

WINNIE MADIKIZELA - MANDELA
“A FORCE RESOLUTE IN PULLING DOWN GIGANTIC MOUNTAINS OF EVIL”

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In August 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr addressing delegates at a conference in Atlanta said:

“When our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil.”

Dr. King’s submission would have resonated with oppressed black South Africans suffering under apartheid crimes against humanity: executed, incarcerated, tortured, dragged behind trucks, fed into crocodile-infested rivers, burned alive, exiled, and subjected to all manner of debauched sub-human treatment. During our darkest period, icons like Winnie Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela were among the giants who headed the *force working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil*.

The News of the passing away of Mama Winnie, (as she is fondly known in South Africa), on 2 April 2018 at the age of 81 has reverberated in Africa and most parts of the world.

Announcing her demise, South Africa’s President: Cyril Ramaphosa, declared that we are mourning the death of the “mother of our nation.” Some commentators have since failed to neither understand why she earned this moniker, nor what she embodied to the majority of South Africans: the black woman, the poor, the economically marginalised and the landless. Conveniently they have fixated on her faults, branded her “divisive; controversial.” The reality is that neat dichotomies do not fit Madikizela-Mandela. She was neither “perfect” nor “evil”. She was merely a human being whose path was the product of both the apartheid atrocities she was subjected to and her commitment to see her people free.

One might have expected Mama Winnie to step back when her husband, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, was declared a terrorist and later incarcerated for more than 27 years. The opposite is true. Relentlessly, she challenged those protecting the white minority rule, and faced decades of constant harassment.

Her movements were constrained, with curfews and house arrests, making it impossible for her to work as a social worker and earn a living. In 1969 she was dragged out of her house by about twenty police officers. She was detained for 18 months in solitary confinement. In her bug infested cell, her only contact during this time was with her interrogators.

The cell had no windows. The lights burned constantly. While trying to sleep on a bed made up of only three blankets stained by urine and blood, she endured what she later described as “the cruellest of the various punishments the regime meted out in order to break both my spirit and that of Mandela.”

After her release, she was more determined, continuing her struggles against the notions of white supremacy that underpinned the apartheid system.

For us South Africans who today find ourselves in a better position than decades back, we remember her as the most potent symbol of our resistance. In her, we saw how strong we could all be. She was undeterred by the oppressors' guns and tanks on our streets. She was there when we would barely whisper Nelson Mandela's name out of fear of reprisal. She was not mythical. She was among us. Mama Winnie would not play the role of a meek and docile woman. She uncomfortably reminded those who wanted her to smile and be quiet that the passion they saw in her was a product of their cruelty.

With her fist raised, and with many of her peers silenced, she valiantly became the symbol of hope in South Africa. She spoke truth to power. As long as we could see Mama Winnie; we knew our freedom was possible. That is the Mama Winnie we will remember: the Mother of our Nation, a *force working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil.*"

Mama Winnie, may your soul rest in Power!