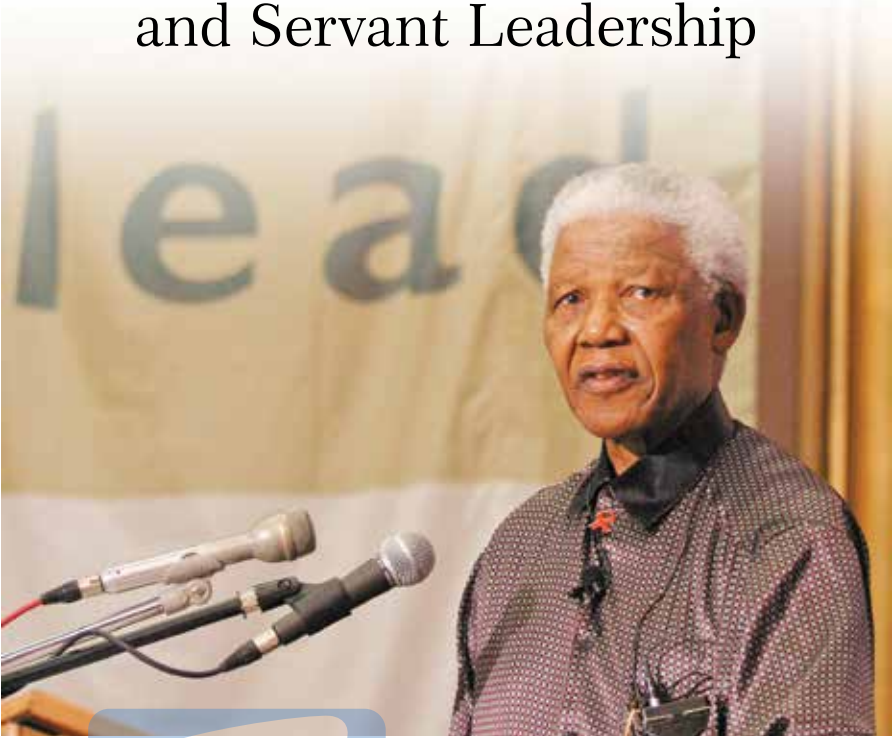


NELSON R MANDELA:

Decolonial Ethics of Liberation
and Servant Leadership



Busani Ngcaweni
&
Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Smile **AWP**

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A Life of Struggle as *Ubuntu*

Thaddeus Metz

Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to provide a moral-philosophical grounding for much of Nelson Rolihlaha Mandela's life. I spell out a principled interpretation of *ubuntu* that focuses on its moral import, and then apply it to salient facets of Mandela's 50+ struggle years, contending that they exemplify it in many ways.

Of course, many of those who eulogized Mandela characterized him as an exemplar of *ubuntu*.¹ What I do differently is to focus on key facets of Mandela's resistance to apartheid² and to do so in light of a philosophically attractive interpretation of the southern African ethic of *ubuntu*. This means that I do not rest content with piecemeal and one-sided accounts of *ubuntu*, according to which it is best exemplified by unconditional forgiveness, invariable non-violence or something akin to saintliness. It also means that I work to go beyond vague ideas such as the 'spirit' of *ubuntu* and unclear maxims (or, rather, maxims that are unclear to those unfamiliar with indigenous African worldviews) such as 'A person is a person through other persons'. Instead, I aim to present an explicit and comprehensive analysis of the ethical dimensions of *ubuntu*, one that is accessible, and even attractive, to a multicultural audience.

1 For a thoughtful critical overview of such eulogies from newspapers, see Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2015).

2 For discussion of how the younger Mandela's life, viz., as a child, a student and a lawyer, was arguably shaped by *ubuntu*, see Oppenheim (2012, pp. 369-77). She also addresses his struggle years, and from a perspective that often differs from mine.

I advance an ethic of ubuntu according to which, roughly, one displays human excellence insofar as one prizes relationships of sharing a way of life and caring for others' quality of life. I point out that, amongst other advantages, this principled rendition of *ubuntu* is neither tribalist, deeming those outside one's clan not to matter from a moral perspective, nor pacifist, categorically forbidding the use of violence.

After articulating *ubuntu* as an ethical theory that has prima facie appeal, peppered with quotes about *ubuntu* from Mandela himself (section 2), I apply it to salient features of his life as an African National Congress (ANC) member prior to the democratic elections of 1994. Specifically, I first address Mandela's decisions to fight apartheid in the 1940s, to use violence in response to it in the 1950s and '60s, and to refuse to renounce the use of violence during the 1970s and '80s (section 3). Then I consider his attempts to negotiate with the apartheid regime in the mid to late 1980s and his support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the 1990s (section 4).

Along the way, I address some suggestions that elements of Mandela's life failed to exhibit *ubuntu*, such as his alleged 'neglect' of his family and 'betrayal' of the black majority regarding economic justice. My conclusion (section 5) is that one can make good sense of many of Mandela's most important decisions, including the hard choices, during the fight against apartheid by appeal to an ethic of *ubuntu*. I do not lionize the man here, and instead aim to understand the major twists and turns of one who has repeatedly said, 'The struggle is my life'.

Ubuntu as a Moral Philosophy

When we speak of '*ubuntu*' in South Africa, we tend to mean a variety of different things. Sometimes we have in mind a *way of life* common amongst indigenous black southern Africans. Other times, we are speaking of a *world-view* recurrently held by these peoples. And still other times, we are referring to a *quality* that a person can exhibit to various degrees, as when Desmond Tutu points out, "When we want to give high praise to someone we say, "Yu, u nobuntu"; "Hey, so-and-so has *ubuntu*" (1999, p. 31). Strictly speaking, the last use of the word '*ubuntu*' is the basic one; the word '*ubuntu*' literally means *humanness* in the Nguni languages of Xhosa, Zulu and Ndebele. Someone who has *ubuntu* displays human excellence, or is a '*mensch*' in the vernacular. And indigenous southern African peoples by and large sought to live genuinely human lives, or at least adhered to worldviews prizing that.

In this chapter, I advance an ethic grounded on southern African thoughts about how to display *ubuntu*, something that I have worked to develop as a

professional philosopher in South Africa.³ My aim is not to *reflect* the ways that a particular indigenous black people or group of them has conceived of *ubuntu*, but instead to appeal to salient aspects of their views in order to *construct* a moral philosophy that will be appealing to people from a wide array of backgrounds. *Ubuntu* need not just be for Africans, but rather has elements in it that have the potential to speak universally. I focus on culling those out (leaving others behind⁴), and organize them into the form of a moral philosophy that I expect readers from a variety of cultural traditions to find compelling.

I begin with the maxim, ‘A person is a person through other persons’, which Mandela used to encapsulate *ubuntu* (2013, p. 227), as have many other South African intellectuals, including Reuel Khoza (1994, p. 3), Yvonne Mokgoro (1998, p. 17), Desmond Tutu (1999, p. 35) and Mvume Dandala (2009, p. 260). Although those steeped in African culture associate certain ideas with this maxim, those outside the fold will not readily grasp its meaning. It does not say much in plain English—after all, whoever thought that a person is not a person? My aim is to make good explicit sense of this maxim and related ones such as ‘I am because we are’.

Take the first part of the maxim, ‘a person is a person’. Part of what this phrase implies is that one ought to develop one’s personhood.⁵ Personhood here is the same as humanness. To say that a person is a person suggests that one should strive to become a real person, to live a genuinely human way of life, to exhibit *ubuntu* as much as one can. Personhood or humanness comes in degrees, where the more an individual has, the more moral, wise and admirable she is. A true or complete person is someone who has succeeded in displaying ethical traits that human beings are in a position to exhibit in a way that nothing else in the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdoms can.

3 See Metz (2011a, 2011b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), from which the rest of this section borrows.

4 For one example, consider that some South Africans have thought that white people cannot exhibit *ubuntu*, that it is something available only to black people (for quotations and discussion, see Gade 2012). Regardless of whether that is an *accurate* account of how a particular person or group has conceived of *ubuntu*, it is not a philosophically *attractive* interpretation. Instead, human excellence is best understood to be the sort of thing that is in principle open to anyone.

5 This phrase is typically used to make both prescriptive and descriptive claims. Regarding the latter, it describes how one comes to exist, or who one essentially is. The ideas are that one would not exist if ancestors had not founded one’s lineage and one’s family had not socialized one, and, further, that one’s identity as a particular person is necessarily bound up with the clan of which one is a member. However, I downplay these connotations in order to focus on moral considerations.

Just as one might say that a jalopy is ‘not a *real* car’ (Gaie 2007, p. 33), so southern Africans often say of those who lack *ubuntu* that they ‘are not a person’ (Gaie 2007, p. 32; Dandala 2009, pp. 260-61) or that they are even ‘animals’ (Pearce 1990, p. 147; Bhengu 1996, p. 27; Letseka 2000, p. 186). That does not mean that the wicked are literally not human beings, viz., no longer subjects of human rights, but instead connotes the metaphorical point that these individuals utterly fail to exhibit human, i.e., moral, excellence and have instead actualized their lower, base nature (Ramose 1999, p. 53).

Turning now to the second clause, it tells people how to become real persons (or, equivalently, how to exhibit *ubuntu*), namely, ‘through other persons’. Typically this implies by entering into *communion* with others, or seeking to live *harmoniously* with them. It is well known that African ethics is characteristically communitarian, but this element is often left vague or is construed in a crude manner, as the collective taking precedence over the individual. However, that is not the best way to interpret the tradition, for it fails to account for human dignity and human rights. To spell out what it plausibly means to enter into community or to live harmoniously, consider representative comments from southern Africans about the idea.

Former South African Constitutional Court Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, famous for having evaluated the death penalty in light of *ubuntu*, remarks, ‘Harmony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group’ (1998, p. 17).

Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu says this of moral views amongst Africans: ‘We say, “a person is a person through other people”. It is not “I think therefore I am”. It says rather: “I am human because I belong.” I participate, I share’ (1999, p. 35).

Gessler Muxe Nkondo, who has held positions of leadership on South Africa’s National Heritage Council, says, ‘If you asked *ubuntu* advocates and philosophers: What principles inform and organise your life?...the answers would express commitment to the good of the community in which their identities were formed, and a need to experience their lives as bound up in that of their community’ (2007, p. 91).

Nhlanhla Mkhize, an academic psychologist at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal who has applied *ubuntu* to conceptions of the self, remarks that ‘personhood is defined in relation to the community....A sense of community exists if people are mutually responsive to one another’s needs....(O)ne attains the complements associated with full or mature selfhood through participation in a community of similarly constituted selves....To be is to belong and to participate’ (2008, pp. 39, 40).

For a final example, Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, two

theologians based in South Africa, say this of *ubuntu*: ‘Individuals consider themselves integral parts of the whole community. A person is socialised to think of himself, or herself, as inextricably bound to others....*Ubuntu* ethics can be termed anti-egoistic as it discourages people from seeking their own good without regard for, or to the detriment of, others and the community’ (2009, pp. 69, 71-72).

These remarks about what it is to commune or to live harmoniously with others suggest two major themes. On the one hand, there is what I call ‘sharing a way of life’ or ‘identifying with others’, a matter of being close, belonging, participating, experiencing life as bound up with others, and considering oneself a part of the group. On the other hand, one finds reference to being sympathetic, sharing what one has, being committed to others, responding to others’ needs, and acting for others’ good, which I label ‘caring for others’ quality of life’ or ‘exhibiting solidarity’.⁶ Although these are distinguishable in thought and can come apart in practice, the southern African ideal is to realize them at the same time.

Bringing things together, here are some concrete, principled interpretations of ‘a person is a person through other persons’:

- one should become a real person, which is matter of prizing communal relationships, ones of sharing a way of life and caring for others’ quality of life;
- an agent ought to live a genuinely human way of life, which she can do insofar as she treats others as special in virtue of their capacity to enjoy a sense of togetherness, to participate in cooperative projects, to engage in mutual aid, and to do so consequent to sympathy and for others’ sake;
- above all, one ought to avoid living like an animal, which would be to flout the value of harmonious relationships and instead to seek out discordant ones of division and ill-will.

Elsewhere I have argued that these principled renditions of the ethical core of *ubuntu* make good sense of many traditional southern African practices. Consider, for instance, *letsema*, where all able-bodied people in a society move from farm to farm to help clear harvests for those living on them, instead of leaving each individual or family to fend for itself. Or think about *lekgotla*, where all those potentially affected by a decision (or at least their popularly appointed elders) talks until they come to a consensus about how to deal with a controversy. Or recall the fact that reconciliation has often been sought out when responding to offenders. Sometimes punishment is

⁶ When Mandela is concrete about what *ubuntu* involves, he tends to focus on the ideal of caring for others’ quality of life or serving them (2012, pp. 147, 155; 2013, p. 227).

eschewed altogether in favour of apology and compensation, while other times, when punishment is imposed, it is done with an eye to resolving conflict between the offender and his victims or between his family and the families of those whom he has wronged. These are all well understood, I submit, as upholding an ethic that prizes relationships of sharing a way of life and caring for others' quality of life.

Turning away from the African credentials of the present interpretation of *ubuntu*, consider some of its attractive implications, before I view Mandela's life in light of it. First, notice that it is not flawed for entailing that only one's particular group matters morally. Sometimes it is thought that *ubuntu*'s emphasis on communal relationships means thinking of one's own clan as having sole moral significance. However, that is not an accurate interpretation of *ubuntu*, or at least is not an attractive one. Indeed, Mandela himself eschewed it; when asked in an interview what *ubuntu* means, Mandela highlighted as a quintessential instance of it the widespread practice amongst traditional African peoples of being welcoming to strangers (2006a; see also 2006b).

While it is true that honouring communal relationships often means prioritizing one's own family when it comes to the distribution of one's own time and resources (on which see Ramose 2003, p. 385; cf. Appiah 1998), it does not mean that others do not count and may be used merely as a means to the benefit of one's in-group. Instead, everyone is considered to have a dignity, or to be a potential individual with whom to commune, or to be a member of the human family, such that even the (peaceful) foreigner is entitled to hospitality.

Notice, too, that my favoured understanding of *ubuntu* does not unconditionally rule out the use of violence. Sometimes *ubuntu*'s emphasis on communal relationship and reconciliation is thought to mean that it invariably requires forgiveness and forbids violence. Again, that is neither accurate as a reflection of southern African norms, nor plausible as a moral theory.

The present ethic says to *prize* communal relationships, which need not mean invariably *exhibiting* them. Treating people with respect in virtue of their ability to commune means responding to them according to the way they have exercised this ability or failed to do so. If someone has initially acted in a discordant way, say, by trying to rape a woman, it would not treat his capacity to commune with others disrespectfully if she responded to him in a comparably discordant way (say, with a solid kick to the groin), supposing that were necessary to protect herself. Indeed, by using deception or coercion against an aggressor in order to prevent wrongdoing to innocent parties or to compensate them for it, one could thereby honour the value of communal relationship that he flouted.

Perhaps the reader can begin to see outlines of the picture of Mandela's political life that I now sketch. By *ubuntu*, violence can be justified when necessary to rebut an initial, comparable violence, but it is unjustified when it is not necessary for that. This kind of approach can make sense of what might at first glance appear to be contradictory: Mandela's support for violence in response to apartheid for much of his life, and his consequent rejection of it in later years.

The Period of Armed Resistance

It is well known that Mandela was one of the main figures who convinced the ANC to take up violence and that he was tasked with creating *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), its military wing. In this section, I explain how Mandela's decision to advocate violence against the apartheid regime, and not to renounce it when in prison, were both justified by the moral-philosophical interpretation of *ubuntu* sketched in the previous section. Later, in the following section, I explain how Mandela later having sought out negotiation and reconciliation with the white community was *also* justified by *ubuntu*. There is no inconsistency because, by *ubuntu* as an ethical principle, whether violence is justified depends on whether it is necessary to rebut a comparable violence.

The ethic of *ubuntu* I have articulated urges people to prize communal relationships, ones of identity and solidarity, and in the first instance that means that they ought to commune with one another, or at the very least not act in discordant ways. However, such an orientation makes little moral sense when others are not inclined to commune and instead are systematically disposed to be divisive and to act out of ill-will. In cases where others have initially been discordant, prizing communal relationships can mean using discordance as necessary to rebut theirs. More carefully, so long as you direct violence, threats of it, trickery or the like towards those who initially engaged in such behaviour, so long as the amount you are using is no greater than the amount they are exhibiting, and so long as you use the least amount necessary to get them to stop, you are justified in doing so, by the *ubuntu*-based principle above.

It is not clear whether this approach squares with a Christian ethic or not. Albert Luthuli appears to have believed that, by Christian values, non-violence is always required, while Mandela disagreed about that understanding of them (2010, pp. 52-53, 76-78, 81-82). However, I am interested in what an African ideal of *ubuntu*, interpreted as a plausible philosophy, entails for the use of violence, not what a Christian ethic does.

Although there are similarities between Christianity and *ubuntu*, in that they both place loving relationships at the heart of morality— note that the

combination of identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them is more or less what English-speakers mean by a broad sense of ‘love’—a pacifist reading of the African moral tradition is implausible. Indigenous southern African peoples on the whole have clearly believed that coercion in the form of, say, punishment of wrongdoing and resistance to colonialism can be permissible. Those conditions are well understood ethically this way: prizing people in virtue of their capacity for communal or loving relationships can mean treating those who are being unloving in comparably unloving ways, to the degree necessary to protect innocent parties.

This ethical analysis coheres tightly with Mandela’s decisions to fight the apartheid regime and to do so with violence, as well as his explicit statements about them. First, the white South African government was of course the one that was initially discordant towards black people. Starting in earnest with the Natives Land Act of 1913 and intensifying with apartheid and the prohibition of political gatherings, the government was the one to distance itself from non-white people, to subordinate them, to knowingly harm them and to act out of indifference to their well-being. ‘If there was not the violence of apartheid, there never would have been violence from our side’ (Mandela 2013, p. 233).

Second, Mandela sought to use violence against government and more generally political targets, i.e., against those most responsible for the oppression of blacks. Now, we know that in practice the ANC sometimes did foreseeably harm civilians; the TRC hearings made this clear. And Mandela himself approved of the targeting of infrastructure, such as electric power stations (2010, p. 79) as well as telephone lines and transportation links (1994, p. 336). However, so far as I can tell, Mandela never deemed it permissible to use violence against those were not initially being violent or were not particularly responsible for violence. He instead tends to speak of violence being properly used against ‘the state’ (1994, p. 325), ‘government installations, particularly those connected with the policy of apartheid and race discrimination’ (1994, p. 338) or ‘the government’ (2013, p. 232). He also differentiates MK’s tactics from what he calls the ‘terrorism’ employed by other groups that was not ‘controlled and responsible’ (1994, p. 401). In *Long Walk to Freedom* Mandela recounts the following about the decision to found MK: ‘Violence would begin whether we initiated it or not. Would it not be better to guide this violence ourselves, according to principles where we saved lives by attacking symbols of oppression, and not people?’ (1994, p. 322).

Third, Mandela had used non-violent forms of struggle against apartheid for about 15 years, and the ANC and black resistance movements generally

had used non-violent responses for several decades. However, they had been ineffective. The historical record is clear about this,⁷ and Mandela often emphasized the point that he and the ANC deemed violence to be permissible only as a last resort. Most famously, consider his statement at the Rivonia Trial when he said, for just one short line, ‘It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle’ (1964). He reiterated this point, about the necessity of violence to rebut violence, in the speech in which he rejected the government’s offer to release him from prison in exchange for a renunciation of violence on his part (1985), and Mandela continued to make it repeatedly in later years (1994, pp. 320-22, 618; 2010, p. 249; 2012, pp. 22-23; 2013, pp. 232-33).

Fourth, and finally, Mandela sought to use the least force necessary to accomplish his aim of achieving freedom and equality for all those in South Africa. Again in *Long Walk to Freedom* he says:

Our intention was to begin with what was least violent to individuals but most damaging to the state....It made sense to begin with the form of violence that inflicted the least harm against individuals: sabotage....Strict instructions were given to members of MK that we would countenance no loss of life. But if sabotage did not produce the results we wanted, we were prepared to move onto the next stage (1994, pp. 325, 336; see also 441).⁸

All these elements of Mandela’s advocacy of violence accord with *ubuntu*, and moral common sense more broadly.

One might wonder whether Mandela exhibited *ubuntu* in deciding to remain in prison rather than reunite with his family. It was perhaps reasonable for him to judge in 1962, ‘If I had my time over I would do the same again’ (2012, p. 4). However, what about in 1985, after he had already done so much for the political cause at the expense of his family? Was it not wrong for him more than 20 years later to continue to prioritize the struggle, in light of a traditional African morality well known for ‘family first’, ‘charity begins at home’ and similar sayings?

Indeed, Mandela himself thought hard about whether he was morally right to have been an absent husband and father. ‘I have often wondered

7 Those in Johannesburg can simply visit the Apartheid Museum or the Liliesleaf Farm Museum.

8 By the next stage, Mandela does speak of not only ‘guerrilla warfare’ but also ‘terrorism’ (1994: 336). One wonders what he means by the latter term in this context, particularly since he castigates other groups for engaging in it. Regardless, it is unequivocal that Mandela was not a ‘terrorist’ in the straightforward sense of having intentionally inflicted serious harm on innocent people in order to advance a political cause.

whether a person is justified in neglecting his own family to fight for opportunities for others' (Mandela 2010, p. 62) is just one of many instances where he expresses concern about having made the struggle his life.

Mandela's dilemma is not easy to resolve, but the ethic of *ubuntu* at least provides a way of understanding why it is so hard. Included within the ethic, at least as articulated here, are both impartial and partial elements. *Ubuntu* is impartial for deeming every human person to have a dignity, to be someone with whom potentially to commune, and to be part of a human family, but it is also partial for giving greater moral weight to actual communal relationships of which one is a part. 'Greater' does not mean absolute or overriding, which, in turn, means that there can be occasions—extremely difficult to judge—when sacrificing the interests of one's family for the greater good of others can be justified.

It is plausible to maintain that Mandela failed to exhibit *ubuntu to some degree* by virtue of, in his words, 'not being able to fulfil my role as a husband to my wife and a father to my children' (1994, p. 719). However, he also surely exhibited much *ubuntu* for having been so central to the liberation of an entire country and an inspiration to many other progressive movements. The question is which life would have given him the most *ubuntu*, developed the most personhood. And his own judgment about his chosen life of struggle (2012, p. 17) is a reasonable one.

The Period of Reconciliation

Just as Mandela was the one to start up MK, so he was the one to begin dialogue with the apartheid regime, to have 'talks about talks'. He is well known for having done so in secret, without the initial approval of his comrades and without having first wrought concessions from the government (Mandela 1994, pp. 626-27; 2010, pp. 246-48). In addition, he called for suspending armed struggle when negotiations were underway, and even for using non-violent forms of resistance after they stalled (Mandela 1994, pp. 702, 724-25). If violence had been justified for two decades, then why Mandela's resolute shift to non-violence?

By *ubuntu*, such a shift would be apt if violence were no longer necessary (or likely) to rebut violence, that is, if communal relationships could be restored without being discordant. And that was precisely Mandela's judgment. '(T)he purpose of the armed struggle was always to bring the government to the negotiating table' (1994, p. 702). Once there was a clear prospect of overcoming racial injustice without the use of violence, Mandela 'went for it'. Speaking about the ANC,

Our approach was to empower the organisation to be *effective* in its lead-

ership. And if the adoption of non-violence gave it that effectiveness, that efficiency, we would pursue non-violence. But if the condition shows that non-violence was not effective, we would use other means (Mandela 2010, p. 53).

If an agent of oppression is willing to negotiate, i.e., to consider ending its injustice and to make up for it consequent to dialogue, then *ubuntu* plausibly forbids the use of violence in response. Although there have of course been retributive elements of ‘an eye for an eye’ in indigenous local cultures, the dominant moral theme in them has been that *ubuntu* demands seeking out reconciliation after conflict, when it is possible (see, e.g., Tutu 1999; Louw 2006; Krog 2008).

Note that, for Mandela, reconciliation meant not merely ending armed struggle, but also ruling out other forms of coercion against those who had enacted, supported and participated in apartheid. In particular, Mandela supported the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, a law that (amongst other things) established the TRC and directed it to grant amnesty to those who had committed political crimes, supposing they fully disclosed their misdeeds. Those who had committed gross human rights violations for political ends but confessed to them completely could not be punished by the state. In addition, their victims could not sue them in court, though the TRC did make recommendations to the government to provide compensation to victims.

One might think there is a lack of *ubuntu* here; does not *ubuntu* demand standing up for victims and holding offenders accountable for the way they have treated them? Here, again, there are conflicting values that need to be balanced, and the ethic of *ubuntu* makes sense of the dilemma.

Consider that *ubuntu* is standardly understood to urge parties to reconcile after a period of intense conflict.⁹ A desirable form of such reconciliation, by that ethic, would be one in which parties *both* reveal their misdeeds *and* disavow them. A fully reconciled society would be one in which there is (amongst other things) *both* a completely accurate picture of the nature of the prior conflict *and* a systematic distancing from the injustice of it by at least public institutions, if not also by the wrongdoers themselves.

Now, although such a state of affairs was conceivable, it was not in fact likely to obtain in South Africa’s case. In order to get substantial truth from offenders about their unjust behaviour, the state had to reduce the extent to which it otherwise would have distanced itself from them by punishing them. Mandela and company believed that the only way to get an adequate

9 For a full account of why and how, see Metz (2011b, 2015), from which the next two paragraphs draw.

amount of truth about the past, so as to facilitate a genuinely shared way of life amongst whites and blacks, was to offer amnesty to offenders in exchange for full disclosure about their misdeeds. Although Mandela might have been mistaken about that, it was a reasonable judgment to have made, in light of *ubuntu* values.

Finally, one might also wonder whether Mandela exhibited *ubuntu* with regard to the deal struck between the black movement and the white government. It has become common to hear the criticism that Mandela ‘sold out’ the black majority when it came to economic justice, that he should have held out for much more than merely civil liberties and political power.¹⁰

There is no doubt that, by *ubuntu*, the white community that benefited so greatly from apartheid should seek to pay back the black majority as a whole. It is not enough merely to have the government pay out a few thousand individual victims of gross human rights violations.

However, the question is what was possible to nail down in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mandela and associates thought that the best they could do was immediate democracy and liberty, with property to be transferred in the long run. Although I am not a historian, I believe it is clear from the record how difficult it was just to broker that deal. It would take a lot of evidence to rebut Zakes Mda’s perception of Mandela as ‘a skillful politician whose policy of reconciliation saved the country from a blood bath’ (2013).

Conclusion

Mda (2013) sees Mandela as a man of contradictions, for instance, avuncular but also strict, a revolutionary but also a traditionalist African aristocrat. I do not know Mandela’s life in detail well enough to judge. But what I have argued in this chapter is that, when it comes to the 50 or so years that Mandela devoted to struggling against apartheid, he was consistent in the ways he did so. Although his tactics changed depending on the circumstances, his principles did not. Or at least there is a principled interpretation of *ubuntu* that can make good sense of the choices he made, and of why some of them were difficult.

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¹⁰ For overviews of the criticism, see Mda (2013); Ndlovu (2013). For a related sort of criticism, some maintain that it was not in the spirit of *ubuntu* to seek out a Constitution that would put redistributive compensation beyond the reach of a black majority (e.g., Ramose 2014). For a reply to this point, see Metz (2014c).

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