



## **Mama Madikizela-Mandela fought a good fight**

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In a new book on Thomas Sankara, Aziz Salmone Fall says 'it is said that behind every great man is a great woman. In the case of Thomas Sankara that woman is Mariam Serme. The courage and resistance of this great woman in the face of adversity is an example of resilience for all of Africa. She remains convinced that social progress cannot occur without a radical change in the status of women.' We also learn, in this new book (*A Certain Amount of Madness: The Life, Politics and Legacies of Thomas Sankara*), that Sankara was significantly influenced by his mother like many other men out there (at least those who imbibed good values and are able to espouse such).

The continent of Africa and entire global south has come a long way. The liberation struggle for the emancipation of the peoples of the global south, and Africa in particular, was long and hard – there is still a long way to go. For South Africa, the next phase of the struggle for the complete emancipation of the majority is gaining momentum. We stand in the shoulders of the heroines and heroes that brought the freedoms, however insufficient, that we are enjoying. They fought a good fight. Mama Madikizela-Mandela fought a good fight among those of her generation, and endured many hardships as well as made many sacrifices. We often talk of Sankara, Cabral, Lumumba, Mondlane, Mbeki and many heroes of the liberation project but we hardly talk of the many heroines that gave birth to the politically independent Africa we now enjoy. Freedom was never free, and many of our grandmothers and grandfathers suffered immensely so we can have the freedoms we experience.

About two years before he passed on, Julius Nyerere made a plea that the new generation of African leaders and African peoples 'must work for unity with firm conviction that *without unity there is no future for Africa*'. He made a point that his generation led Africa to political freedom and that 'the [new] generation of leaders and peoples of Africa must pick up the flickering torch of African freedom, refuel it with their enthusiasm and determination and carry it forward'. The passing on of the Mother of the South African 'nation' is a reminder of the wise Mwalimu advise, for Mama Madikizela-Mandela – like Mariam Serme and many other women – played her part and we must carry the 'torch of African freedom, refuel it with enthusiasm and determination and carry it forward'.

Our generation is again called upon to take forward the struggle. Drawing inspiration from courageous women like Miriam Serme and Mama Madikizela-Mandela, we must not only carry the torch forward as Julius Nyerere urged just two years before he passed on, but we must also ensure that future generations know about outstanding leaders who brought us freedoms in Africa – however limited the freedoms we enjoy are. More should be documented about Miriam Serme, Maria Magige Wangu, Fathia Halim Ritzk, Zanele Dlamini and many others instead of mainly hearing about their husbands. Frantz Fanon told us that each generation has a responsibility and role in the liberation project and that we still have to 'shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute...' The bigger ongoing struggle against imperialism need courage and determination. Mama Madikizela-Mandela did it against all odds. We can do it too.

Inspired by pan-Africanism, which gave impetus to the struggle for political independence in Africa, African nationalists fought tirelessly to bring about the political freedom that most of the African continent now enjoys. However, some of the very African nationalists that catalyzed political freedom became enemies of freedom. With the liberation of South Africa and the recent independence of South Sudan, we can safely talk about a politically independent Africa (notwithstanding some of African political leaders that compromise the promise for freedom

and some Africans not sufficiently critically conscious and mentally liberated who do not value the freedom that so many lives were sacrificed for).

Alongside pan-Africanism and African nationalism, other political struggles were waged. Mama Madikizela-Mandela was among those who led other forms of the struggle that brought 350 years of oppression and plunder on the knees. Heroines, often while supporting African nationalism, stood up for rights of women and fought tirelessly not to be relegated to the background of the struggle for independence. Some could name the struggles they led feminism or womanism – feminism understood as ‘a serious political discipline, politics of life and revolutionary transformation’ as Patricia McFadden explains. In essence, whatever we call it, the struggle was about ensuring that everybody enjoys the freedoms and rights sacrificed for. Again, as McFadden argues, ‘women’s freedoms remain the inescapable necessity for human existence and well-being in every society’.

The question occasionally arises whether we know enough or we talk enough about the sacrifices that brought us the freedoms we enjoy, however limited, often against all odds. I am sometimes also concerned regarding the politically independent South Africa in particular whether we know enough about the struggle that brought the freedom, however limited, that we now witness. The many peoples that sacrificed a lot so we can be free need to stay in our minds. It was not only the leaders that are usually spoken of that brought freedoms in South Africa. The peoples of Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria and other many parts of Africa ensured that freedom came in South Africa. We seem to have forgotten this. South Africa should have focused more on Africa when freedom came and we should have pushed harder to integrating South Africa with the rest of Africa.

Taking the logic behind the liberation struggle for freedom in South Africa, one cannot help but be thankful that the struggle brought about a relatively peaceful transition from apartheid colonialism to democracy. It is easier to forget, particularly for those of us who were not directly involved, how tough it was to bring about democracy. It is easier to criticize for we do

not fully appreciate what the African nationalism agenda was about. Indeed, some can justifiably argue that the political struggle could have been waged differently. In hindsight people can argue that the political settlement that South Africa embraced in the early 1990s was/is problematic.

It is convenient to forget the global political economy of the cold war era. Although there were many challenges in the liberation movement, the overall foresight and one-mindedness of those who led the struggle have to be commended. The lives that were sacrificed did not go to waste. The political freedom that came at the dawn of democracy should be dearly cherished. It is wrong to argue that the political settlement that brought us freedom is a constraint to the advancement of wellbeing in South Africa. Indeed, the government of national unity implied that not much could be done during that period – and the predominance of global capitalism which implied that mainly the free enterprise/market system could be followed. However, our heroines and heroes took us, within the constraints they were dealing with, to political independence. It is now for us to take the ‘torch’ forward.

Political freedom, however imperfect, came. Government, through policies etc and working with other partners, has the responsibility to take society forward. The first ten years or so were tricky, arguably – not much could be done other than putting in place a foundation through which substantive progress could be pursued. Political freedom came. Economic freedom remains a pipedream for many. In honour of Mama Madikizela-Mandela, we shall make economic freedom a reality – in our lifetime. We need a plan.

Aluta continua!