

# A revolutionary love

BIO

MIRIAM GURZELMAN, Friday 14-20 Feb 2003 p.1

The story of Walter and Albertina Sisulu is one of love triumphing despite overwhelming odds

Raymond Suttner

**E**linor Sisulu's biography, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (David Philip), must have been a difficult book to write — especially as she is their daughter-in-law. It covers two people over so long a period — in the case of Walter Sisulu, the entire period of the existence of the African National Congress. How does one author acquire sufficient familiarity with all of these periods to do justice to the Sisulu couple in every phase? What also worried me was whether the political pre-eminence of Walter Sisulu would make a joint biography of the couple unequal, with Albertina treated as a footnote to her "major partner".

How Elinor Sisulu resolves these

questions is not through analysis, for the book is a chronological narrative divided by very broad themes. In that respect, her role as daughter-in-law is an advantage to her as biographer, although she goes well beyond that and uses a variety of sources for her material. And the way the story is told raises issues that are fresh to political biography and autobiography in South Africa. It addresses issues that many political activists have been reluctant to discuss — questions that are supposedly outside the realm of the political and public domain.

The book provides an account of all the major phases of both Walter and Albertina's political involvement and some of this material breaks "silences". For example, it is traditional in much historiography to



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