

**T**om Lodge, a former politics professor at South Africa's University of the Witwatersrand, has written a biography of South Africa's first democratically-elected president, Nelson Mandela, that follows three earlier biographies by Fatima Meer, Anthony Sampson, and Martin Meredith. Lodge seeks to shed more light on the role of Mandela's childhood in shaping his leadership qualities; he assesses Mandela's role in 'leading from prison', examines the mythical cult that was consciously developed around his iconic status, and analyses Mandela's 'messianic' leadership of South Africa's democratic transition.

Mandela grew up in a royal Xhosa household, attending elite Methodist schools modeled on the English education system. He developed great respect for English democratic institutions and gentlemanly manners, becoming a life-long Anglophile. Mandela studied at the black elite Fort Hare University, where he met Oliver Tambo, the future head of the African National Congress (ANC). Moving to Johannesburg, he met another ANC stalwart and mentor, Walter Sisulu, who was with Mandela for most of his 27 years in jail. Before prison, Mandela had married two women (including Winnie Madikizela) and became involved in ANC politics. The political struggle in apartheid South Africa, which led to an absentee father role, caused Mandela much personal anguish – a subject that Lodge tackles well.

Mandela's intellectual thinking was particularly influenced by members of South Africa's Communist Party (SACP), before he helped to found the ANC Youth League in 1944. He gradually metamorphosed from a black nationalist who expressed concern that South African Indians were dominating the liberation struggle to a prophet of multiracialism. At first inspired by Gandhian tactics of passive resistance, Mandela would eventually come to play a leadership role in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, before initiating the 'armed struggle' that led to a life sentence in 1964. His visit to Tanzania,

Ethiopia, Zambia, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Guinea in 1961 had given him great insights into continental diplomacy and the tactics of other liberation movements. Mandela was particularly influenced by the Algerian *Front de Liberation Nationale*. He had always adopted a much broader pan-African vision of his country's struggle, as the name of his party – sheltered during the apartheid struggle by many neighbouring countries, at huge costs to themselves – suggested.

Lodge describes Mandela's difficult experiences in jail: his eyes, lungs and prostate were badly affected by the squalid conditions on Robben Island. But this was also a forum in which the ideological struggles of the ANC were played out, as Mandela and Govan Mbeki (father of the current president, Thabo) battled over the role of traditional chiefs, the prospects for revolutionary warfare, and the role of the Black Consciousness Movement and Communist Party in South Africa's liberation. Mandela read widely, and wrote his memoirs which were smuggled out of jail. He became a 'constant gardener', planting vegetables during his captivity. Mandela's relationship with Winnie is touchingly described, as is the tragic aftermath when the relationship that had sustained him in jail for three decades disintegrated bitterly and in public within two years of his release.

Mandela and his comrades stubbornly stuck to their principle of majority rule, and

refused offers to renounce their armed struggle in exchange for their freedom. Despite being isolated in jail, Mandela instinctively knew when to negotiate with apartheid's leaders, requesting a meeting with Minister of Justice Kobie Coetsee in 1985, and eventually meeting both Presidents P.W. Botha and F.W. De Klerk as a prisoner. As Mandela noted: 'There are times when a leader must move out ahead of his flock...' Like a good shepherd, he skillfully guided his followers to freedom. Mandela's leadership was clearly decisive in ending apartheid and ushering in democratic rule. Lodge effectively tackles the acrimonious battles that took place between Mandela and De Klerk during the transition, with Mandela angrily accusing De Klerk of acting in bad faith in not curbing the excesses of his security forces. During a cabinet meeting in the post-1994 government of national unity, Mandela, then president, chastised deputy president De Klerk so harshly that the latter considered resigning.

Mandela not only embodied the nation but also became the leading apostle of reconciliation. He emerged from prison without any apparent bitterness towards his former enemies, and tirelessly promoted national reconciliation. This biography is, however, not very critical of Mandela, though it does point to some of his flaws: his lambasting of critical black journalists; his suggestion that Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu not criticise the ANC

in public; his occasional intolerance of dissent, which led to the ousting of Pallo Jordan as Minister of Telecommunications, and Bantu Holomisa as Deputy Minister of the Environment; and his obsessive loyalty to some politicians of dubious moral character and competence.

Mandela consistently upheld personal loyalty abroad as well, as seen, for example, in his insistence on maintaining his friendship with Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and Cuba's Fidel Castro, both of whom had strongly supported the ANC's struggle. This loyalty was to serve Mandela well in brokering a deal on the Lockerbie bombings in Scotland which finally lifted UN sanctions on Libya. After retiring in 1999, Mandela became a tireless peacemaker in Burundi. He also pushed Mbeki's government to provide anti-retroviral drugs to HIV/AIDS sufferers in South Africa, where five million people are currently infected by the pandemic. This was a battle which Mandela – much to his regret – had neglected during his own tenure in office. Employing his incredible moral stature, South Africa's icon also became one of the fiercest critics of America's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

As the author himself appears to concede, this is not a definitive biography of Mandela, and earlier studies have gone into far greater depth about the man. But this is a thoroughly researched book that pulls together different strands of the tale and captures well the essence of one of the greatest moral figures of the 20th century. Critics have noted that Mandela may end up doing more long-term damage by papering over racial differences and by not having forced whites to show more contrition to their largely black victims of apartheid. Mandela's legacy in liberating his country is secured, but the success of his efforts at reconciliation will only endure if rapid progress can narrow the country's grotesque socio-economic inequalities.



## Africa's Avuncular Saint

Adekeye Adebajo

### Mandela: A Critical Life

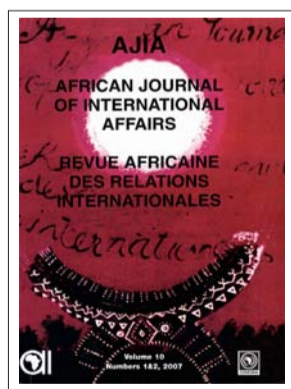
by Tom Lodge  
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#### Contents / Sommaire



Special Issue on Elections and the Challenge of Post-Conflict Democratisation in West Africa  
Guest Editor: Cyril I. Obi

Introduction: Elections and the Challenge of Post-Conflict Democratisation in West Africa  
Cyril I. Obi

Democracy and Conflict Management in Africa: Is Ghana a Model or a Paradox?  
Jasper Ayelazuno

From War to Peace: Elections, Civil Society and Governance in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone  
Abraham John

The Challenges of Documenting War Atrocities in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone: A Study of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)  
Proscovia Svärd

Post-Conflict Elections in Africa: Liberia and Guinea-Bissau in Comparative Perspective  
John Akokpari and Elisabete Azevedo

Partnership and Post-War Guinea-Bissau  
Jónína Einarsdóttir

Rhetoric of Power, Power of Rhetoric: Discourse Implications of Mass Media Reports of Election Campaigns and the Sustenance of Democracy in Nigeria  
Augustine U. Nwagbara

Pro-democracy Movements, Democratisation and Conflicts in Africa: Nigeria, 1990–1999  
Kehinde Olayode

Democracy, Elections, Election Monitoring and Peace-Building in West Africa  
Adelaja Odukoya