


# Just Festival 2015: Nelson Mandela: the Myth and Me

The first time **Khalo Matabane** heard Nelson Mandela's name  he was seven years old and living in Ga Mphahlele, a village in Limpopo. It was 1981, South Africa was still split by apartheid; Khalo's mother whispered to him of the man who would one day set people free – she whispered because she was afraid;

'My parents' anger was silent, their pain unbearable'

By the time of Mandela's death in 2013, Matabane had become an acclaimed filmmaker. Apartheid had been officially 'over' for 19 years – but were black South Africans really free? Matabane decided to investigate Mandela's legacy by speaking to people who knew him, people who lived through apartheid and the new generation growing up in today's South Africa. His film ***Nelson Mandela: the Myth and Me***, was shown at **Henderson's @ St John's** on Sunday as part of the **2015 Just Festival**, in partnership with **Africa in Motion Scotland African Film Festival**.



khalo matabane

The film takes the form of a letter from Matabane to Mandela, interspersed with news footage of events before, during and after Mandela's presidency and interviews with activists, writers, journalists, academics, world leaders, politicians and 'ordinary' people. What emerges, perhaps unsurprisingly, is a picture of a complicated man and a complicated country; a man who was not always the benign elder statesman of recent fame, and a country in which the forgiveness that he seemed to advocate does not come easily to a people who suffered so much, and are suffering still;

'People fought for freedom and people paid a huge price...this land is stained with blood' (**Zubeida Jaffer**, journalist and anti-apartheid activist).

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison; he was, as Kenyan-born anti-apartheid campaigner and former Cabinet Minister **Peter Hain** points out, seen as a terrorist, 'politicians used to wear 'Hang Nelson Mandela T-shirts'. During those years Matabane's parents saw Mandela as a hero, but during those same years thousands of young black South Africans were detained and killed for taking the fight into their own hands,

**'Do you, Tata Mandela, know what happened to that generation?'**

And this is one of the recurrent themes of this engrossing film; Mandela did great things, but many, many people shared the struggle;


'South Africa was created by its people and not by one person's greatness' (**Seline Williams**, whose sister **Coline** died in 1989, when a limpet bomb she was preparing with another ANC activist detonated prematurely in questionable circumstances that have been linked to South Africa's National Intelligence Service).

✘ Throughout *Nelson Mandela: the Myth and Me*, Matabane highlights the conflict between those who think that Mandela was wrong to favour post-apartheid peace and reconciliation, and those who feel that compromise was the only route he could have taken. Activist and former judge **Albie Sachs**, who lost an arm and the sight in one eye when his car was bombed in Mozambique in 1988, shook the hand of his would-be killer – but only once the man had given evidence at the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**. Others feel that Mandela sold them short, that he was far too willing to forgive their oppressors; leading figures in the apartheid regime were never punished; if murderers are locked up, asks

one mother, why are these people free?

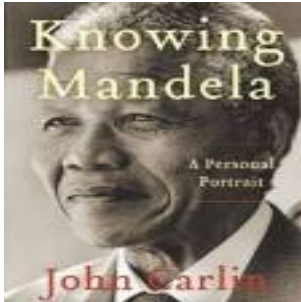


South American academic and activist **Ariel Dorfman**, who lived in exile throughout the Pinochet regime in Chile, is interviewed at length; he believes that you cannot forgive your enemies until 'they have got rid of the apartheid in their soul'. The **Dalai Lama**, who also speaks to Matabane and who met Mandela on several occasions, says that forgiving does not mean forgetting. Matabane: 'I struggle with forgiveness'.

Whether or not Mandela was right, there can be no doubt  that vast numbers of black South Africans still live in appalling poverty. The young blacks that Matabane speaks with are cynical; their parents still revere the 'Father of the Nation', but for them the right to vote, to ride in the same buses as whites and swim in the same pools, does not address the fact that South Africa remains one of the least equal countries in the world; 'the young people are out of options'. Academic and leading feminist **Pumla Gqola** agrees, saying 'better' is definitely not good enough, 'When there has been no real transfer of power, no restitution of land rights, we cannot and must not say 'it could have been worse''.



John Carlin



Nuruddin Farah (c) Simon Fraser

Political journalist and author **John Carlin**, however, defends Mandela's policy; he thinks that without it South Africa would (as Mandela himself said) have 'gone up in flames', or become another Congo or Palestine. Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah (whose own sister was killed by a Taliban bomb in Kabul in 2014) also takes the view that there is nothing to be gained from killing your enemy.

✘ Although *Nelson Mandela: the Myth and Me* does its best to show both sides of the story, Matabane does not hide his fears for the new South Africa, the so-called 'rainbow country'. He sees his homeland as a tinder box, a time bomb over which no-one has control, and asks

**'What was the ultimate price of peace?'**

***Nelson Mandela: the Myth and Me*** by **Khalo Matabane** is part of the **Just Festival's** strand of films looking at myth and

misinformation surrounding African leaders. The last film in the series *Capitaine Thomas Sankara*, is the story of a courageous leader who fought to liberate his country, **Burkina Faso**, following the end of colonisation; it will be shown at Hendersons @ St John's at 7.30pm on 30th August 2015 – see Just Festival website for details.

The series is screened in partnership with the tenth **Africa in Motion: Scotland African Film Festival**, which will take place 23rd October-1st November 2015 in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

