

KATHRADA. UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE AND MAYIBUYE CENTRE. 9th March, 2010.

The Program Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Comrades,

Thank you to the University of Western Cape, the Mayibuye Centre, and especially Professor Premesh Lalu for inviting me to share some thoughts with you.

At the very outset, I wish to dedicate my talk to Walter and Mama Sisulu.

In particular to the memory of Walter, who passed away a few years ago. He was my leader, my comrade, my prison colleague, and most importantly one whom I regarded as my father. We were arrested together on 11th July, 1963, and released together on 15th October, 1989. He was an extraordinary human being, warm, caring and forever smiling. In the 26 prison-years together, he quarreled with no one and was loved by all – across the political spectrum. Blessed with only a Primary School education, he was widely regarded as the undisputed authority on the history of the liberation movement.

During the last years of our incarceration he and I were kept together in the same cell. He immeasurably enriched my life. We salute him for his numerous achievements. But above all, we remember him as an exceptional human being.

I have been invited, among other things, to speak about what has come be referred to as the “Kathrada Collection” at *Mayibuye Centre* . I do intend to speak about it. However, I’m going to disappoint some expectations, and immediately make a confession. When I initiated the “Collection”, furthest from my mind was any motivation about history, or archives, or publications. I had studied a bit of History and Bibliography in prison. But to embark in these directions was also not without an element of ulterior motives .For instance, B.Bibliography offered African Politics as a 2nd Major. And the battles, including threats of legal action, paved the way towards post graduate courses in African Politics and History. These allowed one to acquire books that otherwise would not have been allowed. . This literature added value to the illegal political classes which were compulsory for all ANC inmates.

I hope I'll be forgiven if I don't deal with what I assume you have come to hear. And I also hope that what I do say will somehow find some space under the broad subject of Archiving. Having said that, I'm afraid you will have to bear with me, and listen to an accidental archivist by default.

For those of you who may not be aware, the "Collection" consists, among other documents, of 7 notebooks of quotations.

My reason for the quotations is best described by Professor Tim Couzens, with whose collaboration we published the book, "A Simple Freedom".

He says, they are *"proverbs, aphorisms, poetry and drama extracts, and passages from books, magazines and newspapers....."*

"Kathy is not sure himself why he did this. He started the habit as a young school-aged politician when a well-chosen quotation would add authority and gravitas to an impassioned speech in his school's Debating Society. The Robben Island collection continued the activity precisely because it was forbidden."

In the last sentence I believe Professor Couzens was not far off the mark. Because – there were things we felt compelled to do precisely because they were forbidden! We will come back to this later.

Perhaps I should single out just one quotation out of the hundreds, which made quite an impact on my mind, and which turned out to have an interesting coincidence.

It was in 1967 when I came across a poem by a 17 year-old Afrikaans-speaking Matric student. During the apartheid years one would have found it very unusual, and brave, for this young girl to write a poem, the gist of which was very strong criticism of the Immorality Act! And what's more, it was published in her own name! I of course copied it in one of my Quotations book. Some years later, I was surprised and pleased to learn that the young girl grew up to be none other than Antjie Krog.

The next part of the "Collection" is my letters, both incoming and outgoing. I believe there are about 900 carbon-copies of letters I had written, and many hundreds of letters I had received.

A bit about the Prison Regulations relating to letters may be of interest.

In the first years we were allowed to write and receive one letter and one visit (of half-an-hour) every 6 months. The letters had to be no more than 500 words, and confined to what the Prison Censors regarded as strictly "family matters". What they really looked for in letters and in our visits, was anything they considered to be "political news" which was strictly prohibited. They were determined to ensure that we were completely cut off from happenings in the outside world. So much so that we were not allowed to get any newspapers for 16th years! The letters were not to exceed 500 words, and no mention could be made of a politician's name, nor the name of a fellow prisoner.

For all prisoners the absence of children was the worst deprivation. For political prisoners the second-worst deprivation was news-deprivation, which for political prisoners was perhaps the most terrible punishment. News was our life blood, and we had to keep ourselves informed, by hook or crook – by begging, bribing, bartering, stealing, and yes, even by blackmailing. And we did succeed. But the details of how, are matters for another occasion.

The "undesirable" portions in our letters were, either blacked out, or cut off with scissors. I wont bore you with details about how indiscriminate, ignorant, ridiculous and vindictive the Censors could be.

After our correspondents continuously complained about the mutilated letters, the Censors changed their practice. They returned the letters to us, with undesirable portions underlined, and we were instructed to re-write the letters, omitting the underlined sentences or paragraphs. But in my case, what they were not aware of, was I had carbon copies of the originals! Many of these were included in my "Letters from Robben Island".

Prison Regulations stipulated that we were allowed to keep Incoming letters only for a short period, and thereafter, hand them back.

Keeping copies of Outgoing letters was prohibited. From 1964 to about 1971 I used to draft the letters in a book, and copy them onto writing paper. When this book was discovered during a raid, it was confiscated, and most probably destroyed.

My Carbon copies of letters remained undetected for a long time. But when I was punished for some offence I lost my study privileges and literally everything in my cell was

taken away and locked in one of the empty cells. The only things remaining in my cell were my toiletries, and a copy of the Bible.

I don't know if you will be interested to know about some of our criminal activities in prison; about how we managed to get back the letters and Quotations books. But I'll tell you anyhow, especially since there is no chance now of my getting arrested and jailed.

Fortunately for us, the warders who worked with us over weekends were not the ones who worked with us daily. And the weekend-ones were not familiar with the routine in our Section. One Sunday, my comrade Lalloo Chiba and I approached the warder with brooms and cleaning rags in our hands, and told him we wanted to clean the locked cells. He willingly obliged, and also unlocked the cell in which our confiscated material was kept. We hesitate to use the word "steal", but we "re possessed" all my books and letters. Thereafter they survived all the raids on Robben Island. In 1982, after 18 years, 5 of the 7 Rivonia Trialists were transferred to Pollsmoor Prison with all our belongings. During our next 7 years at Pollsmoor there were no raids. In the relatively relaxed atmosphere we in fact managed to acquire more, formerly restricted literature.

On Friday, 13th October, 1989, we were flown to Johannesburg Prison, and on Sunday 15th October, we were released, with all my letters and quotation books intact!

Incidentally, by the time I was released, after 26 years, I was allowed 30 visits a year, and 40 letters. The one and only concession our jailors made to prisoners serving life sentences, is we were allowed 12 extra letters, making it 52 letters a year. Not bad. But it is another story when one considers that it was a very gradual process, which took many years before we reached 52.

While on the matter of our criminal activities I should mention another criminal activity which will be of more interest to archivists than my letters and quotation books.

Some time during 1975 it struck some of us that after over a decade in prison the time had come for the imprisoned ANC men and leadership (Madiba, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba) to make a political statement, in defiance of the laws and Prison Regulations. We considered that such an act would boost the spirits of our people outside. Madiba would be turning 60 on 18th July, 1978, and the most appropriate statement would be for him to write his autobiography, with a view to getting it published

on his birthday. Mac Maharaj was due to be released at the end of 1976, and he would smuggle out the manuscript and ensure that it reached ANC President, Comrade Oliver Tambo in England. Madiba drafted as many pages as he could at night after lock-up, and he handed these to Walter Sisulu and me for our comments, and amendments. These were placed in small plastic containers and buried in our garden. The idea was; as soon as we get the planned signal from Mac that Madiba's final manuscript had reached England, we would destroy the drafts. The manuscript in Madiba's writing, amounted to 500 to 600 pages. For smuggling-purposes this was transcribed in tiny handwriting by Mac, assisted by Laloo Chiba. They managed to reduce Madiba's hundreds of pages to fewer than 50. These pages were then so cleverly concealed that Mac was able to easily carry them out of prison, undetected. And as arranged he succeeded in sending it safely to England, and sent me the confirmation via an innocuous birthday card.

We were a little too sure about the safety of the containers in the garden, and did not destroy the drafts. But we had miscalculated; an entirely unexpected development forced us to retrieve the containers in a great hurry. We managed to retrieve only a couple, and destroyed the drafts as planned! I wonder how die-hard archivists would react to this "crime"? Unfortunately the rest were discovered. Because they contained the handwriting of Madiba, Walter and myself, we were punished. Our "crime" was we had violated the study conditions by using pen and paper for illegal purposes. As a result the 3 of us were deprived of our study privileges. On this occasion we lost our studies for 4 years.

We were very disappointed when all our efforts to make the political statement on Madiba's 60th birthday came to nought. It was not published.

However, all was not lost. Madiba's manuscript was safely brought back from England, and it proved to be a valuable source and basis for the writing and publication of the unceasing popularity of "Long Walk to Freedom". A recent press report indicated that it had sold 6 million copies world-wide!

I believe a few pages of the transcript of Madiba's manuscript has been on display. But unfortunately I haven't had the time to verify the details.

I recall two additional manuscripts that were smuggled out from Robben Island. Together with Madiba's manuscript, Mac also smuggled out a number of essays written by fellow prisoners from different organizations. These were published under the title.....^{Reflections in Prison}

A biography of Walter Sisulu was also written on the Island, and successfully smuggled out. It too was not published; and I don't know if the manuscript was used by Elinor Sisulu in her book: Walter and Albertina Sisulu.

Some time between 1989 and 1994 I happened to meet Andre Odendaal, who was then in charge of Mayibuye Centre. In 1993, he invited me to Cape Town to open Mayibuye Centre's Exhibition about Robben Island. From him I learnt to appreciate the Archival value of the Quotations Books and Letters, and also my Prison uniform, utensils, etc. He suggested they would serve a more useful purpose if they were housed at Mayibuye Centre. No sooner said than done. One day he pitched up at my place in Johannesburg with a Combi, and loaded the "Collection", and more, into the vehicle and deposited them at Mayibuye Centre.

There was an understanding that all my material was embargoed. Access to anyone could only be allowed with my permission. Unfortunately due to radical and more than one staff changes, the embargo was not adhered to. More serious than that; during this period, I happen to go into one of the offices and discovered some of my valuable awards in an unlocked drawer! I'm not even sure if all of them were still there. I informed the person in charge that I was taking those away. I'm mentioning this, not because I'm harbouring any criticisms against Mayibuye Centre.

My big concern about the Kathrada Collection is preservation. A very important part of the Collection are the carbon copies of my letters on newsprint. And I believe newsprint fades faster than other paper. What can be done to preserve these? And this of course also applies to all the documentation of a similar nature.

I hope Ms.Helen Joannides will be able to elaborate on the state of the Kathrada Collection in which she found them.

There can be no doubt that, apart from it being among the first of Liberation Archives in South Africa, Mayibuye also has an extremely valuable collection of



documentation, videos, photographs, posters and memorabilia. At the time, perhaps the only other institution of its kind was SAHRA at Wits University. Since its inception Mayibuye Centre had been the natural repository of individual collections, a complete file of the Guardian newspaper, and the other newspapers that took the Guardian's place after it was banned. It also has a unique collection of a wide range of interviews conducted by the late Wolfie Kodesh. There is very much more.

It is heartening that there is an increasing realization of the need to record the liberation-struggle history. The Archives at Fort Hare are extremely valuable in this regard. But, with the best will and dedication, it cannot, and does not claim to be complete.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation and its Centre of Memory has come some way towards gathering as much information as possible, not only about Madiba the individual, but also about the campaigns, the political court cases in which he was an accused etc. They are also mindful of Madiba's constant reminder that he was always part of a collective, and it is equally essential to research, record and make known their contribution as well. Towards this end some small progress is being made. For instance there has been a photo exhibition about Walter Sisulu, and other Exhibitions that contribute towards Madiba's wishes. In my opinion, no single Archive is able to cover the extremely rich history of the liberation struggle, and of leadership figures. What about Oliver Tambo, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, Chief Luthuli, J.B. Marks, Dr. Abdur Rahman, Cissie Gool, Molvi and Yusuf Cachalia, Moses Kotane, Robert Sobukwe, Dr. Monty Naicker, Helen Joseph, Bram Fischer, Lilian Ngoyi, and many others.

It is vitally important to remember that in researching and recording liberation history, reliance cannot solely be placed on documents. It is not possible to get as complete a picture as desirable by this means. In fact it is indispensable to use the written sources together with oral interviews. In many cases more can be gained by systematically recording oral history. The importance of this is increasingly being acknowledged.

What is indispensable is for the ANC and other former liberation organizations, and individuals to utilize all available avenues and means to conscientise the young people about liberation history, and persuade them to actively participate in searching for, recording and propagating the knowledge.

In my constant inter action with young people I had to make the unfortunate observation that one of our biggest enemy today is ignorance of the past. How can I ever forget; while travelling with a young educated couple, the young man remarked that he knew I was in prison, but did not know for how long. When I said 26 years, the young lady was shocked, and exclaimed, "Were you in for murder?" The challenge facing us is; how to combat ignorance.

I have largely concentrated on my prison papers at Mayibuye Centre. Quite a bit more has accumulated since then. My comrades have taken the initiative to establish a Kathrada Foundation, with the primary aim of "Deepening Non-Racialism". It is still a baby, and has thus far been busy mainly with programs. We have started, but not systematically initiated the collection of material. A building to house the Foundation is envisaged. It has also published a book, "Men of Dynamite". It is about activities of MK units and individuals who largely hailed from Lenasia. Of necessity, for security reasons the units were recruited from the relatively small part of Johannesburg. We have been amazed by the interest it has roused. All 3 launches in Gauteng attracted good audiences. It is our hope that it is the beginning of a process to research, record and publish a comprehensive history of MK as a whole. It will contribute immensely towards filling a gap in the history of the liberation struggle.

Program Manager. My apologies if I have over-stepped my time- allocation. But I hope the audience will appreciate that:- having been deprived of children, news, and as important – freedom of speech, we do try sometimes to make up for the years we were deprived of opportunities to make speeches.