in London

The magnificent response to the call of the National Action Council for a three-day strike and the wonderful work done by our organisers and field workers throughout the country proves once again that no power on earth can stop an oppressed people determined to win their freedom. In the face of unprecedented intimidation by the government and employers and of blatant falsehoods and distortions by the press, immediately before and during the strike, the freedom-loving people of South Africa gave massive and solid support to the historic and challenging resolutions of the Pietermaritzburg Conference.¹ Factory and office workers, businessmen in town and country, students in university colleges, in primary and secondary schools, inspired by genuine patriotism and threatened with loss of employment, cancellation of business licences, and the ruin of school careers, rose to the occasion and recorded in emphatic tones their opposition to a White republic forcibly imposed on us by a minority. In the light of the formidable array of hostile forces that stood against us, and the difficult and dangerous conditions under which we worked, the results were most inspiring. I am confident that if we work harder and more systematically, the Nationalist government will not survive for long. No organisation in the world could have withstood and survived the

¹The meeting of the ANC on March 25–26, 1961.

full-scale and massive bombardment directed against us by the government during the last month.

In the history of our country no political campaign has ever merited the serious attention and respect which the Nationalist government gave us. When a government seeks to suppress a peaceful demonstration of an unarmed people by mobilising the entire resources of the State, military and otherwise, it concedes powerful mass support for such a demonstration. Could there be any other evidence to prove that we have become a power to be reckoned with and the strongest opposition to the government? Who can deny the plain fact that ever since the end of last month the issue that dominated South African politics was not the republican celebrations, but our plans for a general strike?

Today is 26 June, a day known throughout the length and breadth of our country as Freedom Day. On this memorable day, nine years ago, eight thousand five hundred of our dedicated freedom fighters struck a mighty blow against the repressive colour policies of the government. Their matchless courage won them the praise and affection of millions of people here and abroad. Since then we have had many stirring campaigns on this date and it has been observed by hundreds of thousands of our people as a day of dedication. It is fit and proper that on this historic day I should speak to you and announce fresh plans for the opening of the second phase in the fight against the Verwoerd republic,² and for a National Convention.

You will remember that the Pietermaritzburg Resolutions warned that if the government did not call a National Convention before the end of May, 1961, Africans, Coloureds, Indians, and European democrats would be asked not to collaborate with the republic or any government based on force. On several occasions since then the National Action Council explained that the last strike marked the beginning of a relentless mass struggle for the defeat of the Nationalist government, and for a sovereign multi-racial convention. We stressed that the strike would be followed by other forms of mass pressure to force the race maniacs who govern our beloved country to make way for a democratic government of the people, by the people, and for the people. A full-scale and countrywide campaign of non-co-operation with the government will be launched immediately. The precise form of the contemplated action, its scope and dimensions and duration will be announced to you at the appropriate time.

At the present moment it is sufficient to say that we plan to make government impossible. Those who are voteless cannot be expected to continue paying taxes to a government which is not responsible to them. People who live in poverty and starvation cannot be expected

to pay exorbitant house rents to the government and local authorities. We furnish the sinews of agriculture and industry. We produce the work of the gold mines, the diamonds, and the coal, of the farms and industry, in return for miserable wages. Why should we continue enriching those who steal the products of our sweat and blood? Those who exploit us and refuse us the right to organise trade unions? Those who side with the government when we stage peaceful demonstrations to assert our claims and aspirations? How can Africans serve on School Boards and Committees which are part of Bantu Education, a sinister scheme of the Nationalist government to deprive the African people of real education in return for tribal education? Can Africans be expected to be content with serving on Advisory Boards and Bantu Authorities when the demand all over the continent of Africa is for national independence and self-government? Is it not an affront to the African people that the government should now seek to extend Bantu Authorities to the cities, when people in the rural areas have refused to accept the same system and fought against it tooth and nail? Which African does not burn with indignation when thousands of our people are sent to gaol every month under the cruel pass laws? Why should we continue carrying these badges of slavery? Non-collaboration is a dynamic weapon. We must refuse. We must use it to send this government to the grave. It must be used vigorously and without delay. The entire resources of the Black people must be mobilised to withdraw all co-operation with the Nationalist government. Various forms of industrial and economic action will be employed to undermine the already tottering economy of the country. We will call upon the international bodies to expel South Africa and upon nations of the world to sever economic and diplomatic relations with the country.

I am informed that a warrant for my arrest has been issued, and that the police are looking for me. The National Action Council has given full and serious consideration to this question, and has sought the advice of many trusted friends and bodies and they have advised me not to surrender myself. I have accepted this advice, and will not give myself up to a government I do not recognise. Any serious politician will realise that under present-day conditions in this country, to seek for cheap martyrdom by handing myself to the police is naive and criminal. We have an important programme before us and it is important to carry it out very seriously and without delay.

I have chosen this latter course, which is more difficult and which entails more risk and hardship than sitting in gaol. I have had to separate myself from my dear wife and children, from my mother and sisters, to live as an outlaw in my own land. I have had to close my business, to abandon my profession, and live in poverty and misery, as many of my people are doing. I will continue to act as the spokesman of the National Action Council during the phase that is unfolding and

²Named for its founder H. F. Verwoerd.

in the tough struggles that lie ahead. I shall fight the government side by side with you, inch by inch, and mile by mile, until victory is won. What are you going to do? Will you come along with us, or are you going to co-operate with the government in its efforts to suppress the claims and aspirations of your own people? Or are you going to remain silent and neutral in a matter of life and death to my people, to our people? For my own part I have made my choice. I will not leave South Africa, nor will I surrender. Only through hardship, sacrifice, and militant action can freedom be won. The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days.

Six months after going underground, Mandela was asked by the ANC to leave South Africa temporarily to attend the Conference of the Pan African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He left the country secretly and therefore, according to South African law, illegally.

The Laws in Reflection

JACQUES DERRIDA

Jacques Derrida is a professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and has been a visiting professor at several eminent American universities. He is a philosopher with wide-ranging interests, including the affairs of Southern Africa. In the following passage he pays homage to Nelson Mandela and sketches an outline of his program. This includes Mandela's admiration for the law and parliamentary democracy and his opposition to the South African government.

Admirable Mandela.

Period, no exclamation point. I am not using this punctuation to temper any enthusiasm or to be a killjoy. Instead of speaking only in honor of Nelson Mandela, I shall say something about his honor without succumbing, if possible, to loftiness, without proclaiming or acclaiming.

The homage will perhaps be more exact, as will its tone, if it seems to surrender its impatience, without which there would be no question of admiring, to the coldness of an analysis. Admiration reasons, whatever is said of it, it works things out with reason, it astonishes and interrogates: how can one be Mandela? Why does he seem exemplary and admirable in what he thinks and says, in what he does or in what

he suffers? Admirable in himself, as well as in what he conveys as a witness, another word for martyrdom, that is to say the experience of his people?

"My people and I," he always says, without speaking like a king.

Why does he also *force* admiration in this manner? This word presupposes some resistance, for his enemies admire him without admitting it. Unlike those who love him among his people and together with his inseparable Winnie,³ from whom these enemies have always futilely kept him separated, these enemies fear him. If his most hateful persecutors secretly admire him, this proves that, as one might say, he forces such admiration.

So, this is the question: where does that force come from? Where does it lead? It is used or is applied, but for what? Or rather: what *folds* under it? What form is to be recognized in this fold? What line?

First of all we will see in it, and let's say it without any other premise, *the line of a reflection*. This is first of all a force of reflection. What is obvious right away is that Mandela's political experience or passion can never be separated from a theoretical reflection: about history, culture, and above all jurisprudence. An unremitting analysis enlightens the rationality of his acts, his demonstrations, his speeches, his strategy. Even before being constrained to withdraw from the world into prison, and during a quarter of a century of incarceration, he has been acting endlessly and giving a direction to the struggle. Mandela has always been, like all the greatest politicians, a man of reflection. . . .

Admiration . . . does not just belong to sight. It translates emotion, astonishment, surprise. . . . It enables understanding. Outside of it there is only ignorance, . . . and in it resides "a great deal of force" of "surprise" or of "sudden arrival." The admiring look is astonished, it questions its intuition, it opens upon the light of a question but of a question received no less than asked. This experience lets the light of a question pass through it, which in no way prevents it from reflecting it. The light has as focus the very thing which forces admiration, it partitions it then into a specular movement which seems strangely fascinating.

Mandela becomes admirable for having known how to admire. And what he has discovered, he has found through admiration. He fascinates too, as we shall see, for having been fascinated. . . .

Nelson Mandela's voice—what does it remind us of, ask from us, demand of us? I mean to say what do the dynamics of that voice have to do with sight, reflection, admiration, but also what sings in his name? (Listen to the clamor of his people when they demonstrate in his name: Man-de-la!) . . .

³Mandela's wife.

A first quotation—a lawyer is speaking, during a trial, his trial, the one where he is also prosecuting, the one in which he prosecutes those who accuse him, in the name of the law:

The basic task at the present moment is the removal of race discrimination and the attainment of democratic rights on the basis of the Freedom Charter. . . . From my reading of Marxist literature and from conversations with Marxists, I have gained the impression that communists regard the parliamentary system of the West as undemocratic and reactionary. But, on the contrary, *I am an admirer* of such a system. The *Magna Carta*, the Petition of Rights, and the Bill of Rights are documents which are held in veneration by democrats throughout the world. *I have great respect* for British political institutions, and for the country's system of justice. I regard the British Parliament as the most democratic institution in the world, and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration.⁴

He admires the law, he says it clearly, but is this law, which gives orders to constitutions and declarations, essentially a thing of the West? Does its formal universality retain some irreducible link with European history, even with an Anglo-American one? If it were so, we would of course still have to meditate upon this strange possibility: that its formal character would be as essential to the universality of the law as its presentation in a determined moment and place in history. How could we conceive of such a history? The struggle against apartheid, wherever it takes place and such as Mandela carries it on and reflects it, would this remain a sort of specular opposition, a domestic war that the West carried on with itself, in its own name? An internal contradiction which would not put up with either a radical otherness or a true dissymmetry?

In this form, such a hypothesis still implies too many indistinct presuppositions. We shall try to recognize them later. For the moment, let's retain an obvious, more limited but also more certain fact: what Mandela admires and says he admires is the tradition inaugurated by the *Magna Carta*, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man under their diverse forms (he frequently calls upon "human dignity," upon what is human and "worthy of that name"); it's also parliamentary democracy and, still more precisely, the doctrine of the separation of powers, the independence of justice.

But if he admires this tradition, does it mean that he is its inheritor, its simple inheritor? Yes and no, depending on what is meant here by inheritance. You can recognize an authentic inheritor in the one who

⁴Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle Is My Life* (London: International Defence and Aid for Southern Africa, 1978), p. 170. All the following quotes are taken from this publication and the italicized words are Jacques Derrida's. [Note in *For Nelson Mandela*.]

conserves and reproduces, but also in the one who respects the *logic* of the legacy enough to turn it upon occasion against those who claim to be its guardians, enough to reveal, despite and against the usurpers, what has never yet been seen in the inheritance: enough to give birth, by the unheard-of *act* of a reflection, to what had never seen the light of day.

In all the senses of this term, Mandela remains, then, a *man of the law*. He has always appealed to the law even if, in appearance, he has to oppose himself to such-and-such specific legality, and even if certain judges have made of him, at certain moments, an outlaw.

A man of the law, he was this first *by vocation*. On the one hand, he always appeals to law. On the other hand, he has always felt himself attracted by, appealed to by the law before which people have wanted him to appear. He has moreover accepted to appear before it, even if he was also constrained to do so. He seizes the occasion, we don't dare to say, the good opportunity. Why the good opportunity? Let us reread his "defense" which is in truth an indictment. We will find there a political autobiography, his and that of his people, indissociable. The "I" of this autobiography establishes himself and justifies himself, reasons, and signs in the name of "we." He always says "my people," as we have already noted, especially when he asks the question of the subject responsible *before the law*:

I am charged with inciting people to commit an offence by way of protest against the law, a law which neither I nor any of my people had any say in preparing. The law against which the protest was directed is the law which established a Republic in the Union of South Africa. . . . But in weighing up the decision as to the sentence which is to be imposed for such an offence, the Court must take into account the question of responsibility, whether it is I who is responsible or whether, in fact, a large measure of the responsibility does not lie on the shoulders of the Government which promulgated that law, knowing that my people, who constitute the majority of the population of this country, were opposed to that law, and knowing further that every legal means of demonstrating that opposition had been closed to them by prior legislation, and by Government administrative action. (pp. 139–40)

So he presents himself in this way. He presents himself in his people, before the law. Before a law he rejects, beyond any doubt, but which he rejects in the name of a superior law, the very one he declares to admire and before which he agrees to *appear*. In such a presentation of the self, he justifies himself in resuming his history, which he reflects in a single center, a single and double center, his history and that of his people. . . . He is only what he is, he, Nelson Mandela, he and his people, he has presence only in this movement of justice.

Memories and confessions of a lawyer. The latter "confesses" in fact, even as he justifies it, even to the point of claiming it proudly, a fault in the eyes of legality. Taking as his witness humanity as a whole, he addresses himself to the universal justice above his judges of one day only. Whence this paradox: we can perceive a sort of joyous quivering throughout the tale of this martyrdom. And sometimes we think we hear Rousseau's accent in these confessions, hearing a voice which never ceases to appeal to *the voice of conscience*, to the immediate and unflinching sentiment of justice, to this law of laws that speaks in us before us, because it is inscribed within our heart[s]. In the same tradition, it is also the place of a categorical imperative, of a morality incommensurate with the conditional hypotheses and strategies of self-interest, as it is with the figures of such-and-such civil law:

I do not believe, Your Worship, that this Court, in inflicting penalties on me for the crimes for which I am convicted, should be moved by the belief that penalties deter men from the course that they believe is right. History shows that penalties do not deter men when their *conscience* is aroused. . . . (p. 150)

Whatever sentence Your Worship sees fit to impose upon me for the crime for which I have been convicted before this Court, may it rest assured that when my sentence has been completed, I will still be moved, as men are always moved, by their *consciences*; I will still be moved by my dislike of the race discrimination against my people when I come out from serving my sentence, to take up again, as best I can, the struggle for the removal of those injustices until they are finally abolished once and for all. (p. 151)

It was an act of defiance of the law. We were aware that it was, but, nevertheless, that act had been forced on us against our wishes, and we could do no other than to choose between compliance with the law and compliance with our *consciences*. (p. 143)

[We] were faced with this *conflict between the law and our conscience*. In the face of the complete failure of the Government to heed, to consider, or even to respond to our seriously proposed objections and our solutions to the forthcoming Republic, what were we to do? Were we to allow the law, which states that you shall not commit an offence by way of protest, to take its course and thus betray our *conscience*? . . . In such a dilemma, men of honesty, men of purpose, and men of public morality and of conscience can only have one answer. They must *follow the dictate of their conscience* irrespective of the consequences which might overtake them for it. We of the Action Council, and I particularly, as secretary, *followed our conscience*. (p. 145)

Conscience and conscience of the law, these two make only one. Presentation of oneself and presentation of one's people, these two make only a single history in a single reflection, in both cases, as we

have said, a single and double focus. And it is that of admiration, since this conscience presents itself, resumes itself, gathers in reflecting upon itself before the law. That is to say, let's not forget, before what is admirable. . . .

To be able to inscribe himself in the system, and above all in the faculty of law, Mandela takes courses by *correspondence*.

He wants to obtain first a degree in letters. Let's stress this episode. Since he cannot have immediate access to direct, personal conversation, he has to begin by correspondence. Mandela will complain about this later. The context, no doubt, will be different, but there will always be a politics of voice and writing, of the difference between what is said "aloud" and what is written, between the "live voice" and "correspondence." . . .

In order not to hear, not to understand, the white Government requires that one writes to it. But it also means thus not to answer and first of all not to read. Mandela reminds us of the letter that Albert Luthuli,⁵ then the president of the ANC, had addressed to the first minister Strijdom. It was a lengthy analysis of the situation, accompanied by a request for a consultation. Not the slightest response.

The standard of behavior of the South African Government towards my people, and its aspirations, has not always been what it should have been, and is not always the standard which is to be expected in serious high-level dealings between *civilized* people. Chief Luthuli's letter was not even favored with the courtesy of an acknowledgment from the Prime Minister's office. (p. 144)

The white power does not believe itself required to respond, does not hold itself responsible before the black people. The blacks cannot assure themselves, by return mail, by verbal exchange, by any look or sign, that any image of them has been formed on the other side, which might afterward return to it in some way. For the white power does not content itself with not answering. It does worse: it does not even acknowledge receipt. After Luthuli, Mandela experiences it himself. He has just written to Verwoerd to inform him of a resolution voted on by the action committee of which he is then the secretary. He requests also that a national convention be convoked before the deadline determined by the resolution. Neither an answer nor acknowledgment of receipt:

In a *civilized* country one would be outraged by *the failure* of the head of Government even to *acknowledge receipt of a letter*, or to consider such a reasonable request put to him by a broadly representative collection of important personalities and leaders of the most important commu-

⁵Luthuli became president of the ANC in 1952 and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

nity of the country. Once again, Government standards in dealing with my people fell below what the *civilized* world would expect. No reply, no response whatsoever, was received to our letter, no indication was even given that it had received any consideration whatsoever. Here we, the African people, and especially we of the National Action Council, who had been entrusted with the tremendous *responsibility* of safeguarding the interests of the African people, were faced with *this conflict between the law and our conscience*. (p. 145)

Not to acknowledge receipt is to betray the laws of civility but first of all those of civilization: a primitive behavior, a return to the state of nature, a presocial phase, *before the establishment of the law*. Why does the Government return to this noncivilized practice? Because it considers the majority of the people, the "most numerous community," as noncivilized, before or outside the law. Acting in this way, interrupting the correspondence thus in a unilateral fashion, the white man no longer respects his own law. He is blinded by this evidence: a letter received means that the other is appealing to the law of the community. In scorning his own law, the white man gives the law over to being scorned. . . .

I was made, by the law, a criminal, not because of what I had done, but because of what I stood for, because of what I thought, because of my conscience. Can it be any wonder to anybody that such conditions make a man an outlaw of society? Can it be wondered that such a man, having been outlawed by the Government, should be prepared to lead the life of an outlaw, as I have led for some months, according to the evidence before this Court? . . . But there comes a time, as it came in my life, when a man is denied the right to live a normal life, when he can only live the life of an outlaw because the Government has so decreed to use the law to impose a state of outlawry upon him. (pp. 148–49). . . .

A man of the law by vocation: it would be greatly simplifying things to say that he places respect for the law and a certain categorical imperative above professional deontology.⁶ The "profession of jurist" is not a *métier* like any other. It professes, we could say, what we are all bound to, even outside the profession. A jurist is an expert of respect or admiration, he judges or delivers himself to judgment with an increased rigor, or in any case he should. Mandela must then find, *inside* professional deontology, the best reason for failing in a legislative code which already betrayed the principles of every *good* professional deontology. As if, upon reflection, he were also to repair, supplement, reconstruct, add on to a deontology where the whites were finally showing themselves deficient.

Twice, then, he confesses a certain "scorn for the law" (still his

⁶Moral obligation.

expression) in order to hold out to his adversaries the mirror in which they should recognize and see their own contempt for the law being reflected. But with this *supplementary inversion*: on the side of Mandela, the apparent contempt signifies an increase of respect for the law. . . .

To oppose the law, to then try and transform it: once the decision is made, the recourse to violence should not take place without measure and without rule. Mandela explains in minute detail the strategy, the limits, the progress reflected upon and observed. First there was a phase in the course of which, all legal opposition being forbidden, the infraction had nevertheless to remain nonviolent:

All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority or to defy the Government. We chose to defy the law. We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence. (p. 156)

The infraction still manifests the absolute respect of the supposed spirit of the law. But it was impossible to stop there. For the Government invented new legal devices to repress nonviolent challenges. To this violent response, which was also a nonresponse, the passage to violence was in its turn the only possible response. Response to the nonresponse:

When this form was legislated against, and then the Government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence. (Ibid.)

But there again, the violence remains subject to a rigorous law, "a strictly controlled violence." Mandela insists, he underlines these words at the moment when he explains the genesis of the *Umkonto we Sizwe* (the Nation's Spear) in November 1961. In founding that combative organization, he means to submit it to the political directives of the Council for National Action, whose statutes prescribe nonviolence. In front of his judges, Mandela describes in detail the rules of action, the strategy, the tactics, and above all the limits imposed on the militants charged with sabotage: to wound or kill no one, either in the preparation or the execution of the operations. The militants must not bear arms. If he recognizes "having prepared a plan of sabotage," it was neither through "adventurism" nor through any "love of violence in itself." On the contrary, he wanted to interrupt what is so oddly called the cycle of violence, one implying the other because first of all it answers, reflects, sends it back its image. Mandela meant to limit the risks of explosion in controlling the actions of the militants, in constantly devoting himself to what he calls a "reflective" analysis of the situation.

He is arrested four months after the creation of the *Umkonto*, in

August 1962. In May 1964, at the end of the trial of Rivonia, he is condemned to permanent criminal detention.

P.S. The postscript is for the future—for that part of the future most undecided today. I wanted to speak, of course, of Nelson Mandela's future, of what does not allow itself to be anticipated, caught, captured by any mirror. Who is Nelson Mandela?

We will never cease to admire him, himself and his admiration. But we don't yet know whom to admire in him, the one who, in the past, will have been the captive of his admiration or the one who, in a future anterior, will always have been free (the freest man in the world, let us not say that lightly) for having had the patience of his admiration and having known, passionately, what he had to admire. The one refusing as early as yesterday a conditioned freedom.

Would they have also imprisoned him, almost a quarter of a century ago, in his admiration itself? Was that not the *objective*—I mean that in the sense of photography and of the optic machine—the right to look? Did he *let* himself be imprisoned? Did he *have* himself imprisoned? Was that an accident? Perhaps we should place ourselves at a point where these alternatives lose their meaning and become the justification and the starting point for new questions. Then leave these questions still open, like doors. And what remains to be seen in these questions, which are not only theoretical or philosophical, is also the figure of Mandela. Who is he?

We have looked at him through words which are sometimes the devices for observation, which can in any case become that if we are not careful. What we have described, in trying precisely to escape speculation, was a sort of great historical watchtower or observation post. But nothing permits us to imagine this unity as assured, still less the legitimacy of this optic of reflection, of its singular laws, of the law, of its place of institution, of presentation or of revelation, for example of what we assemble too quickly under the name of the West. But doesn't this presumption of unity produce something like an effect (I don't hold to this word) that so many forces, always, try to appropriate for themselves? An effect visible and invisible, like a mirror, also hard, like the walls of a prison.

All that still hides Nelson Mandela from our sight.

Mandela in the 1990s

SHERIDAN JOHNS AND R. HUNT DAVIS JR.

The following is the summary passage from Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress: The Struggle against Apartheid, 1948–1990: A Documentary Survey, edited by Sheridan Johns and R. Hunt Davis Jr. (References to source documents have been omitted.)

Through the 1980s Mandela and his Rivonia coprisoners, along with Oliver Tambo and his coleaders in exile, became progressively more visible symbols for all South Africans, black and white, pro-government and antigovernment, of the leadership of the ANC. All government efforts to split the ANC by enticing "moderates" away from the communists or to get Mandela to renounce violence in return for release from prison failed. Yet the government of P. W. Botha persisted in its refusal to accept the ANC or its leaders as legitimate representatives of the black majority.

In 1989 the stroke and subsequent resignation of P. W. Botha and the ascendancy of F. W. de Klerk as head of the National party created possibilities for new initiatives. P. W. Botha's July meeting with Nelson Mandela marked a dramatic and tacit reversal of government policy. De Klerk's subsequent unconditional release of Sisulu and the six other Rivonia prisoners in October and the toleration that followed of their open political activity seemed a further sign that the new National party government headed by F. W. de Klerk was ready to accept the ANC in some form as a negotiating partner in any discussions about the future of South Africa. De Klerk's statement on December 2, 1989, that Mandela would be released, followed by his meeting with Mandela on December 13, only heightened anticipation of how and when the government would finally release Mandela and permit him to resume open political activity. De Klerk's final announcement in Parliament on February 2, 1990, of the government's intention to release Mandela unconditionally and the lifting of the bans on the ANC, PAC, SACP,⁷ and other antiapartheid organizations set the stage for Mandela's release on February 11, opening a new chapter in the seventy-eight-year struggle of the ANC to obtain full democratic rights for Africans in the land of their birth.

Botha's and de Klerk's belated and explicit recognition of Mandela capped a steady process by which the ANC had returned to the center

⁷The South African Communist Party.

of the political stage, occupying again the position that it held in the 1950s as the most prominent of the black opposition groups. In more than four decades of opposition to the National party government, the ANC remained remarkably consistent in its vision for an apartheid-free, nonracial social democracy with equal opportunities for all citizens. After 1960 it reluctantly adopted violence and adapted to enforced exile and a clandestine existence. In the post-Soweto years its new stance, complemented by renewed attention to popular mobilization and the encouragement of dialogue with a broad range of opponents to apartheid, enabled it to achieve unprecedented mass support and national preeminence.

The ANC of the 1990s has many features in common with the ANC of the 1950s. Although many leading figures of the 1950s have died in exile or in South Africa (most notably Chief Albert Luthuli), the ANC's most prominent current leaders, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu in the country and Oliver Tambo overseas were among those in the forefront when the ANC was banned in 1960. They are of the political generation that rose through the ANC Youth League in the 1940s to revitalize and expand the ANC in the 1950s. Under the leadership of their generation in the 1950s, many of the major goals for a new political and economic order in South Africa and the political tactics to be practiced to realise these goals were fashioned; many of the goals and tactics remain essentially unchanged today.

Articulating their vision for a postapartheid society through the 1950s and early in the 1960s, Mandela, Tambo, and the ANC delineated a nonracial and democratic South Africa in which African nationalism—conceived as the freedom and fulfillment of the African people in their own land—could be realized. Central to their vision were a universal franchise for all South Africans, legally guaranteed individual rights, and a government open to all South Africans. Impressed by the egalitarian features of socialist societies and determined to achieve redistribution of economic power in the interests of the majority, they advocated a mixed economy in which banks, mines, and selected large industries would be state owned and in which the state would actively intervene to advance the economic well-being of the black disadvantaged, notably in redressing inequities in access to land. Deeply influenced by antiracist and nonracial sentiment, they advocated the end of not only apartheid statutes but also all racially discriminatory legislation and practices. They urged a policy of racial inclusiveness and participation by South Africans of all races in common institutions. The Freedom Charter summarized their blueprint for a new and just South Africa.

To achieve their goals, Mandela and Tambo looked to the ANC as the prime vehicle for mobilizing expanded opposition to apartheid. In keeping with practice since the foundation of the organization in 1912, the ANC was to continue to be an African "parliament" inclu-

sive of all political persuasions united in common opposition to discrimination and apartheid. Among the political persuasions that had been accepted by the ANC since the 1920s was communism. Although Mandela and Tambo had been among the Youth League members critical of communist participation, in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and the enthusiastic participation of banned communists in the common struggles of the 1950s, they came to accept the historical ANC position of including all Africans who accepted ANC goals, regardless of their ideology. Similarly, moving away from the original Africanist exclusivist stance of the Youth League, they came to accept that the ANC should work together with other antiapartheid opponents of all races. From 1955 onward these groups were organized together in the multiracial Congress Alliance. Through united political struggle under the leadership of the African-led ANC, it was believed that apartheid eventually could be challenged and ended.

More than three decades later Mandela, Tambo, and the ANC still are committed to the broadly defined conceptions of democracy, socialism, and nonracialism that they put forth in the 1950s. In his interviews with Lord Bethell and Samuel Dash⁸ in 1985, and then subsequently in discussion with the EPG, Mandela not only reaffirmed his commitment to the Freedom Charter but also conveyed his convictions about the relevance of Western democratic institutions for a postapartheid South Africa, reiterating the praise for the British Parliament and the American division of powers expressed in his Rivonia speech. At the same time he reiterated his belief that a mixed economy would be appropriate. Tambo has articulated similar views, both before foreign audiences and in the lone post-1960 opportunity he has had to speak directly to South Africans, through the interview published in the *Cape Times* in 1985. In mid-1988 the ANC in exile released its *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa*, also published in South African newspapers, in which the sentiments of Mandela and Tambo were echoed in a formal ANC document stating its parameters for debate on a postapartheid constitution. In contrast with the Freedom Charter the *Constitutional Guidelines* implicitly endorsed an independent judiciary and a multiparty system (provided that racism is not advocated) at the same time they muted the commitment to extensive nationalization.

On the question of the role of communists in the ANC and links with the Soviet Union, an issue regularly raised by Americans and Britons, Mandela has reiterated his view that the ANC is beholden to

⁸Lord Bethell was a representative of the British House of Lords who visited South Africa in 1985. Samuel Dash was Chief Counsel to the U.S. Senate Watergate Committee, who also visited South Africa in 1985.

no other body, likening its communist members to radicals in Britain. Tambo likewise has asserted his confidence that the ANC would continue to determine its own policies independently while including communists in its ranks and accepting support from the Soviet Union and its allies. In a forceful statement reaffirming the antiracist convictions that had driven him and his generation of ANC members, Tambo justified the ANC's willingness to include all accepting its antiapartheid platform within its ranks, including communists, by reference to American willingness to create a broad anti-Nazi alliance in World War II, including the Soviet Union.

The banning of the ANC in 1960 and the immediate necessity of reconsidering the strategy and tactics for survival underground and in exile, conditions for which the ANC was ill prepared, precipitated rethinking in the ANC on the central question of whether its policy of nonviolence should be continued. Mandela was among the small group of ANC leaders who established Umkhonto we Sizwe to conduct sabotage and continue toward guerrilla activity, articulating a measured argument for the use of carefully controlled violence against "hard" political, military, and economic targets with no loss of life, if possible, as a tool to bring a change in government policy.

To a large degree, the position formulated in the early 1960s, in which the indiscriminate killing of terrorism was rejected, has been sustained through the 1980s in the vastly changed situation of more extensive government violence and mass mobilization in South Africa. Since the reappearance of Umkhonto we Sizwe guerrillas in the late 1970s, many of their actions have been "armed propaganda" directed at both white and black, avoiding as much as possible the loss of life. From the early 1980s, in the wake of South African attacks on targets in neighboring states and successful assassinations of exiled ANC leaders, such as Joe Gqabi in Zimbabwe, and even more in the mid-1980s with rising injuries and loss of life at the hands of the police and the military called in to suppress mass demonstrations in the townships, the ANC argued that the distinction between "hard" military targets and "soft" nonmilitary targets would become blurred in the intensification of the struggle against the violence of apartheid. Amidst growing anger at the government repression under the state of emergency, Umkhonto we Sizwe members placed explosives not only in government buildings but also in shopping centers and public gathering places, resulting in civilian casualties. Responding to vigorous debate in the ANC and to outside criticism Tambo led the National Executive Committee in August 1988 to restate explicitly that it was contrary to ANC policy to select solely civilian targets, distancing itself from the actions of its headstrong guerrillas in the field and broadly reaffirming the ANC's stance on the controlled use of violence set in the early 1960s.

The question of violence was also posed in the stark new form of

so-called black-on-black violence in the townships, including widely publicized incidents of "necklacing." In response to questions, Tambo explained the crowds' attacks against individuals regarded as collaborators as an understandable response of Africans to the violence inherent in apartheid, not as a part of ANC strategy. Both Mandela and Tambo convey the image of reluctant advocates of the use of violence. In their view, violence is a necessity forced on the ANC by the violence of the state and the apartheid system and the lack of alternatives left to it by the government; it is appropriate only if it is used in carefully controlled fashion to complement and advance political mobilization.

As the role of violence became a central issue for the ANC after its banning in 1960, so too did questions concerning the international activities of the ANC. Before 1960 the ANC had paid limited attention to overseas operations and the mobilization of overseas support. But as the ruthless government campaign of the early 1960s succeeded in its goals of imprisoning much of the ANC leadership, destroying the initial ANC and Umkhonto we Sizwe underground, and forcing many remaining activists into exile, the ANC inevitably was forced to give priority to external operations to muster crucial financial, logistical, military, and political support.

In its efforts to gain facilities and funds for exile operations the ANC has had mixed success on the African continent, mustering generally strong support from the Front Line States of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, while encountering difficulties with Malawi, Swaziland, and more distant francophone states. Beyond the continent it has received Soviet and East European military and training support plus material and moral support from Western European and North American sources.

Since the early 1960s the ANC has advocated economic sanctions against South Africa as a means of forcing the government to reconsider its policies and to limit loss of life in the transition from apartheid. Frustrated by its lack of success in influencing the Western powers, particularly the United States and Britain, the ANC welcomed the passage of limited economic sanctions by the United States in 1986.

By the 1980s the ANC's external efforts, both in lobbying to get governments and international organizations to change their policies toward South Africa and in diplomatic representation to gain practical support for its exile operations, had become the major visible component of its organizational activities. In contrast with the 1950s, external sources of support played a major role in the ANC's ongoing operations.

The ANC of the 1990s is committed to the racial inclusiveness that has characterized it since the 1950s, but the organizational expression of its commitment has shifted from multiracialism to nonracialism. In

the 1950s questions about the role of non-Africans in the ANC continued to be raised, becoming more salient after the formal establishment of the multiracial Congress Alliance in 1955. Africanists, invoking the Africanism of Anton Lembede⁹ and the stance of the Youth League in the 1940s, split away in 1959 to form the PAC, asserting *inter alia* that only Africans should be members of a liberation movement. The ANC rejected the PAC contention, reaffirming its commitment to working with opponents of all races who shared its views, a practice continued underground and in exile.

In 1969, at the First National Consultative Conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, the ANC translated its commitment, expressed in the multiracialism of the Congress Alliance, into nonracialism when it opened membership to all South Africans. Simultaneously, in recognition of the centrality of African interests (and perhaps explicitly recognizing some of the appeal of Black Consciousness), it gave priority to recognizing African national pride and confidence and restricted membership of the National Executive Committee to Africans. In the mid-1980s, however, at the Second National Consultative Conference in Kabwe, Zambia, at a time when the nonracialism of the UDF¹⁰ in South Africa was expanding, the ANC removed the last barriers in the organization to non-Africans by elevating two Indians, two Coloreds, and one white to the thirty-member National Executive Committee. In contrast with the Congress Alliance of the 1950s, composed of linked racially based political bodies headed by the ANC, the ANC in the 1980s became a nonracial organization open at all levels to South Africans of all races.

Even more striking was the change from the 1950s to the 1980s in the nature and base of support for the ANC. In the 1950s, spurred by the Defiance Campaign of 1952–53, the ANC expanded to a membership of approximately 100,000, concentrated for the most part in urban townships. Additional tens of thousands responded intermittently to ANC campaigns but were not actively involved in the organization. With the banning of the ANC in 1960 a new situation was created in which the ANC in the country could be only an ambiguously stated affinity or implicit identification with an underground and exile organization.

With membership in the ANC illegal and the declaration of support for a banned organization a criminal offense, the costs of explicitly identifying with the ANC were high. Through the 1960s and 1970s the government systematically moved not only against suspected Umkhonto we Sizwe members and underground ANC cells but also against all who manifested support for the banned organiza-

⁹An attorney who was the first president of the Youth League.

¹⁰United Democratic Front.

tion. Yet the success of the mass mobilization campaigns of the 1980s, led primarily by the ANC-oriented UDF and its affiliates since 1983, made it impossible for the government to suppress all support for the ANC. Although no longer a legal political organization as it had been in the 1950s, the ANC as a recognizable political orientation, symbolized in its charterist stance, clearly again captured the loyalties of a broad spectrum of South Africans. The response to the activities of the UDF and its affiliated bodies showed that hundreds of thousands of black South Africans, if not millions, identified with the charterist orientation and, through it, with the ANC.

In contrast with the supporters of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s, the bulk of charterist supporters at the end of the 1980s were grouped in hundreds of local community organizations or trade unions affiliated with the UDF or COSATU¹¹ rather than as members of a single national political organization. The organizationally decentralized nature of charterist affinity remained a source of resiliency in the face of government repression of national political organizations, including the UDF. The fact that the expression of support for charterist goals easily fused with a general antiapartheid stance and did not require explicit adherence to a party platform also ensured a broad diversity of viewpoints among those who identified with an ANC orientation.

Other major features of the ANC in the 1980s marked not so much shifts from the pre-1960 period of open politics but shifts reflecting the changing currents of post-1960 black opposition politics. Continuing in the founding ANC tradition of opposition to "tribal" bodies as a base for national African politics, the ANC opposed separate development from its inception under Verwoerd in the 1950s. Yet in the late 1960s and 1970s the ANC explored the utility of working through and with independent-minded bantustan leaders, specifically identifying Gatsha Buthelezi¹² with his solid base in KwaZulu.¹³ From 1980, however, relations with Buthelezi and Inkatha¹⁴ soured in the wake of his opposition to school boycotts and other ANC-supported campaigns in South Africa, as well as his well-publicized antisansations stance, his attacks on ANC "terrorism," and Inkatha-supported township violence in Natal in the mid-1980s. Nevertheless, the UDF attempted to negotiate with Inkatha to stop township violence in Natal, and to this end in 1989 Mandela continued to correspond with Buthelezi.

In line with the overarching goal of establishing as broad a front as possible, the ANC remained willing to meet with bantustan leaders who seemed receptive, entertaining a delegation of KaNgwane lead-

¹¹Congress of South African Trade Unions.

¹²The most important domestic leader of the ANC.

¹³The Zulu homeland.

¹⁴A rival of Buthelezi in the ANC.

ers in Lusaka in 1986 and urging that potentially sympathetic elements in the bantustan administrations be cultivated. The fruits of this policy were dramatically visible on November 26, 1989, when the recently freed Walter Sisulu addressed a pro-ANC rally in Umtata, the capital of the Transkei, and also met with General Bantu Homolisa, the head of the military government of South Africa's first "independent" bantustan who has continued to show signs of reversing the policies of the deposed Matanzima regime.¹⁵

The ANC's relationships with adherents of Black Consciousness have also shifted with changes in the nature of both the Black Consciousness movement and the ANC's fortunes. From an initial critical stance in the late 1960s the ANC moved in the mid-1970s to seek links with Black Consciousness adherents. After Soweto, the 1977 bannings of Black Consciousness organizations and the imprisonment and flight of many Black Consciousness movement militants, the ANC was successful in attracting significant numbers of the young exiles to its ranks, anticipating a movement that accelerated internally in the 1980s, particularly as Black Consciousness militants were released from prison, where many had changed their views through close contact with ANC leaders and ordinary members. Although important Black Consciousness adherents remained opposed to white participation and committed to exclusively black opposition through AZAPO and other Black Consciousness-oriented successor organizations, by the mid-1980s many former supporters were playing prominent roles in the nonracial UDF, and many Black Consciousness-initiated community organizations were participating in the UDF.

The ANC unquestionably enjoys strongly rooted and widespread support among the black majority and growing respectability among a minority of the white population. Indicative of the depth and breadth of its support was the crowd of seventy-thousand, including whites, that assembled for the first ANC rally permitted by the government in late October 1989, shortly after the release of Sisulu and his fellow prisoners. Among ANC supporters are South Africans of all ages, ranging from the pre-1960 generations, to those whose political initiation came through Black Consciousness, to even more recently mobilized youth whose participation started with the militant actions of the 1980s. As all ages are represented, so are diverse political viewpoints, ranging from communists to non-Marxist socialists to radical democrats to more conservative elements.

Buoyed by this diverse support, the ANC enters the 1990s dedicated to realizing a postapartheid South Africa, on the basis of a program articulated in the Freedom Charter of the 1950s and modified little in its essential features by the Constitutional Guidelines for

a Democratic South Africa of 1988. Among the antiapartheid opposition it faces rivalry from other militants, both those who still identify with the PAC as well as those who identify with the modified Black Consciousness stance that also rejects nonracialism, and also gives higher priority to the achievement of socialism rather than merely to the institution of full democracy. It also faces the seemingly well entrenched Inkatha organization, headed by Gatsha Buthelezi and supported by the financial and institutional resources of KwaZulu.

Unlike its rivals in the antiapartheid movement, the ANC is strongly established both outside and inside the country. Although it has temporarily lost the unifying presence of Oliver Tambo, it is active on many fronts. It has strong links with many African states. It has relied on the Soviet Union for the majority of its military requirements and continues to receive assurance of Soviet support. It actively maintains its policy of sustaining and expanding contacts with both antiapartheid citizen movements and governments in Western Europe and North America to increase pressure on the National party government.

The center of gravity of ANC activities, however, has unquestionably shifted back to South Africa. Despite the increasing government surveillance and intimidation in the 1980s, the three internal ANC leadership clusters—Mandela and his fellow prisoners, the underground internal organizations of both Umkhonto we Sizwe and the ANC, and those operating above ground and semiclandestinely in the UDF and COSATU—managed defiantly and resourcefully to extend their capacity to communicate and coordinate with one another and the fourth leadership cluster, the exiled leadership. In the changed setting of 1989 created by the new tolerance of the National party government headed by de Klerk, the four components of the ANC leadership seized new opportunities to coordinate their activities and to continue to build support among the South African population, including antiapartheid whites who did not identify fully with the principles and goals of the ANC.

With the unbanning of the ANC on February 2, 1990, and the release of Nelson Mandela on February 11, the antiapartheid struggle of more than four decades entered a new stage. Speaking before tens of thousands of supporters within hours of his release, Mandela reaffirmed the aims and goals of the ANC which had been articulated through the 1980s, emphasizing its unchanging commitment to majority rule, universal suffrage, and democratic rights in a unitary South African state in which major economic reforms, including nationalization, would be required to redress the inequities of apartheid and discrimination. He reiterated the ANC's willingness to enter negotiations with the government, listing the conditions that had been enumerated in the Harare Declaration. At the same time he repeated that armed struggle remained

¹⁵Kaizer Matanzima, the chief minister of the Transkei.

appropriate as an additional weapon to challenge the government to end apartheid.

In the hectic days and weeks that followed Mandela's release, he and his ANC associates continued to advance the platform articulated prior to his release. In countless meetings and appearances, including consultations with ANC supporters and leaders of the antiapartheid opposition, interviews with domestic and foreign correspondents, and public speeches before nationwide audiences in South Africa, Mandela was thrust into the maelstrom of everyday operational politics. Designated deputy president of the ANC at his first meeting with the National Executive Committee in Lusaka in early March, Mandela carefully showed that he would conduct himself within the ANC ethos to which he had so often pledged allegiance—that of a loyal member of the organization. It was also clear that he had become the prime spokesperson for the organization at home and abroad.

In the changed setting of freedom and legality for the ANC, Mandela, Sisulu, and other ANC leaders worked simultaneously to broaden the antiapartheid movement linked with the ANC and to push the government to release remaining political prisoners, amnesty exiled ANC members, and end the state of emergency. With the full support of the National Executive Committee, Mandela led an ANC delegation comprised of longtime exiles (including military leaders and communists), erstwhile prisoners, representatives of the UDF, trade unions, and churches, and representing all of South Africa's racial groups to a three-day meeting from May 2 to May 4 with President de Klerk and cabinet ministers at Groote Schuur, the president's residence in Cape Town. At the first meeting ever between an ANC delegation and the head of the white South African government, agreement was reached that the state of emergency and security legislation would be reviewed by the government and mechanisms would be established to consider the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles. In well-publicized visits elsewhere in Africa and in Europe and North America, Mandela counterpointed the negotiations with repeated appeals for the retention of sanctions until the full dismantling of apartheid.

The first stage of the negotiation process advocated by Mandela from prison and by the ANC in the Harare Declaration has begun. The length of the process and the specific details of the new postapartheid South Africa remain unknown. However, Mandela and the ANC have demonstrated that they will continue to demand, as they have since 1948, the end of apartheid, democratic rights and full opportunity for all South Africans, and recognition as the preeminent voice of the opposition.

Questions for Review and Study

1. What activities was Mandela engaged in during the 1940s and '50s?
2. In the selection from *The Struggle Is My Life*, what is Mandela proposing?
3. How does Derrida characterize Mandela's program?
4. What does Mandela advocate for the 1990s?

Questions for Comparison

1. Compare Gandhi and Mandela. What conditions provoked their resistance, and what forms did it take? What strategies did each employ, and to what ends? On whose behalf did these men act, and whose support did they earn? How complete was Gandhi's and Mandela's opposition to things Western? Do Gandhi and Mandela impress you more as moral or as political leaders? In what ways do these men recall earlier men of conscience such as Socrates and Luther?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Nelson Mandela has published a fair number of books, articles, speeches, and interviews. His autobiography is *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Collections of his speeches have been edited by Greg McCartan and by Steve Clark. Somewhat larger and more diverse collections are Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom* and *The Struggle Is My Life*, which is excerpted in this chapter. A related book is by Nelson Mandela's former wife Winnie Mandela, *Part of My Soul Went with Him*.

Mandela's official biography *Higher Than Hope* is by Fatima Meer. Other biographies include the texts by John Vail, Richard Tames, Mary Benson, and Rebecca Steffoff. *For Nelson Mandela*, a series of biographical articles, edited by Jacques Derrida and Mustapha Tlili, is excerpted in this chapter. Specialized biographical accounts include *Chained Together*, by David Ottaway; *Opposition in South Africa*, by Tim J. Juckes; *Nelson Mandela*, edited by E. S. Reddy; *World That Was Ours*, by Hilda Bernstein; and *Nelson Mandela and Apartheid in South Africa*, by K. K. Virmani.

Two biographical items that deal with Nelson's controversial wife Winnie are Nancy Harrison's *Winnie Mandela* and Arthur Schelsiner's *Nelson and Winnie Mandela*.

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