

BOOK REVIEW

La Grange, Zelda “*Good Morning Mr Mandela*” South Africa: Penguin Books, 2014, pp. v-367

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INTRODUCTION

There are a number of books written about Nelson Mandela. ‘*Good Morning Mr Mandela*’ is a memoir that describes and takes the reader through the life journey and experiences of Zelda la Grange, a once secretary, personal/private assistant for the late, iconic legend, Nelson Mandela. On the one hand, the author explores her experiences from apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa and how Nelson Mandela played a major role in the shift of her world perception. On the other, she displays the kind of man that Madiba was through her lens; who he was, not only to her as his employer, but also to the rest of the world. Not only was this man a grandfather to his grandchildren, a father to his biological children but he was also a ‘*father*’ to those that were privileged to work with him but mainly a ‘*father*’ to the nation. The notion of social fathering is prominent with people of African descent. This is true for Africans in Africa, in the Latin and South Americas and in the diaspora [1, 2].

Zelda talks about her life and the years of working side by side with Mr Mandela and how it intertwined with him on a day to day basis, not only from an employee to employer aspect, but also as a father/grandfather figure that nurtured and groomed her experience and lens of understanding people. This is the first book published by this particular author; hence, there are no other works to reference her experiences to. The aim of this review is not to give an exhaustive and generally satisfying interpretation of a number of stories about Zelda and Mandela and their interactions with the world. In this review, I explore the process of the building of a father/daughter relationship over time by looking at the chapters outlined in the book and extracting from the author the forming of a non-biological father/daughter relationship and what impact this had on both parties. Mandela spent the best and youthful days of his life in prison. Before that, the socio-political systems that ruled the lives of Black African men in South Africa in those times affected his experiences of fathering to a great extent. Mandela lost his own father at a tender age; consequently, he moved home to be raised by relatives; a phenomenon that

continues to affect the South African society to date [3]. Labour migration was one of the systems that affected and still does, to a large extent, affect men’s abilities to father [1, 2]. 20 years of political imprisonment curtailed his opportunity of being a father. Political instability, exile, imprisonment and political murders separated many men like Mandela from their families, Apartheid left South Africa with broken families, and deprived many young men of role models for. The story of Mandela’s life is told many times and the official separations through divorce from his two wives affected his fathering relationship with his children [4]. Some of the challenges that follow divorce and remarrying as described in this book, resonate with those described in literature [5].

The architecture of the book is as follows: Part One, ‘If it isn’t good, let it die’ which is a chapter that offers a general introduction to the author’s childhood and what brought her to where she is today. It gives an overview of Zelda’s family structure as a young Afrikaner woman growing up during the times of apartheid, seeing the change happening right in front of her, and adapting from apartheid structures to a post-apartheid regime. Apartheid was the political and structural system that imposed racial segregation laws on blacks, coloureds and Indians during the leadership of the white minority in South Africa pre-1994 [6]. Part two to four however is where we meet the main character of the stories being told as it is all about ‘*the start of a new dawn*’. In this chapter, the author meets the man that would change and transform her life, a man that she refers to as ‘*utata*’ (a Xhosa term for father) or sometimes as ‘*khulu*’ (a Xhosa term that means a grandfather). It is extremely uncommon in South Africa that a Black African man would father a white Afrikaner woman and this is due to the previous political segregation policies that prohibited interracial sexual relationships and marriages. It is the dynamic relationship between the author and Mr. Mandela that makes this book an extraordinary read and worthwhile contribution to the history of South Africa. We hope that the relationship described here by Zelda would contribute to the nation-building project and provide a learning curve for future generations of South Africans. This interracial and very intimate relationship reflects a new, post-apartheid order that South Africa strives towards.

The presentation of this book is clear. It is written in a memoir/storytelling style and provides the reader with new

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and challenging information about Nelson Mandela's day-to-day lifestyle and fatherhood as a whole. However, there are some shortcomings. For example, the book felt like it was a recitation of activity-to-activity and a chronological listing of what happened from her experiences, without much insight to put things into context or provide deeper understanding. The author describes herself as being so obsessed with doing more, that one probably misses some valuable opportunities to get a deeper understanding of what was historically happening around the duo [7]. This was evident throughout the book. There were several unsupported claims as well. For example when the author talks about the African National Congress from the Polokwane Conference making a few mistakes by giving some members wrong titles, like when she called Jessie Duarte an ANC deputy chairperson [7].

With that being said, the language is however too subjective for readers that may be close to the main character of the book or those that can identify with the author. Zelda's memoir makes some strict, interesting, and peculiar contributions to the basic understanding and knowing of who Nelson Mandela was and how much of an impact he had on different individuals. It provides an understanding that fatherhood does not necessarily rely on biological genealogy but how the person treats and relates to you can have the same or greater impact than that of a biological father. Another aspect that I extracted from the book is that sometimes men may fail or find it difficult to be fathers and play the father figure roles to their own biological children but they can be natural fathers to outsiders without any

hesitations or fears that stand in the way. It is an incredible record of the years that Zelda spent with 'Khulu', even if we miss the perspective of the man himself. The book is more of a tribute to him through her recall of her life journey with him, and her great respect and need to ensure that all those who were and remain associated with Mandela, from friends to celebrities to politicians, were cared for.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author confirms that this article content has no conflict of interest.

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Declared none.

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