



491 Days: Prisoner Number 1323/69 (Modern African Writing Series)

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela

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On a freezing winter's night, a few hours before dawn on May 12, 1969, South African security police stormed the Soweto home of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, activist and wife of the imprisoned Nelson Mandela, and arrested her in the presence of her two young daughters, then aged nine and ten.

Rounded up in a group of other antiapartheid activists under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, designed for the security police to hold and interrogate people for as long as they wanted, she was taken away. She had no idea where they were taking her or what would happen to her children. For Winnie Mandela, this was the start of 491 days of detention and two trials.

Forty-one years after Winnie Mandela's release on September 14, 1970, Greta Soggot, the widow of one of the defense attorneys from the 1969-70 trials, handed her a stack of papers that included a journal and notes she had written while in detention, most of the time in solitary confinement. Their reappearance brought back to Winnie vivid and horrifying memories and uncovered for the rest of us a unique and personal slice of South Africa's history.

491 Days: Prisoner number 1323/69 shares with the world Winnie Mandela's moving and compelling journal along with some of the letters written between several affected parties at the time, including Winnie and Nelson Mandela, himself then a prisoner on Robben Island for nearly seven years. Readers will gain insight into the brutality she experienced and her depths of despair, as well as her resilience and defiance under extreme pressure. This young wife and mother emerged after 491 days in detention unbowed and determined to continue the struggle for freedom.

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