



**Jyoti Mistry**

## Mandela: Humanitarian Hero

Nelson Mandela has been one of the few contemporary heroes whose reputation and idolized status has always remained intact. Jyoti Mistry asks why.

In a recent advertising research poll, Nelson Mandela was ranked the most visible and recognizable brand in the world, followed by Coca Cola which once occupied first place. The famous prisoner who later became the first president in a democratic South Africa is a brand associated with humanitarian efforts such as championing children's education, building schools in rural communities and more recently has become involved with the safe-sex HIV/AIDS campaign in South Africa.

It is virtually impossible to find any negative press associated with this national hero who is indisputably the global symbol of reconciliatory politics and peaceful negotiations. Nelson Mandela seems only to be flawed by his temper which is said to be short-lived and often erupts when he feels surrounded by inefficiency. It is Mandela's charismatic presence, his sense of fairness and his statuesque physique which have occupied many of his biographers. Those who have worked closely with him are even less likely to disclose any intimate information about Mandela. His employees, as with his tight circle of friends, are bound by their loyalty to him.

How do we understand the making of a national hero who spent 27 years isolated from public life and public scrutiny? How do we understand a prisoner made president who relinquishes power very soon after inauguration? How do we deconstruct a human being who has been deified for exuding the best of human qualities: generosity, compassion and virtue. How do we separate the man, who has remained enigmatic, from the myths that surround him?

### Constructing a Hero

Rehana Ebrahim-Vally shows that the heroic figure emerges when an individual displays extraordinary qualities within their social context and rises above ordinary people. She uses the distinction between the Homeric hero and the modern hero to suggest how Nelson Mandela emerges as a heroic figure in a time of turbulent socio-political transition in South Africa. The Homeric hero is identified by his commitment to his own personal excellence and is guided by his aim to fulfill a particular goal. In the case of Odysseus his aim is to return home safely and as expeditiously as possible. While the Homeric hero is privileged to eventually be deified into a lineage with the gods, the modern hero is seen to be committed to the development of his personal excellence for public good and immortalized for very mortal actions. Modern heroes are

rarely, if ever, couched in the discourse of gods and demons but it is useful to think through this notion in terms comparable to modern times. This is what makes Mandela a fascinating historical figure. He has in fact been deified with equal enthusiasm by South Africans and internationally.

His childhood background, educational privileges and his isolated incarceration have offered invaluable opportunities for mythologizing. It is indisputable that Mandela embodies exceptional qualities but is through the careful selection and exhibition of these qualities that he has been constructed as a national hero.

The modern hero is an ordinary member of society with a vision that promises to improve the lives of people and advance their cause. He first emerges as a leader and depending on his actions and its consequences will much later, upon reflection, emerge as a hero. Furthermore, the individual's ability to offer strategic guidance and exhibit tactical skills distinguishes leaders, from those who eventually become heroes. "The common purpose that Mandela evokes was to become the leitmotiv for a unified black society that could fight against the injustices experienced." (Ebrahim-Vally, 2002). Mandela's heroic rise was far from meteoric but steadily and strategically orchestrated by those he met and later befriended (Walter Sisulu Oliver Tambo and Ahmed Kathrada to name a few). The years he spent in prison were his years of education which turned him from being a radical revolutionary to a statesman. This preparation was necessary for grooming Mandela as the consummate negotiator and for ensuring that his leadership reflected at all times the sentiments of the ANC and its aspirations. In as much as Mandela, the man was being turned into a myth, he always remained faithful to the ANC party line. Only recently has Mandela distanced himself from the ANC position on certain fundamental issues like the ANC government's position on the Zimbabwe land claims or South Africa's international foreign policies. This distancing came as result of his prolonged negotiations within the party and even though he has chosen not to agree with certain political decisions, he has remained a ANC loyalist. He rarely if ever criticizes the ANC openly and when he does disagree he resorts to the rhetoric of a politician who aims to resolve internal conflicts from within the party which is not visible for public scrutiny. The ANC's opposition have severely criticized this mode of operation by attacking its undemocratic procedures. Mandela has also come into the line of fire, because his persuasion within the party and on members of parliament has been questioned. Even though Mandela is revered as a socio-political icon within the country, he is seen by many contemporary, younger ANC members as a conservative politician. This position is particularly clear in his relation to Thabo Mbeki.

The pursuit of an ideal is central to the psychic make-up of the modern hero and like the Homeric hero there are no limits to achieving the goals the hero must accomplish. In striving to achieve his objectives the hero will have to make personal sacrifices and even offer his life to the cause he believes in. This makes him all the more inspiring to the society he lives in and with each objective he achieves his status is elevated. "The modern hero interacts with ordinary beings in his society and his status as a hero is dependent upon recognition of his ideals and actions by ordinary people." (Ebrahim-Vally, 2002)

While on the one hand this may be true of Mandela as a modern hero, the complexity of deconstructing "Mandela as hero" is the fact that he does in many respects embody the characteristics associated with the Homeric hero. Moreover the enigma of Mandela is perpetuated by the fact that he was for

many years not a part of the society whose ideals he represented. His imprisonment on Robben Island protected him from public scrutiny and scandal. He emerged from prison an untarnished public figure in February 1990 cloaked by carefully constructed legends that arrived to shore long before he had. A model prisoner, he sacrificed his youth because he was driven by the goal to emancipate South Africa from its racial injustices. The long hours of mining in the lime quarries on the Island confirmed for the people his physical strength and stamina. Mandela's corporeal capacity to lead the nation is augmented with his intellectual might and vision for rebuilding the South African nation–state.

### **Ideological Influences**

While his ideals may have remained, he constantly revised and changed his strategy depending on the tactics of the hegemonic power during apartheid in South Africa.

The brilliance of Nelson Mandela has been his ability to tactfully assess situations and make judgments and pronouncements which take into account the historical, political and economic implications of the situation.

In the early 1950's the ANC (African National Congress) waged a Defiance Campaign – a peaceful protest through letters and the court system – which protested the separatist apartheid legislation. In his autobiography Mandela cites the influence of Mahatma K. Gandhi's *satyagraha* principles of non–violence, that seek to conquer through conversion, as the approach adopted by the ANC.

Gandhi had developed his ideas of non–violent protest during his early years as a lawyer in South Africa. In 1913, Gandhi led a procession of Indians from Natal to the Transvaal in protest of the segregation laws which discriminated against Indians. Years later, when he had returned to India, he led another campaign in 1946 which opposed the British occupation of India. The strategies of the Indian liberation struggle profoundly influenced the ANC's tact throughout the 1950's. However, the historical circumstances in South Africa were radically different from those of colonial India. While the British conceded that they were no longer able; in good conscience; to wage attacks on passive protesters, the Afrikaner government had responded to the Defiance Campaign with escalated violence targeted at black communities.

Mandela has often been compared with Gandhi and while both national heroes have common ideologies, their personalities as public figures and their use of the media to further their political objectives have been radically different.

Gandhi's concern with equity and national self determination, it may be argued were extremely narrow and ethnically bound. During his years in South Africa, it was centrally the Indian question, the discriminatory laws and treatment of his "fellow countrymen" (as he referred to them) for whom he rallied his cause. While Gandhi's influence on changes in legislation pertaining to Indian rights in South Africa is undeniable; he did little to acknowledge either publicly or privately the larger context of colonial oppression experienced by all blacks in South Africa. Gandhi's sentiment remained pointedly with the emancipation of the Indians and his implicit lack of creating alliances with black African resistance raised suspicions. While it is true that Gandhi may never be overtly accused of segregational politics because of his heroic status as a champion of non–violence, his political ideologies were focused centrally on the Indians in

South Africa and, later in India where Muslims felt that Gandhi's vision of an emancipated India was not inclusive of them.

What makes Mandela distinct from Gandhi is their own particular use of their background and their individual political and ideological stance on being a part of the oppressed. Gandhi aligned himself with the political position of the oppressed by himself taking on the social and symbolic role of one of the oppressed. Even though Gandhi came from the highest caste, the Brahmins in India, he chose quite strategically to enact a subaltern status. In other words, as an educated person of high caste standing, he was not subjected to the same discrimination as experienced by the working classes or the untouchables in India. He performed gestures of solidarity as though he were one of the oppressed or discriminated against. This meant that he chose a life of poverty by design, wore minimal clothing which he made himself and presented these symbols strategically as a means of making a political statement. The complexity and the difference, from a revisionist historical perspective, is Gandhi did not also fully present the plight of the people he claimed to be representing. Instead he seems to have propagated his own personal philosophy on fasting, sexual abstinence and material detachment – all of which have come into contest more recently in history.

In contrast, Mandela, does not perform any physical or overt gestures of solidarity with the oppressed. Instead for Mandela the rhetoric of emancipation and empowerment is central for the liberation of his people. To inspire upliftment and empowerment, Mandela shares his material and financial gifts with non-partisan parties, like children's causes and educational initiatives. Gandhi's liberation initiatives; and after India's independence; gave greatest credence to labor empowerment rather than education and economic equity. The spinning of cotton in this respect became the metaphor for Gandhian politics, while for Mandela fund raising to build schools in rural communities and creating community support for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS are his humanitarian efforts couched in the agenda of national social and economic upliftment.

Mandela's politics as shown in his autobiography is an evolution of awareness about tribal identity and solidarity and its relation to a larger African consciousness. In the introductory chapters he is wholly concerned with his pride in the Xhosa people and more specifically in the Themba tribe which he belonged to. At his initiation ceremony (the ritual circumcision of young boys) he is exposed, for the first time, to a discourse that will change the shape of his thinking about identity and the need for political solidarity among oppressed people. Chief Meligqili made a provocative speech which angered the community at the time, including Mandela, because the chief challenged the tribe to a solidarity among all Africans which would fight the oppression imposed by the white man. In his own words, Mandela reflects on this initial moment of political enlightenment, "I was cross rather than aroused by the chief's remarks, dismissing his words as the abusive comments of an ignorant man who was unable to appreciate the value of the education and benefits that the white man had brought to our country. At the time. I looked on the white man not as an oppressor but as a benefactor, and I thought that the chief was enormously ungrateful...but without exactly understanding why, his words soon began to work on me. He had sown a seed." (1994:28) By the time Mandela had returned to his community from his studies at Fort Hare University, he had changed his position on ethnically specific solidarity and saw the emancipation of all black people as an urgent political issue. His time in Johannesburg as a practising lawyer also gave him the opportunity to

examine the value of seeking alliances across racial boundaries. His relationships with Joe Slovo, Ruth First and members of the National Indian Congress (NIC) which later joined forces with the banned ANC to form the UDF (United Democratic Front) bear testimony to the shift in thinking, not just of the ANC but the Indian community who were initially influenced by Gandhi's more separatist approach.

The reflective nature of Mandela's political awakening and his willingness to articulate these with candor, reinforces his "ordinariness" as a human being. In this way his evolution as a hero seems all the more alluring because at each juncture the more his community, or the nation in general, have deified him, he subverts the representation to show how he is really acting from a position of universal humanism. Anthony Sampson, in his biography writes: "Mandela seemed instinctively aware of the power of his icon: he could provide a symbolic expression of the confused desires of people. BUT he guarded against the personality cult which bedeviled so many young African states; he was careful to avoid the word "I". He was always stressing that he was the servant of the ANC. As Mac Maharaj said "The "I" never supplanted the organization." (1999:412)

Such a position makes Mandela the political hero which South Africa needed for its emancipation from apartheid, but more importantly an unthreatening hero who would have the cross-over appeal to ensure that whites would feel equally confident in his leadership.

Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, where police opened fire on some several thousand unarmed protesters, it was Mandela who convinced the ANC to change their strategy. Mandela hardened his position and resolved that non-violent action was not the solution to the state's physical violence against black people. The violence of the apartheid state begot violence resisting it. As Mandela writes in his autobiography, "I condemned the government for its ruthlessness and lawlessness, I said the time for passive resistance had ended, that non-violence was a useless strategy and could never overturn a white minority regime bent on retaining power at any cost. I said, violence was the only weapon that would destroy apartheid and we must be prepared, in the near future, to use that weapon. The ambition of the ANC was to wage a mass struggle, to engage the workers and peasants of South Africa in a campaign so large and so powerful that it might overcome the *status quo* of white oppression. But the Nationalist government was making any legal expression of dissent or protest impossible. For me, non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there was no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon. But my thoughts on this matter were not yet formed, and I had spoken too soon." (1994:147)

It may be argued that Mandela's call for an armed struggle in the 1960's was an impetuous decision fuelled by anger from the brutality of the apartheid government. Retrospectively, through his writing and from the political strategy he adopted throughout the negotiations leading to the first democratic elections, he has constantly weighed the choice of his words and been unambiguous about seeking peaceful resolutions. The impact of having "spoken too soon" seems to have haunted his stay in prison and his impulse since his release has been to settle this score. Evidently, for Mandela non-violence is now a moral principle. In two highly explosive situations in 1992 and later in 1993, Mandela called explicitly for peaceful responses from ANC supporters and the South African population in general.

In 1992 when the CODESA negotiations came under threat, Mandela asked his constituency and many white South Africans who were feeling insecure in the highly charged political climate, to trust the peace process implied through the negotiations. And just as the CODESA negotiations got on track again, the assassination of Chris Hani, a popular and prominent ANC leader, revitalized growing tension and speculation that a civil war in South Africa was inevitable. Harsh criticism of Mandela's revised politics came from his estranged wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. By April 1991 Mandela was forced to distance himself from Winnie amid growing scandals of corruption and her impending trial relating her to the deaths of Stompie Moeketsi Seipei and Dr Asvat. With growing allegations of corruption looming over Winnie her resignation from her political duties within the ANC was necessary to restore credibility to the organization and to distance Mandela from Winnie's fiercely violent rhetoric. At the time of Hani's assassination Winnie saw the opportunity to restore her own political career. She had been currying the support of the ANC Youth League and in a rally protesting the assassination of Hani held in Cape Town she was captured on television with Peter Mokaba, the ANC's youth leader, chanting the slogan "Kill the Boer! Kill the farmers!" This sentiment was exactly the emotional furore that Mandela was trying so desperately to quell. In the words of Martin Meredith, one of Mandela's biographers, "The significance of these events went far beyond the question of violence. It was a time when Mandela emerged as a national leader, comprehending at once the magnitude of the crisis, seeking to calm white fears as well as calm black anger, demanding discipline and receiving it." (1997:484)

Mandela's continued response to always put the people before his own personal happiness underlies his heroic feats and, reinforces his commitment to achieving the ideals necessary for developing the nation. His personal sacrifices continued well after his release from prison and is best exemplified in his address to the press when he had to announce his separation from his wife Winnie. While on the one hand the language in this speech of April 13, captures the remorse and sadness Mandela felt by having to reveal the intimacy of his emotions, it also belies the incredible difficulty he found in exposing the depth of his suffering. In part, Mandela said. "Owing to the pressures of our shared commitment to the ANC and the struggle to end apartheid, we are unable to enjoy a normal family life. Despite these pressures our love for each other and our devotion to our marriage grew and intensified... My love for her remains undiminished. However, in view of the tensions that have arisen owing to differences between ourselves on a number of issues in recent months, we have mutually agreed that a separation would be best for each of us...My action was not prompted by the current allegations being made against her in the media...I part with my wife with no recriminations."

In his autobiography Mandela speaks of his relationship with the warmth necessary for his readers to develop a sense of his love for the woman in whom he found incredible strength and comfort during his long years in prison. However when he has to address the embarrassing events of her affairs and corruption he speaks of her with a state-man's detachment and never compromises his loyalty of the memory of their relationship.

In 1994, when Mandela ran for president in the first democratic elections, his campaign once again worked to win the trust of all South Africans, irrespective of their race or political persuasion. He relied once again on the discourse of a universal humanism and his famous quote "Never shall one human being ever be oppressed by another human being on such beautiful a land" gave birth to the Rainbow Nation campaign during his term of office. Perhaps the most

striking distinction about Mandela as president has been his disinterest in maintaining official, national power.

Soon after his inauguration, in 1996, he stepped down from the post and had his deputy president Thabo Mbeki step in as helmsman. Mandela was seventy-eight at the time and even though by most standards he was healthy, an eye affliction, his progressive loss of hearing and fatigue became a growing concern for the governance of the country and for international leaders as they began to lose confidence in his physical capacity to govern. With rumors of his ill-health, the economy began to tremble and the Rand fell into fast depreciation. It was at this time that Mandela showed once again his concern with the well being of the country rather than a concern with retaining his power. Even though Mandela was confident at the time that he would be able to serve his five year term as president he conceded to having his deputy president conduct the day-to-day running of his office. Downplaying his importance in government and reinforcing the strengths of his cabinet, he said "Many of my colleagues are head and shoulders above me in almost every respect. Rather than being an asset, I'm more of a decoration." (Meredith, 1997:552)

This level of self-reflection and irony speaks of Mandela's acute awareness of his function and the appropriate timeliness of his political discourse, which no longer appeared to have the political persuasion for his younger more ambitious colleagues.

The cabinet were no longer as concerned with a political agenda of reconciliation, which is what had won the good faith of white South Africans, but were more progressively influenced by Mbeki's call for the transformation of South African society. Social transformation for Mbeki has meant redressing economic imbalances between blacks and whites which he sees as the cause of racial divide in South Africa. Even though Mandela concedes to these differences, his priorities have been education, housing and health – in that order. Therefore his approach for the transformation of the country places greater agency within black communities for instrumenting change. His background as a young boy growing up in the Xhosa, Themba tribe shaped his commitment about the privileges derived from education for socio-economic advancement of people and he forfeits any simplistic notions that economic redistribution can wholly transform impoverished communities.

## **The Back Story**

Early theories (Machiavelli, Thomas Carlyle) about heroism deal centrally with the figure of the prince as leader whose birthright accords him power over his people. For Machiavelli virtues that inspire fear were seen as more desirable in a leader than those of love, compassion or mercifulness. Carlyle however, saw the embodiment of a leader's positive virtues as an inspiration for his society. While both thinkers disagree on significant grounds, they share a common concern with the idea of the hero in the public imagination. The state's propaganda and the perpetuation of an image is central to the hero's appeal and as we see in the case of Mandela there were two antithetical mechanisms involved in propagating his image.

By his own account Mandela seems to have been groomed from an early age for a life in public service. Born Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela on July 18, 1918 in the Transkei on the southeast coast of South Africa he was privileged on account of his father's position as advisor to the Chief of the Themba tribe. The

unexpected death of Mandela's father Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa led to his adoption by the Royal family. Here he was groomed to be advisor to the prince. Mandela by his account and that of his biographers does not seem to have inspired fear in any conventional sense at this time of his life but he was treated with incredible reverence when he returned home periodically during his studies. Fort Hare was virtually the only university open to blacks at the time, run by missionaries with approximately 150 students. Mandela recognized his privileged status immediately in his community. However it is only during his activist years in Johannesburg that we see the profound change as Mandela's public personae begins to emerge. There are two distinctly antithetical conceptions of his personae that were propagated. The one perpetuated by the apartheid government which inspired fear. In this case Mandela was totally vilified and constructed as a threat to the Afrikaner social order. The press at the time did little to explain the Defiance Campaign (why would they – it was not in the best interest of maintaining the apartheid regime) but instead showed how it was only a small group of black activists who were instigating protests. Furthermore, the mainstream press at the time, represented this group (Mandela, Thambo and Sisulu) as a core group of troublemakers who were intimidating a larger black population into a protest they were not necessarily keen on participating in. The second perception of Mandela ran counter to the state's propaganda apparatus. In his autobiography Mandela muses that he was chosen among his peers to be the central public figure because he was considered popular among the ladies because of his statuesque physique and his charismatic charm.

### **The Body Image**

Sarah Nuttall in her analysis of Mandela's body image (what she terms *bodiography*, the writing of one's history through a representation of the body) looks at the reorientation of the hero's body at different moments in his history. In her analysis she points to Mandela's disciplined and well groomed presentation of self. There are distinct *bodiographies* of Mandela which span his life.

As a young man, his appeal among women is reinforced through his athletic prowess in his image as a boxer. His body as a "normal" desiring and desired body is established in his relationship, and later in his marriage to Winnie, who is herself an attractive woman. Their relationship evoked fertility and the ability to transcend the rigid policing of the black body under apartheid. The black body under apartheid as so many writings have shown is a tortured body, a body in pain and a body under constant surveillance because it was never allowed to move with any freedom. In this respect the early images of Mandela's body challenged the conventions prescribed by the apartheid state and showed itself as a healthy body demanding to move freely.

Moreover, Mandela inscribed an intellectualism in his *bodiography*. Often dressed in a suit during his days as a lawyer and activist, the many pens or small white notebook in his top breast pocket, presented a radical alternative to the images of black bodies that the apartheid government created. In prison though Mandela's body is sanitized and he is no longer constructed as a sexual being capable of experiencing pain or pleasure. While most autobiographies tend to reveal the intimate emotions of the subjects, Mandela's narrative slips into an extended intellectual and political reflection. His story is unlike any other prison narrative from South Africa about torture, solitary confinement, sexuality or violence. Mandela's story reveals no social deviance but instead retells a story of camaraderie amongst men who believe in the same

ideological cause, to destroy racial oppression, and further provides an in-depth account of the routine and regiment of prison life. This sanitizing of Mandela's body and his life has fed into the mythologizing of the man. A man who is no longer a man with human needs and desires but almost a god-like creature who transcends the ordinariness of a modern hero.

As an aging man Mandela is now the grandfather of the nation. And yet for the first time in many years since his prison release, his responsibilities as a humanitarian have forced him into a precarious position. Even though Mandela has taken on many challenges in his time as president and after, he has often described himself in traditional terms. A man whose desire is to be with his family and children. As an African man, and as the stoic ageing patriarch of the nation, he is the least likely candidate to be associated with sexuality. Yet he has taken on the ultimate challenge facing South African society, the growing HIV/AIDS crisis. Granted, it took Mandela time to become comfortable with the idea of preaching safe-sex to teenagers, he once again rose to the challenge. The South African government, particularly Thabo Mbeki, have been tardy and often controversial in making AIDS drugs available to the people. Mandela has distanced himself from the government's position and now offers his name and reputation to the HIV/AIDS campaigns.

### **Current Political Image**

Mandela has been brilliant in using the image and perception created and generated by the media to his advantage and taken opportunities offered in the media to endorse local politics or challenge international politics. Gary Younge, in a recent article deciphering Mandela's politics, claims that Mandela has been severely misunderstood by the media and more specifically by the ANC. Younge offers the points of contention in the image of Mandela in the public imaginary and the real political might of Mandela, as a politician of incredible influence and persuasion. In South Africa when he has challenged Mbeki's position on important socio-economic policies, the ANC are fast to deflect his comments as the ideas of "A kindly old gent who only wanted black and white people to get along." He has been criticized for not having implemented greater economic redistribution during his term of office and being unrealistic in his offers of health and housing for the nation.

In his current role as an elder statesman, he has taken a radical position opposing American President George W. Bush's threats to attack Iraq. What some have considered to be uncharacteristic of Mandela, Younge argues is totally in keeping with Mandela's ethical position. "This man who had been respected worldwide as a Nobel Prize winner suddenly applied his non-violence ethic and practice to the realm of foreign policy. And no, people said, its all right for black people to be non-violent when dealing with white people, but white people don't need to be non-violent when they're dealing with brown people." In this statement and the ensuing challenge presented by Mandela is that the US recognize their military domination and not oppress less privileged nations.

In 1999, he convinced Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi to hand over two alleged intelligence agents indicted in the Lockerbie bombing of 1988. He was personally involved in negotiating the deployment of South African troops, in 2001, to Burundi to end the impending genocide in Rwanda.

In these respects it would appear that the ethical and ideological ethos from which Mandela operates has not shifted in any radical form. Instead he has

extended his purview to be inclusive of a global context and recognized once again his privileged position of being a respected world leader who can make certain very radical political pronouncements. And, while for some these pronouncements may appear radical (because they challenge the political *status quo*) they do not fall outside the realm of his well thought-out and established ideological position.

John Stuart Mill in his exposition of heroes and leadership makes a vital leap from the exemplification offered by Homer and propositions offered by Machiavelli or Carlyle, to suggest that heroes in democracies are borne from rationally selecting and discharging leadership. It is subjects of the democracy who choose leaders whom they feel will best represent their aspirations. Moreover, Mill offers a new slant on the role of the hero in relation to the hero's constituency and suggests the heroes ability to inspire happiness in the nation.

In expanding this definition of the hero in democracy, Mill shows the heroes ability to awaken consciousness, to appeal to reason and collective social welfare. In this respect Mandela, known affectionately as Madiba to South Africans was responsible for awakening a new socio-political consciousness. His ability to elicit strong emotional responses, even from his critics, is perhaps a result of his ability to inspire a sense of hopefulness through reason and patience when all others seem to be losing theirs. He rekindled national aspiration which made it possible to imagine divided peoples reconciled without bloodshed or war. Most importantly he did not casually remark, that South Africans should "forgive and forget", as he has often been misquoted as saying. But he raised awareness about the need for forgiveness in order to restore social welfare and the importance of remembering so that we remain committed to seeking happiness implicit in democratic societies.

If it is indeed true that Mandela is the world's most recognizable brand, it is because he has an appeal that is universally translatable. The principles of reason, fairness and equity amongst all peoples speaks to a contemporary global need for a leader, a hero who offers a humanist solidarity. In a time of war, uncertainty and incredible changes in moral and ethical values Mandela offers the embodiment of something that transcends economic policies, trade agreements, historical and cultural specificity. This is the moment of Mandela as hero, the making of his legend and when historians write his story fifty years from now, they will tell of his achievements differently because the socio-political needs of the world would have changed. But for now, Mandela offers to quench the thirst for equity and compassion—which offers greater long term happiness than an iced cold Coke!

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