

South African Woman ‘Banned’ But Unbowed

By **JOSEPH LELYVELD**, Special to **The New York Times**

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BRANDFORT, South Africa, Jan. 4 — The police station on the main street of this small farming town in the Orange Free State has two entrances, one marked “white” and the other “nonwhite.” Winnie Mandela, wife of the imprisoned leader of the banned African National Conference, went through the one marked “white” today when she reported for the first time under a new order that banishes and confines her to Brandfort for another five years.

The order requires her to report to the police weekly, which is pure formality because she is kept under daily and often nightly surveillance in the hope, she believes, that she will be caught in some infraction of what is known as her “ban.”

Both sides recognize it as a contest of strong wills. Going through the wrong door at the police station — as Mrs. Mandela can be relied upon to do for the next 259 weeks — expresses more than the contempt of a vivid and sophisticated woman for the racial conventions imposed by the dominant Afrikaners on this provincial community, her place of exile since 1977.

It is also a way of saying she expects no quarter and gives none. When the commander of the security police in the Free State turned up last week to serve her with her fifth banning order since 1962 — the year her husband, Nelson Mandela, was arrested — she tried not to look at him, she recalled this afternoon.

“I just asked whether it was any different from the last one and told them to put it on the table,” she said. “You cannot pretend it is not painful, but you develop a type of immunity after having the same pain inflicted on you over and over again.”

Like the banning order that was to expire two days after the new one was served, it not only confined her to Brandfort but placed her under house arrest every night and weekend in her three-room township house, which has neither electricity nor plumbing.

It also forbade her to attend “gatherings” and made it a crime for her words to be published anywhere in South Africa. The only difference was a slight easing on the conditions under which she can receive visitors. This was not done for her convenience but that of the police, she contended, so they can keep tabs on whom she is seeing.

Mrs. Mandela, who has been charged eight times with breaking her various banning orders and convicted twice, takes the latest as signifying the unyielding quality of Afrikaner domination. And so she talks about the way the Afrikaners think, much the way many Afrikaners tend to talk about the way blacks think.

“No, the Afrikaner is not prepared for change; not even Reagan can deceive himself into believing that,” she said, writing off the possibility of a negotiated settlement on the protracted issue of South-West Africa. “That’s just not the Afrikaner. He knows only one language.”

She meant, of course, the language of force. And yet she was able to laugh richly, the way a woman might laugh over an extravagant compliment, at the implied tribute in her ban.

“Why should an insignificant woman in the backveld of the Free State be a threat to the Afrikaner’s kingdom?” she asked in tones of deepening irony and pleasure. “You know, they are God’s chosen people. They are so strong. The country is so rich, so stable. Why be afraid of a little ‘Communist’ who belongs to an organization they have wiped out?”

Still speaking in an ironic vein, Mrs. Mandela returned to the subject of President Reagan. How was it, she asked, that the Reagan Administration could resort to economic sanctions against Poland but reject them against South Africa? Weren’t sanctions “taboo”? The situations in the two countries were now “exactly the same,” she contended, with Solidarity experiencing in Poland the fate the African National Congress has experienced here for two decades.

In the last months, she has twice been given restricted furloughs from Brandfort. The first time was to travel — by a route determined by the security police — to a brother’s funeral in Transkei. On the way back, the car in which she was being driven was forced off a bridge by a truck. Mrs. Mandela emerged with a broken arm and several cracked ribs.

When she recovered enough to travel again, she was permitted to go to Robben Island off Cape Town, the jail that is her husband’s Elba. She saw him on Christmas and the day after, each time for 45 minutes, which was 15 minutes longer than any previous visit. They were not allowed to discuss anything political, including her ban, but it was plain, she said, “he assumed I would still be in Brandfort for a very long time.”

This premonition was confirmed two days after she returned, with the delivery of her new ban. Mrs. Mandela, who is 47 years old, expects no leniency from the authorities but, she said, she also does not expect to be banned forever. “We consider ourselves very lucky to belong to a generation that will actually see the liberation of our country,” she

declared in a tone that was firm but not insistent, as if she were merely expressing an obvious fact.