THE TRIAL OF WINNIE MANDELA

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A Change in Perceptions

The prosaic spirit of the 1990s has torn the veil from the most glamourized iconography of the 1980s. In the trial of Winnie Mandela, the recent past of the African National Congress is displayed in a manner to write *finis* to many of the heroic myths of the period when her husband and his colleagues defied the apartheid regime in the Rivonia Trial, 27 years earlier.

Then, the mystique of revolutionary violence was exalted as the antidote to the all–saturating violence of the state. Now, the balance–sheet of the past three decades of nationalist politics is drawn up, and payment must be made.

This was recognized outside the courtroom before being recognized in it. The law imitated life. As the once putative First Lady of a future South Africa, Winnie Mandela was repudiated by members of her own organization before she was convicted by the white judiciary. In finding her guilty of the kidnapping of four black youths and as accessory to their assault, the verdict of the court followed an implied act of censure by a major section of the ANC membership, which decided a week earlier by 400 votes to 196 against electing Mrs Mandela to the presidency of the ANC Women's League. This election result, an index to ANC affairs in the second year after its unbanning, was not merely a prophylactic against political contamination. It followed the open denunciation of Mrs Mandela by the most influential members and supporters of the ANC within the country in February 1989, a year before its unbanning. Within the ANC inside South Africa during this period, two souls contended in a single breast, that of Nelson Mandela – in isolation on Robben Island – confronted by the fury of his wife.

As she strode out of court following her conviction, an image flashed across the world of an old man held hostage by a younger wife, more sinned against than sinning. The contrast in faces: she, manic, exultant, wilfully impervious to her own humiliation; he, drawn, ashen, grieving almost, a bitter taste in the mouth after the decades of honourable endurance. That famous noble head, turned grey, his name soiled, an aging Antony married to a vulgar Cleopatra. Was it for this so much was dared, and sacrificed?

How little this portrait of a marriage was purely personal was given point by the threat of Chris Hani, chief of staff of the ANC military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), that there would be mass protest action if she were convicted, in contrast to her husband's insistence, shortly after sentence had been passed, that the matter be left to the courts. In the event, it was the sober realism of her husband and not the giant–killing rhetoric of Hani or of Peter Mokaba, leader of the ANC Youth League, that was closest to the opinions of the people of Soweto. Their reserved response to Mrs Mandela's conviction, their implied acknowledgement that she was indeed guilty of serious

abuses, speak of a profound longing for some kind of civic peace after so many years of appalling tension. This emphasizes in its own way that the period of revolt is well and truly over, and that the ascent of the period of negotiations corresponds to a profound decline in the curve of general social rebellion. It heralds the wish for a period of order, characterized by a strong state clothed in the toga of constitutionalism. The rhetoric of the clenched fist employed by Mrs Mandela outside the court after her conviction and sentence, like the rhetoric of combat fatigues and hammer and sickle headgear sported by her co–accused, Mrs Xoliswa Falati, marks the aggrieved reaction of the doomed stratum of township lumpenism in a period of serious upward social mobility (for some). It suggests the bad grace of the drunk evicted from a dinner party. Just as she misread the limits to her own immunity to prosecution by the state, so Mrs Mandela misread the very widespread desire among blacks for an end to criminality as the normal condition of life in the townships.

Drum magazine in South Africa has published an account of the criminal associations of Jerry Richardson, head of Mrs Mandela's team of killers, the Mandela United Football Club (October 1990). Formed by her in Soweto at the end of 1986, the football club, which never played a single match, conducted itself in full view of everyone as a kind of brigandage feeding off the society. Mrs Mandela was its pirate chief. It is precisely this convergence of criminality and politics that her trial established as a fact of recent South African history, against the grain of decades of effort to remove political struggle from such accusations by the state.

The iconic exceptionalism of the ANC, a sacred isle in a corrupt world, is gone. Mrs Mandela's house, the house to which Nelson Mandela returned after his 27 years' incarceration, the house from which the 14–year–old 'boy general' Stompie Moeketsie Seipei was dragged off to be murdered only one year earlier, was at the vortex of a psychopathic fusion of political terror, a social vigilante movement and ordinary township gangsterism. Protected by the international aura of the Mandela name and the cunning of the South African state – which calculatingly left events to run their course – the famous residence at 8115 Orlando West in Soweto served simultaneously (among other purposes) as a safe house for returned MK guerrillas, a weapons dump, a barracks for the Mandela football squad, a prison for recalcitrants, a punishment yard in which innumerable beatings were administered and a transit camp from which the executioner set forth.

A South African Gothic

Attention in the trial was focussed on the abduction to Mrs Mandela's house of four youths from a church manse on 29 December 1988 by her team of enforcers, the Football Club. On New Year's Day, one of the four – the teenager, Seipei – is taken out of Mrs Mandela's house, battered and left dead in a field, his throat slit.

Some time after the abduction, a Soweto doctor is consulted by Mrs Mandela and Mrs Falati, previously housekeeper at the manse. Mrs Falati says she fetched a young man from the manse on Mrs Mandela's instructions on the same day that the four victims in the case were abducted. (*Weekly Mail*, 15 February 1991) The priest at the manse is Rev Paul Verryn, whom Mrs Mandela and Mrs Falati accuse of homosexual abuses with homeless black youths sleeping in overcrowded conditions at the manse. The young man is Katiza Cebukulu, who later gives damning evidence to the press about the football club and who is charged alongside Mrs Mandela and Mrs Falati.

On 27 January 1989, Dr Abubaker Asvat – 'Hurley' to his friends, the 'People's Doctor', secretary for health in a political organization rival to the ANC, the Azanian People's Organization (Azapo) – is shot dead in his surgery. Two men are later found guilty of Asvat's murder and sentenced to death, maintaining throughout that their motive was robbery. Yet a strange coincidence: the doctor's appointment book for the day of his death as well as for the day preceding it show meetings with Jerry Richardson, the head of the Football Team. (*Weekly Mail*, 15 February 1991) A year later, Richardson is himself arrested, tried and condemned to death for Seipei's murder.

Before the abduction, followed by the murder of Dr Asvat, two murder trials with important implications take place in the Supreme Court in Johannesburg in 1988 and 1989. Though she is never summoned as a witness, Mrs Mandela is mentioned by name in both trials in testimony agreed between prosecution and defence. This states that her house was used for hiding a murder weapon, that the killers set off on their deadly assignation from, and returned to, her house in her car, that her daughter Zinzi was involved in exchanging the murder weapon and that the killers then continued to operate from the house as members of the football club. No charge is ever brought against Mrs Mandela or her daughter because of these allegations, and they are not made public at the time, either in the South African or international press – even though the facts are well known to journalists. This at a time when Mrs Mandela is a world media star, on a scale to relegate Evita Peron to a mere footnote in the annals. The trial results in the imposition of the death sentence on a trained ANC guerrilla returned from abroad, Oupa Seheri. Leading a charmed life, Mrs Mandela is not called in for questioning.

In the second of the two murder trials, the joint statement between defence and prosecution reads that 'a decision was made by Mrs Winnie Mandela and the football club to kill' two former members of the club, Sibusiso Chili and Lerothodi Ikaneng (quoted by John Carlin, 'Blood Soccer', *New Republic*, 18 February 1991). The court finds that Maxwell Madondo, a member of the club, had been 'mandated' together with another member of the club to murder Chili and Ikaneng, but that the gods had thrown the dice otherwise, and the 'mandated' murderer was himself murdered by Chili, his intended victim. Mrs Mandela is not called, even as a witness.

Madondo was killed on 13 February 1989. Two days later, the police identify the body of the murdered Stompie Seipei. On 16 February 1989, Mrs Mandela's closest political associates in the Mass Democratic Movement –

'the most senior trade union and political leaders loyal to the ANC' (according to Carlin) – publicly dissociate themselves from her.Murphison Morobe, a former activist of the 1976 Soweto school students movement from his time at Morris Isaacson High School alongside the student leader Tsietsi Mashinini, states at a press conference:

> We have now reached the state where we have no option but to speak publicly on what is a very sensitive and painful matter. In recent years Mrs Mandela's actions have led her into conflict with various sections of the oppressed people...In particular we are outraged by the reign of terror that the [Mandela United Football] team has been associated with. Not only is Mrs Mandela associated with the team, in fact the team is her own creation. We are outraged at Mrs Mandela's complicity in the recent abductions and assault on Stompie. The Mass Democratic Movement hereby distances itself from Mrs Mandela and her actions. (Carlin, *New Republic*; and Carlin, BBC Radio 4, 27 November 1990)

Morobe, general secretary of the United Democratic Front, makes his statement denouncing Mrs Mandela alongside Archie Gumede (co–president of UDF) and Elijah Barayi (a long–time ANC stalwart, president of Cosatu). As Carlin observes in the *New Republic*, Morobe's phrase 'recent years' suggests a long history of terror in Soweto emanating from the Mandela household; but this cryptic pointer is never elaborated.

Breaking the Silence

Time passes. Richardson, the 'coach' of Mrs Mandela's Football Club – a club whose metier in leather lies more in sjamboks than in footballs – is convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Seipei. Her husband is released to world acclaim. No awkward questions are asked by the world's journalists and statesmen as she and her husband circle the globe in one glittering reception after another. For the Mandelas it is Hollywood all the way; for Richardson, death row.

Meanwhile, Morobe wisely distances himself by taking up a scholarship for study at Princeton University in the US. As one of the most important political leaders of the period when the ANC was gaining popular sanction through the UDF to return as apartheid's avenging angel, he removes himself from the scene of battle at the moment of triumph. To remain in South Africa while Mrs Mandela is in full cry is not politic.

At last a journalist dares to publish the suppressed testimony of the courts. On 21 September 1990, an account by John Carlin of the Supreme Court trials in 1988 and 1989 (involving statements about events in Mrs Mandela's house) appears in the *Independent* in Britain. This act of honest reportage follows the example of the *Weekly Mail* in Johannesburg, in the early weeks of 1989, in printing the first report of the kidnapping of the four youths to Mrs Mandela's house. Carlin later reveals that he and his assistant, Mandla

Themba – presenter of a programme on BBC Radio 4 on the chaotic conditions among 'the youth' in South Africa – is the recipients of a series of menaces from Mrs Mandela, most recently on the steps of the Supreme Court in the middle of her trial. 'He's an SB', Carlin reports Mrs Mandela as saying about Themba, whom she had summoned to approach her retinue. (*Independent*, 13 April 1991) To be accused in South Africa of being 'an SB' – a Special Branch policeman – is equivalent to a death sentence.

Two months after Carlin's initial scoop, BBC Radio 4 broadcasts a programme by him in which a founder member of the football club, Lerothodi Ikaneng, describes how Mrs Mandela 'often participated' in beatings administered by her personal punishment battalion. Ikaneng describes how as a member of the football club, living in her house, he witnessed the murder of a friend carried out by the chairman of the Mandela FC disciplinary committee, Sizwe Sithole. How Ikaneng was then himself brought to Mrs Mandela and her daughter, Zinzi, (Sithole's lover before his death in police custody); how he was accused by them of being a police spy; how he was punched by Winnie Mandela and ordered by her to be taken to her house at Diepkloof Extension; how, afraid of being killed, he escaped his captors, and fled the area. Six weeks later he returns to Soweto, having run out of money, is seen by Stompie's murderer, Jerry Richardson (still coach to the Mandela team), is taken to a field, stabbed in the neck with a blade from a garden shears, and left for dead. Richardson continues living at Mrs Mandela's house, where he is eventually arrested before the eyes of the television cameras.

A week before Mrs Mandela is convicted, at a crucial point in her trial, a second attempt is made on the life of Ikaneng. He is shot and seriously injured outside his home in Soweto on 6 May by three men whom he later identifies as Matthew, Theo and 'Marlboro'. A second eye–witness, who says she had been beaten by two of the men while four months pregnant in 1988, identifies the three by the same names. A third witness states that Matthew was carrying a large rifle. All three assailants are identified as former members of the Football Club. According to the witnesses, who know them well, at the time of the assault they are part of the guards outside the new Mandela residence in Orlando West, known as 'the Parliament', which sits in glowing lights like a jewelled crown on the top of a low hill overlooking Soweto. They sleep in the smaller Mandela home, also in Orlando West, from where Stompie was taken to his death and where Mrs Mandela's co–accused, Mrs Falati – like her, convicted of abduction – continues to live. It is this house which at the time of the second attempt on the life of Ikaneng is at the focus of the court case then proceeding, before the eyes of the world, in the Supreme Court in Johannesburg.

The second murder attempt on Ikaneng suggests that members of the football team continue to function during her trial as a bodyguard for her and Nelson Mandela himself. Ikaneng ascribes it to revenge for his evidence against Richardson. (Carlin, *Independent*, 8 May) This does not prevent the ANC from issuing a statement six days later, after the conviction of Mrs

Mandela, stating that it had decided following the release of Nelson Mandela in February last year that all members of the club should be removed and barred from premisses associated with the Mandela family. (*Times*, 14 May)

Nelson Mandela was indeed involved in the affair of the kidnappings, but in a manner different to his wife. Following the murder of Seipei, the three survivors of the kidnapping from the manse were Gabriel Pelo Mekgwe (then aged 20), Thabiso Mono (also 20) and Kenneth Kgase (then 29). All three, still confined to Mrs Mandela's house, had been forced by their captor, Richardson, to hold Ikaneng while he cut his throat. Nelson Mandela's intervention in the lives of these young men emerges with some interesting implications. According to a report, news of the kidnappings and assault

> first became public on 4 January 1989, when Mr Kgase escaped from the Mandela house...
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> Mr Kgase went first to the Johannesburg Central Methodist Church and [Rev Paul] Verryn [the white priest alleged by Mrs Mandela to have been responsible for homosexual child abuse of young black boys at the manse]. A full investigation was launched by members of the Soweto crisis committee. Committee members visited Mrs Mandela and demanded the release of the other victims.
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> When she refused to comply, they threatened writs of habeas corpus. But it was not until Mr Mandela was told of the incidents during a prison visit by his lawyer, Mr Ismail Ayob, that Mrs Mandela allowed Mr Mono and Mr Mekgwe to be released. (*Daily Telegraph*, London, 14 May)

This is confirmed by another report, which states that 'Nelson's intervention was eventually successful' in securing the release of the two kidnapped youths, following Seipei's murder and Kgase's escape. (*Observer*, 19 May) Mandela's intervention from prison – which might even have saved the lives of the two youths, one of whom later gave evidence against his wife – corresponds to the consistently humane example presented by him during his decades in prison, a matter attested by fellow–prisoners not members of the ANC.

In a statement delivered at a crowded press conference on the first anniversary of his release from prison, within days of the start of his wife's trial, he declared 'no hesitation whatsoever in asserting her innocence'.(*Guardian*, 9 February) His prison intervention however would indicate that Mr Mandela knew more of the truth concerning his wife's conduct than he would later concede. The inter–relation between husband and wife in this strangely matched couple remains one of many conundrums in this dark night of the soul in southern Africa.

Two Women

A week before Mrs Mandela is convicted, Sibusiso Chili leaves prison after completing a sentence of one year for the killing of Maxwell Madondo, one of the team who had been 'mandated' by the football club to kill him.

Chili is the son of Mrs Dudu Chili, an office–bearer in the Federation of Transvaal Women (Fedtraw). In 1988 Mrs Chili was a close ally of Mrs Albertina Sisulu, one of the presidents of the UDF and wife of Nelson Mandela's most senior prison colleague on Robben Island, Walter Sisulu, former secretary–general of the ANC. While Mrs Sisulu's movements were restricted by banning orders, Mrs Chili had acted as her deputy in finding shelter for young men and boys wanting to leave the murderous circle of the Mandela football club. Older than Winnie Mandela and an honoured figure in Soweto, with a much longer history of political commitment, Mrs Sisulu worked as a nurse in the surgery of the murdered Dr Asvat. While Mrs Sisulu has not commented either to the press or in court on her own relation to the events in Mrs Mandela's house, Mrs Chili states that:

> Some of the children who had started fleeing from Mrs Mandela's place would flee to Mrs Sisulu's place. Mrs Sisulu, as a restricted somebody, according to the South African law, would not be in a position to move around and help these boys. She would call upon me and say, 'Dudu, please, can you get some places where we can keep these children temporarily until we remove them from Soweto for their safety?'
> Those were precautions which we took to help the children who were terrified, who were very scared, staying at Winnie Mandela's. And of course, they would relate to us what was happening there. (Carlin, BBC Radio 4)

ANC politics in Soweto over this period revolves around Mrs Mandela and Mrs Sisulu, these two women of formidably different temperament, each the wife of one of the imprisoned leaders on Robben Island. In the election for presidency of the ANC Women's League at the time of Winnie Mandela's trial, it is primarily the caucus of support for Mrs Sisulu that bars the way to Mrs Mandela. Mrs Sisulu conspicuously fails to give evidence for Mrs Mandela in her trial, or even to appear in the visitors' gallery in court.

On 22 February 1989, nine days after the killing of Madondo, Mrs Chili is arrested and charged with complicity, though she is later set free before the start of her son's trial. That evening, while she is under arrest in the police cells, her 13–year–old niece, Finkie Msomi, is killed in a firebomb and shooting attack on Mrs Chili's house carried out by 'Winnie's boys'. Charles Zwane, one of the Mandela FC, is later sentenced to death for this crime, having been charged with 11 murders and 22 attempted killings. Zwane had previously received a suspended sentence as an accessory to murder in the Seheri murder case of 1988. The motive for the attack on Mrs Chili's house is revenge for the death of Madondo, and a generalized hatred for the role of the family in opposing the whim of the great lady. At this point there was near civil war among supporters of the ANC in Soweto, and Mrs Sisulu must herself have been in danger.

Sibusiso Chili is put on trial in 1990 for Madondo's death alongside Cebukulu, one of Madondo's colleagues in the botched attempt on Sibusiso's life. After their trial, in which the judge gives token sentences, Cebukulu is

interviewed. (Carlin, BBC Radio 4) He tells of a meeting in Winnie Mandela's office in Orlando township on 13 February 1989, the day of Madondo's death, attended by himself, Richardson, Zinzi Mandela and others at which Mrs Mandela 'mandated' the gang to 'get rid' of Chili and Ikaneng. Mr Justice Solomon, the judge, declares he believes Cebukulu's evidence.

Cebukulu is one of the seven people charged alongside Mrs Mandela in February this year. On the opening day of the trial it emerges that four of the accused have skipped their bail and gone into hiding. Cebukulu is one of the missing accused. The following Sunday, pictures appear in the press of Cebukulu standing in the crowd outside the Johannesburg Supreme Court, watching the opening of his own trial. The farce is repeated in the second week of the trial. No effort is made to arrest Cebukulu, and he does not reappear in the dock. The trial proceeds in the manner of *el realismo magical* in the fiction of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, with the accused looking on at his own trial from the outside, cocking a snoot at the massive police presence. The insouciance of this former hit–man would be funny if the circumstances were not as grim.

An Imperial Triumph

Initially, the principle of imperial suzerainty is triumphally asserted by Mrs Mandela and the ANC executive ('the sovereign can do no wrong'). Despite the burning of Mrs Mandela's house in Diepkloof Extension by outraged Soweto school students in July 1988 (following beatings by members of the football club, in connection with a rape), despite the murder of Stompie, despite the statements agreed between prosecution and defence in the murder trials of 1988 and 1989, despite dissociation from her 'reign of terror' by the MDM, the leaders of the ANC at first stand by their royal consort. In particular, Mrs Mandela is supported by the ANC secretary general, Alfred Nzo, one of the top leaders returned from exile (and deeply discredited among the exile rank and file). Within the ANC she rises, as Carlin reports, 'without trace'. At the time of her trial Mrs Mandela holds even more portfolios than her husband. 'She is chairperson of her local ANC Soweto branch; she is on the executive of the ANC's regional branch for the Pretoria–Johannesburg area, the most populous in the country; she is interim head of the Women's League of the ANC; and she is the ANC's head of social welfare' – the beneficiary of a 'collective decision taken by the ANC, right down to township branch level, to close ranks behind her'. (*Independent*, 4 February) Under conditions of an Angolan, or Mozambican, or even Zimbabwean 'people's republic', she would have been as invulnerable as Madame Ceaucsecu in the decades before the floor collapsed beneath her.

Seipei is in no position to give evidence. Nor is Dr Asvat. Of the other three witnesses, one – Mekgwe – fails to give evidence after having been seen leaving the church manse in Soweto from which he was kidnapped in 1988, in the company of 'three African National Congress men', one of the them 'a senior ANC man'. (*Guardian*, 13 February) Mekgwe disappears. Of this, more later. Concerning the other two witnesses, Kgase and Mono, the state

prosecutor declares: 'They are scared because their mate [Mekgwe] had been kidnapped'. Kgase says: 'I very much fear for my life...I think my life is at stake'. (*Guardian*, 14 February) For a period at the beginning of the trial it appears as if it will collapse, due to absence of witnesses. It portends what the US journal *Newsweek* suggestively describes as a 'Sicilian–style outcome – acquittal by kidnapping'. (25 February)

The attorney–general of the Witwatersrand declares he will act with vigour against any attempt to coerce witnesses. According to the *Times*, a 'psychosis of fear' surrounds the proceedings, the central subject of the affair sitting demurely in the dock alongside her three remaining co–accused, the other four having vanished. (13 February) She is relaxed, confident, and jokes with her defence team. Her husband, the expected future president of the country, and the ANC top brass pack the visitors' gallery, while paramilitary squads of uniformed ANC youth parade outside the courtroom door. Under threat of imprisonment, the two remaining witnesses are eventually induced to talk. The case comes to life.

As the trial runs its course, the perception of Mrs Mandela both within the country and internationally undergoes a profound change. This trial provides the occasion for a major learning experience about the reality of southern African conditions, in which judgements are reassessed within the country and across the world. The ANC leadership takes a decision 'to distance the organization from the trial'. (*Independent*, 15 May) Top–level ANC and SACP leaders no longer crowd the visitors' benches, as in the first days of the trial. Three weeks before the verdict, the paragon of national motherhood has been redefined in the *Guardian* in Britain by its political columnist as a 'Medusa'. (Hugo Young, 25 April 1991) It is a view widely shared in Soweto, if not expressed in such classical imagery. On the day when she is found guilty, of the ANC leadership only her husband is present. The following day, when she is sentenced (to six years in prison), even he is not there.

A Radical Confusion

The affair requires comment from a further point of vision. During the trial itself, defence cross–examination makes it appear that the two main witnesses, Kgase and Mono, rather than Mrs Mandela are the accused, and that the crime of which they stand charged is...homosexuality. It is argued by the defence that Mrs Mandela and her co–accused had rescued the youths for their own good from alleged homosexual advances by Rev Verryn, the priest in charge of the manse in which they had been living. The issue of homosexuality becomes the 'key' to Mrs Mandela's defence. (*Weekly Mail*, 8 March) Posters held up by her supporters outside the courtroom read: 'Homosex is not in black culture'. (*Weekly Mail*, 15 March)

One need merely substitute the adjective 'Aryan' for 'black' to appreciate the ideological climate in which the defence of Mrs Mandela is organized. A serious effort is made to convert a trial for kidnapping and assault into a trial of alleged homosexuality of prosecution witnesses, the victims of that kidnap-

ping and assault. The defence argument is characterized by a systematic confusion of concepts: of child abuse relative to the right to freedom of sexual orientation among adults, of the culpability of child abusers relative to that of their victims, and of counselling rather than brutality as the appropriate response towards the victims (and perpetrators) of sexual abuse of children. The murder of Stompie Seipei, a matter of child abuse of the most extreme kind, throws its shadow over the effort of the defence to represent Mrs Mandela as motivated solely by repugnance at the abuse of young people.

This blurring and fudging of concepts relating to sexuality and violence, by the accused, their counsel and their supporters, is an ominous indicator of the tone of thought to be expected in a 'new South Africa'. A heavy dose of sexist poison is spilled into public affairs during the trial, both within South Africa and abroad, with damaging effect given the international importance of its leading personality and her husband. The character of the defence, let alone the events which form the focus to the charges, in all respects typical of a period of deep reaction.

Under these circumstances, it was a brave act of the *Weekly Mail* – a liberal journal normally sympathetic to the ANC – to open its columns to a critique of the sexist brutalism of the defence case, just as it did in exposing the apparent connivance of state and ANC in the disappearance and hijacking of witnesses. The *Weekly Mail*, to its honour, was also the first to expose the kidnappings in January 1989. It may later emerge that the decision of the prosecution to proceed with the case at the critical moment in mid–February owes much to the readiness of this journal to incur the wrath of Mrs Mandela, rather than see a double standard of justice – one for the families and friends of political leaders, another for the rest.

The most sensitive analysis of the character of Mrs Mandela's defence was made by the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (Glow) in an open letter to the national executive committee of the ANC, protesting at its homophobic character. Glow described this as an attempt to capitalize on 'reactionary prejudices against homosexuals', and pointed out that the argument of the defence contravened the ANC's own draft Bill of Rights. It was alarming that the NEC had 'failed to respond to the level of homophobia' that had arisen both within and outside the court, the letter said. The ANC's failure to respond raised 'doubts regarding its stated commitment to the recognition of lesbian and gay rights'. A black gay activist, Simon Nkoli, who had been defended by Mrs Mandela's senior counsel, George Bizos, in a major political trial in 1987, charged with having conspired to overthrow the state, now said of Bizos: 'It is very sad for me to see him using the gay issue in this trial'. (*Independent*, 18 March 1991)

Whether or not sexual abuse of young people did in fact take place at the manse could not be verified from the trial. Nor was it the issue. The character of the defence case, funded from abroad by the International Defence and Aid Fund (like the trial of Richardson) on the grounds that this was a political and not a criminal trial, marks the end of an epoch in which the state, not the accused, was overwhelmingly judged guilty in political trials by a majority

within South Africa and abroad. By the character of her defence, Mrs Mandela affronted a basic principle underlying support for the ANC both within South Africa and internationally. This was the principle of the critique of prejudice. She proved unable to grasp the point made by the sociologist Peter L. Berger, that the persecution of homosexuals

> fulfils the same function of 'bad faith' as racial prejudice or discrimination. In both cases, one's own shaky identity is guaranteed by the counter–image of the despised group...The white man despises the Negro and in that very act confirms his own identity as one entitled to show contempt. In the same way, one comes to believe one's own dubious virility as one spits upon the homosexual. (Berger (1975), *Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective*, Pelican, p180)

The violent and deeply prejudiced nature of South African society was given sharp focus by the trial. That the trial nevertheless proceeded to its conclusion was a small augury of hope for the future.

The Oration at Bekkersdal

It was not only South Africa's homosexuals, however, who felt a cold wind at the back of the neck. On 7 February, three days after the trial had begun and was remanded, Winnie Mandela addressed a rally in the black township at Bekkersdal, about 25 miles southeast of Johannesburg. In what the London *Times* describes as a 'chilling threat' to whites, Mrs Mandela states: 'Any white person who comes here to interfere with us or who comes to preach peace – that person must not leave Bekkersdal alive. Their wives and mothers will have to fetch them as corpses'. (8 February) As the *Times* correspondent notes, this is the 'most vitriolic speech' by the First Lady since her classic call in April 1986 that 'together, hand in hand, with our sticks of matches, with our necklaces, we shall liberate this country'. (Carlin, BBC Radio 4)

Shortly after her Bekkersdal oration, Mrs Mandela delivers a passionate implied justification of the occupation of Kuwait by the regime of Saddam Hussein of Iraq. (Carlin, *New Republic*) Not out of character, Saddam's secret police introduce the necklace to the streets of Iraq a month later as a means of control over the revolt of their own citizens. (*Observer*, 24 March)

The significance of Mrs Mandela's threat at Bekkersdal is that, like so many of her utterances, it is a blind intended to obscure the politics of the organization of which she remains a leading member. The rally in Bekkersdal is convened to call a truce after a weekend of slaughter in which a dozen people are killed and scores left homeless: victims of political factioneering between supporters of the ANC and those of the successor to the black consciousness movement of the 1970s, Azapo.

Like the killing of Seipei, the deaths in Bekkersdal are not an unfortunate act of god, and have a human history which requires investigation. The blood rhetoric of Mrs Mandela relates here to the antagonism of the ANC towards

Azapo, which has a strong following in Bekkersdal. The tone and content of her threat, and the political reality underlying the slaughter, reach back beyond her words of April 1986 – captured by the sound camera – to the period in 1985 when supporters of the ANC began a pogrom to wipe Azapo from the map of political life.

A murderous campaign was launched against Azapo in 1985, after it had dared to humiliate the UDF through its strident campaign against the visit of Senator Edward Kennedy in January of that year. The cycle of township violence of this period requires its own detailed investigation. In his acclaimed book, *My Traitor's Heart*, the South African journalist Rian Malan has described in chilling detail the murder–hunt against Azapo members in Soweto by supporters of the UDF in Soweto in 1985. He quotes George Wauchope, an Azapo leader and former close colleague of Steve Biko, as stating that Morobe, Albertina Sisulu and Patrick 'Terror' Lekota, the leaders of the UDF, 'didn't see anything...they never *ever* acknowledged that there was this internecine warfare. They never *ever* tried to stop it'. (*My Traitor's Heart,* Vintage, 1991, p 324)

Lethal violence against anyone with different opinions enters into the body politic at this time like the Aids virus, erupting five years later in the massacres launched by massed Inkatha members on the people of the townships. To be a township resident, or to be a Zulu speaker in the wrong place at the wrong time, or even erroneously to be thought to be a Zulu speaker, then becomes a fatal error. If the carnage of Inkatha is the vengeance of the despoliated countryside on the township, then the violence centred within the ANC and its supporters is the vengeance of the despoliated township on itself. Despite declarations of harmony at Bekkersdal at the rally on 7 February, in a joint platform appearance by speakers from the ANC, Azapo, the Pan Africanist Congress and Inkatha, South Africa is experiencing a pogrom tending towards low intensity civil war, in which the sources have not been clarified and in which the ANC has signally failed to lead the way to civil peace. It was the place of Mrs Mandela, even at this late stage, to be an exponent of the rhetoric of violent militancy.

The Selling of a Celebrity.

The day before her speech at Bekkersdal, Mrs Mandela implied outside the courtroom – standing beside her husband – that she was being persecuted by the press. As the international media star runs out of hype, she turns on her former sources of publicity. Her husband declares: 'My wife is subject to trial by mass media, before her trial in the court'. (recorded by Carlin, BBC Radio 4)

Yet another media romance of the 1980s now wears out. Not long before, Mrs Mandela was the beneficiary of one of the most spectacular campaigns of hype in modern times. But those whom the media creates, it also frequently destroys. 'As I write', observes Rian Malan on the first day of her trial, 'the

skies above Johannesburg are dark with flying reporters, coming in to cover the trial of Winnie Mandela, and it seems that a journalistic feeding–frenzy is in the offing...' (*Guardian*, 4 February)

> All this is in stark contrast with the abject deference accorded to Winnie Mandela in her 'Mother of the Nation' heyday. Her deification began in 1985, when she returned to Soweto in open defiance of a government banning order and resumed a leading role in the freedom struggle. The world press – the US press in particular – was entranced. Here was a genuine heroine, headstrong, fearlessly outspoken, and enormously telegenic to boot.
>
> Mrs Mandela was the subject of 22 *New York Times* stories in 1986, and made 70 appearances on network television. Scores of flattering magazine profiles, and at least three books, were written. She was showered with movie offers and honorary degrees, even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. She became one of the most celebrated women on the planet.

But now the enthusiasm of the international radical chic is becoming jaded. There is a fly in the unguent. A little worm of doubt creeps into the minds of true believers, some of whom might even previously have wished that someone would 'preach peace' in the townships. It is now Mrs Mandela who most prominently illustrates the ugly face of 'national liberation'. Witness to this is the description of the 'imperious and enigmatic' Mrs Mandela in the London *Times*: she appears to be 'stalking South Africa's political stage like some latter–day Lady MacBeth'. (11 February) The *Guardian*, previously the most pro–ANC of the major daily newspapers in Britain, with a well–tested mechanism for blocking stories critical of the ANC, now declares itself 'appalled by the evidence of intimidation of witnesses' in the Mandela case. The reputation of the ANC itself is at stake because of this 'single, flawed individual'. Her case is a 'disaster for the ANC' which, together with Nelson Mandela needs to distance itself 'very fast, very openly, from this deeply disturbing affair'. (14 February) This editorial, in a newspaper which gave minimal coverage to revelations about the Swapo and ANC prison camps in Angola, marks the turning on its axis of late 20th century liberalism in relation to the ANC.

By April this year it appears that, for the moment, the career of Mrs Mandela has been held in check not only by the disaffection of the world's media but by the women of the ANC. At its first congress inside South Africa for 30 years, the ANC Women's League on 27 April rejects Winnie Mandela as its president in favour of Gertrude Shope – a national executive committee member from the exile, who had acted with humanity to stop executions, torture and humiliation of ANC members held prisoner in Angola after the mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1984 (see *Searchlight South Africa*, No 5, p 53). Mrs Shope's victory, and Mrs Mandela's defeat, had according to the *Times* been 'engineered' by Albertina Sisulu, who stepped aside as candidate in order to let Mrs Shope win. Most significantly, Mrs Shope appears to have

been 'strongly supported by women still in exile' (*Times* 29 April), who have felt the methods of political authoritarianism from the ANC at first hand, on their own persons.

As such, this was the first practical intervention of the exiles through democratic means in the internal life of the ANC within the country. It expressed the concerns of those members with deepest experience of despotic forms of rule within the ANC, and the deepest hostility to them. It indicates a possible consensus or coming together of that section of the ANC which resisted the thuggery of the Mandela FC within the country and the exiles who opposed the Stalinist regime of the security apparatus abroad.

Mrs Mandela's speech at Bekkersdal in February had been a *Pie Jesu* of Third Worldist rhetoric. Addressing the crowd in both English and Xhosa, she declared: 'Your spears should be pointed in the direction of Pretoria. Our enemy is in Pretoria. We have never had enemies within ourselves. We are all here because of our fight for freedom. The enemy come here to exploit our differences'. (*Times*) Yet it is 'the Boers and the apartheid government' – accused of having instigated the violence at Bekkersdal – with whom the ANC is peacefully negotiating for a place in government. There are no spears pointing in the direction of Pretoria, only briefcases, while a never–ending catalogue of deaths in the townships belies Mrs Mandela's glib nationalistic phrase about blacks in South Africa never having had 'enemies among ourselves'.

The Nation of the Mother

Since 1985 – the incubatory period leading to the township slaughter of the 1990s – responsibility for legitimating violence as a primary means of political control 'within ourselves' has lain first of all on the ANC and its supporters, with its leading text in Winnie Mandela's homily on the liberatory authority of necklaces and matches. This must be the subject of another article, which investigates the conditions which nourished the use of executions against political opponents and caused the transfiguration of South Africa's Saint Joan into a Medusa.

Mrs Mandela herself endured 27 years' loss of husband, following a first few years of marriage when her husband was absorbed in mainly illegal political work; 16 months' imprisonment, mostly in solitary confinement; and more than 17 years of banning orders, many of them served in banishment. Her return to Soweto in 1985 (typically, in defiance of her banishment) coincided with the most sustained period of near–insurrection in the country's modern history, when all nerves were strained to breaking point. It was the last years of the old order, when tens of thousands had decided that one final, violent push would consign the regime of racial discrimination to oblivion. Great sacrifice was called for, and great sacrifice was taken.

In the end, Mrs Mandela succumbed. In the endemic violence of South African society, raised to fever–pitch in the mid–1980s, the complementary

norms of white and black brutality became hers. She acquired the characteristics of the regime she opposed, as of the gangster milieu in the purgatory of the townships. She became truly South African.

Alongside so many horrors, three events from the same month as Mrs Mandela's conviction give a pointer to South African political conditions in the middle of 1991. One is the closure by the ANC of its prison camp at Mbarara in southern Uganda and the release of its inmates, in all probability in response to pressure from the British Foreign Office and the campaign of the pressure group, Justice for Southern Africa. There will be a report on this in the next issue.

Second is the shooting by the South African police of a former Umkhonto activist Tumi Padi and his girlfriend Nokuzola as they lay in bed in Soweto on 19 May – slaughter in the old fashion, following the torture of Padi's father (for information) at Protea police station in Soweto in February. (*Independent*, 1 June)

And third: confirmation from a Zambian government official that Mekgwe, the missing witness in the case of Winnie Mandela, was being detained by the ANC in Zambia, after being moved there from Zimbabwe. Cebukulu, Mandela's co–accused, who delighted in attending his own trial from the outside, had earlier been reported in the Zambian press as being held in Kamwalaremand centre at Lusaka, 'apparently under ANC authority'. (*Guardian*, 30 May) These two men, both scarred by their experiences in the Mandela house, thus remain effectively prisoners of the ANC. The lesson from the trial of Mrs Mandela is that in South Africa the rule is: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, the more things change, the more they remain the same.