

# **The Making of the Mandela Myth**

by

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## Abstract

Nelson Mandela stands as one of the most powerful symbolic figures of the past century, embodying notions of freedom, peace, racial reconciliation and the struggle against tyranny. As largely uncontested as this image is today, its constitution has by no means been uncomplicated. Before he was incarcerated on Robben Island, Mandela was viewed as a young, militant firebrand within the ANC-led liberation movement, an image which was counterpointed by his patrician lineage, education and professional success as a lawyer. His highly visible embodiment of this complex identity served to elevate him not only to the top of the black Johannesburg social hierarchy, but to the forefront of the liberation struggle. The state-sanctioned view of him was, by contrast, as a terrorist, agitating for the destruction of the state. During his imprisonment on Robben Island, the government sought to entirely expunge his words and likeness from active circulation, which ironically facilitated the process of myth-making around him. After his release from prison, Mandela largely succeeded in claiming agency over his image – the one which still persists in the international public imagination – facilitated in large part by the publication of his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, and the numerous acts of reconciliation and diplomacy which he undertook. In writing this thesis, I have sought to trace the process of mythmaking around Mandela, questioning how the disparate, and often contradictory, ideas around him have been narrativised and incorporated into the mythical figure we are familiar with today, both by him and others. I have divided the narrative construction of Mandela into two broad epochs: the “dominant” narrative, which developed from his entry into politics until his release from prison in 1990, and the “official” narrative, which developed from his release from prison. I seek to illustrate the processes by which the dominant narrative was constituted, and how this narrative construct gained increasing ideological currency during his imprisonment on Robben Island. I then seek to illustrate how the numerous, often-conflicting elements of the dominant narrative were ultimately consolidated and largely supplanted by the official narrative, as represented by *Long Walk to Freedom*, focusing specifically on its theme of progress and maturation. In my conclusion, I argue that many of the ideological elements which fed the mythical construction of Mandela in the dominant narrative, as a youthful, masculinised liberation fighter, persist today. The promise which the Mandela of the official narrative embodied, of South Africa as a ‘miracle’ nation destined to move beyond the vestiges of Apartheid – including racism, unemployment and poverty – has largely failed to materialise, allowing these elements to gain an ideological currency once more.

## Opsomming

Nelson Mandela word beskou as een van die belangrikste simboliese figure van die afgelope eeu, en hy verteenwoordig begrippe soos vryheid, vrede, rasse-versoening en die stryd teen tirannie. Alhoewel hierdie beeld grootliks onbetwis is, was die vestiging hiervan geensins ongekompliseer nie. Voordat hy op Robbeneiland aangehou was, was die jong Mandela as a 'n militante vuurvreter in die ANC-bevrydingsbeweging gesien; hierdie beeld is teengestaan deur sy aristokratiese afkoms, opvoeding en professionele sukses as 'n prokureur. Sy hoogs sigbare vergestaltung van 'n komplekse identiteit het nie net gehelp om hom te verhoog tot die bo-punt van die swart Johannesburgse sosiale hiërargie nie, maar ook tot die voorpunt van die bevrydingstryd. In teenstelling het die staat hom beskou as 'n terroris wat die staat wil vernietig. Terwyl hy sy tronkstraf op Robbeneiland uitgevoer het, het die regering aktief probeer om sy woorde en foto's uit sirkulasie te verkry; dit het egter, ironies genoeg, die proses van Mandela se mitifisering vergemaklik. Na sy vrylating uit die tronk, het Mandela grootliks daarin geslaag om sy publieke beeld terug te neem en te herskep, grootliks deur middel van sy outobiografie *Long Walk to Freedom* en deur talle versoenings- en diplomatieke daade te onderneem. Dit is hierdie beeld wat steeds in die internasionale publiek se geheue voortduur. In hierdie tesis, beoog ek om Mandela se mitifiseringsproses na te spoor, om te bevraagteken hoe die uiteenlopende en dikwels teenstrydige idees, beide deur hom en ander, rondom hom genarratiseer is en opgeneem is in die mitiese figuur met wie ons vandag vertrou is. Ek het die narratiewe konstruksie van Mandela verdeel in twee breë periodes: Die "dominante" verhaal, wat ontwikkel het vanaf sy toetrede tot die politiek tot met sy vrylating uit die tronk in 1990, en die „amptelike“ verhaal, wat ontwikkel het vanaf en na sy vrylating uit die tronk. Ek beoog om te proses waardeer die dominante narratief/verhaal geskep is, te illustreer, en om te wys hoe hierdie narratiewe samestelling toenemend ideologiese waarde gekry het tydens sy tronkstraf op Robbeneiland. Daarna beoog ek om te illustreer hoe die dikwels teenstrydige elemente van die dominante verhaal/narratief uiteindelik gekonsolideer en vervang is deur die amptelike verhaal, soos verteenwoordig deur *Long Walk to Freedom*, deur spesifiek te fokus op dié werk se tema van vooruitgang en volwassewording. In my gevolgtrekking, argumenteer ek dat baie van die ideologiese elemente wat die mitiese konstruksie van Mandela in die dominante verhaal ondersteun het, as jeugdige, manlike vryheidsvegter, vandag voortduur. Die belofte wat die Mandela van die amptelike verhaal gesimboliseer het, dat Suid-Afrika, as 'n "wonderwerk"-nasie, bestem is om die oorblyfsels van Apartheid – insluitend rassisme, werkloosheid en armoede – te oorkom, het grootendeels misluk om te verwesenlik, wat hierdie elemente weereens 'n ideologiese waarde laat verkry het.

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## Introduction

Until his imprisonment on Robben Island, first in 1962, and again in 1964, Nelson Mandela embodied an identity quite at odds with the Nelson Mandela of the post-1990 period. He played on masculinised martial African archetypes, positing himself as a modern successor to the great warrior tradition of his antecedents, concurrently of Xhosa patrician descent and – in his position as lawyer – a veritable urban ‘noble’ or aristocrat. Were he hanged at the end of the Rivonia trial, Stengel argues, he would today be but a footnote in African National Congress (ANC) history, remembered only as a militant firebrand of great potential (Stengel n. pag.). Mandela’s various projected identities have been supplemented and propounded by the variety of texts, both written and performed, which have been in circulation since his rise to popularity in 1950s Johannesburg. Before his imprisonment, he embodied the ideal of the ANC Youth League’s leadership rhetoric as a young, militant leader who did not need to defer to the authority of the senior ANC. The Nelson Mandela who emerged from Victor Verster in 1990, however, embodied a very different identity, that of reconciler and moderate.

This thesis seeks to identify, and trace the development of, the mythology which built up around Mandela until his release from Robben Island, as well as how this mythology was consolidated by his well-known autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, published in 1994 and ghost written by Richard Stengel. In this regard, I will draw on a Levi-Straussian view of myths as stemming from a communal desire to make sense of the world, through the resolution and consolidation of diametrically opposed elements<sup>1</sup>. This will be augmented by Raymond Williams’<sup>2</sup> concept of dominant, residual and emergent cultural ideologies<sup>3</sup>. This thesis draws on these

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<sup>1</sup> See Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> See Raymond Williams’ “Base and Superstructure” in *Culture and Materialism*, pages 38 – 45

<sup>3</sup> Briefly, Williams defines a “dominant” cultural ideology as an ideology held by the majority of a society, which includes “residual” elements of past dominant ideologies which are reinvented and adapted to new dominant values. The emergent ideology is one which generally comes to stands in opposition to the dominant, and may or may not come to supplant it.

theories in order to draw a distinction between what it terms the “dominant” and “official” narratives<sup>4</sup>.

In the dominant narrative, set in the context of the struggle against apartheid, Mandela was constructed as a liberation fighter rooted in a martial, masculinised tradition. The African mythology around militant resistance to colonial oppression, and the claiming of masculine agency through combat, served as the residual ideological elements which augmented it. However, this narrative construct was counterpointed by the state-sanctioned perception of Mandela as a terrorist, an idea which had gained significant currency by 1990. This symbolic polarisation of Mandela in the dominant narrative would, ultimately, be addressed in the writing of *Long Walk to Freedom*. This work, I argue, subsumes the contradictions between these two understandings of Mandela, constructing him as a reconciler and man of peace, engaging in a Levi-Straussian project of myth-making. This emergent narrative has, subsequently, largely replaced the pre-1990 dominant narrative and is referred to as the official narrative throughout this thesis. Therefore, although this thesis’ engagement with the dominant narrative focuses on the depiction of him as an African emancipator – unless otherwise stated – it acknowledges the contested nature of this image.

Chapter one seeks to interrogate the role the numerous and disparate literary and historical constructions of Mandela’s youth played in the development of the dominant narrative of his life. The time frame in question stretches from his birth until his move to Johannesburg. This period in time, it is argued, has lent itself to a process of mythologisation, partly because of its historical unverifiability in many respects and, partly, because Mandela himself has subsequently been popularly located – and has located himself – within a long tradition of African mythology and traditional narratives. There has been a historical tendency to construct the young Mandela as conforming to common narrative constructs, reverse-engineering his youth to account for his later greatness and position in the long tradition of African figures he has popularly been allocated. Therefore, in order to illustrate the ways in which he is depicted as embodying the culmination of a historical-narrative

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term “dominant narrative” is understood to correspond broadly to Williams’ idea of a dominant cultural ideology, while the “official narrative” corresponds broadly to Williams’ concept of the emergent cultural ideology.

progression, an overview of relevant history preceding his birth will be given. This chapter will argue that there exists no reliable, authoritative text on Mandela's youth, and that the fragmented nature of official record-keeping around this period, in addition to the uncertainty surrounding even the most basic aspects of his childhood, have facilitated the myth-making process by allowing biographers to shape the literary incarnation of the young Mandela largely as they choose. Each text produced dealing with this period has thus contributed to the seemingly impenetrable maze of interpretations and connotations which need to be waded through in attempting to form a full, historically accurate picture of Mandela the man. I will also look at Mandela's own construction of this period, arguing that his account has largely come to be accepted as canonical, with his extensive moral authority largely accounting for its ready acceptance<sup>5</sup>. This section will then, in short, investigate how Mandela's youth was constructed, first in the dominant narrative and, later, in the official narrative, illustrating how this period has served the official narrative's project of consolidating the dominant narrative's disparate and often-contradictory depictions of Mandela.

Chapter two will seek to trace the way in which the store of achievements, images and connotations Mandela had amassed by the time of his incarceration, as well as the initiatives of the ANC, Winnie Mandela and the international community during the period of his incarceration, contributed to developing the Mandela of the dominant narrative. Despite Mandela's removal from the midst of the struggle during his imprisonment on Robben Island, he would come to gain a considerable symbolic currency, both locally and internationally. This chapter will look at how these contributing elements are constructed in various texts and, most notably, how they have been consolidated by *Long Walk to Freedom*, a text which has to accommodate and supplement the dominant narrative, even as it seeks to establish itself as the official narrative, divergent as it is in purpose from any narrative construction of Mandela's life up until that point.

Chapter two will, firstly, show how Mandela's incarceration on Robben Island ties into the longer narrative of African struggle and emancipation, a connection which

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<sup>5</sup> This is true not only of this aspect of the official narrative, but of virtually all of it. As Boehmer points out, "each individual biographer [of Mandela has] take[n] the decision to co-operate with a dominant strain of Mandela's own make-up" (7).

both the dominant and official<sup>6</sup> narratives have strongly emphasised. I will, therefore, begin with a brief overview of the history of Robben Island, seeking to contextualise Mandela's place within its extended narrative of colonial oppression. I will ultimately argue that much of the symbolic significance of Mandela's incarceration on Robben Island was the result of the place that both the island and Mandela occupied within a longer historical narrative of African dispossession. I go on to argue that while Mandela's incarceration was *initially* integrated into the larger narrative of the African struggle against the coloniser, as represented by Robben Island, the island has, since his release in 1990, steadily been integrated into the narrative of *Mandela's* life, a process which has been concurrent to the construction of the official narrative. Rather than defining Mandela, Robben Island has come to be defined in relation to him by being integrated into the rhetoric of nation-building and reconciliation, emphasising the extent to which Mandela's story has come to be seen as analogous to the narrative of South Africa's anti-colonial struggle. In short, the scale of the official narrative has come to envelope one of the key factors which it was initially defined against and given legitimacy by.

Furthermore, this chapter will seek to identify the key elements of Mandela's status at the time of his incarceration, tracing how these came to be developed and integrated into a powerful, if fragmented, broad narrative and myth during his incarceration and, ultimately, how these are reconciled by *Long Walk to Freedom* in its construction of the official narrative. This discussion will, necessarily, play off against, and build on, the background introduced in chapter one – tracing a chronological path from his arrival in Johannesburg until his imprisonment on Robben Island – as well as reading Mandela's performativity in the context of the history introduced at the beginning of chapter two. It will argue that the symbolic currency Mandela accrued during his incarceration can be read as stemming, in large part, from his conformance – both consciously and incidentally – to the store of historical images, symbols and narrative threads around his position as both traditional Xhosa royal and modern African political activist during the period of his public political activism.

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<sup>6</sup>This refers, as it will throughout the rest of this thesis, to the officially sanctioned public narrative as it is presented by power, represented primarily by *Long Walk to Freedom*.

Its methodology will, therefore, essentially be both critically analytical and comparative, focussing not only on the broad form of the dominant narrative, but also on the way in which it is constructed at the level of semiotics and authorial expression. I will seek to show how inferred meaning is every bit as influential in the construction and perpetuation of the Mandela myth as 'factual' representations. I will not, however, seek to ascertain which account(s) can or should be considered the most accurate or reliable; rather, I will seek to illustrate and interrogate the literary construction of dominant elements of the mythology which developed around Mandela until his release from prison, while illustrating the ways in which various central incidents in Mandela's life have been appropriated at various times to suit a range of social and political agendas.

The first period under discussion in chapter two will be the one immediately succeeding Mandela's arrival in Johannesburg. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Johannesburg is constructed as a microcosmic representation of South Africa. In contrast to Mandela's loving and idyllic portrayal of the places of his youth, Johannesburg is constructed as a dark, threatening and alien environment, though one which, concurrently, provides an environment conducive to a process of self-empowerment. No longer under the regent's patronage, Mandela must make his own way in the city, and the depiction of Mandela during this time is distinct from any other incarnation. Initially, he and Justice abuse their connections for personal gain, necessitating the restoration of his sense of morality and responsibility. On a basic level, Mandela uses this section to illustrate the difficulties faced by Africans<sup>7</sup> in the urban environment during Apartheid; it is, however, primarily an affirmation of the work's dominant theme of political development and maturation. Mandela's painful break from under the regent's patronage mirrors the painful disintegration of the integrity of the traditional system of chieftainship; crucially, however, the void created by his abandonment of tradition is only filled by his eventual participation in, and acceptance of the philosophy of, the ANC. This period therefore represents a liminal space, and is a key stage in the development of his theme of political conscientisation as salvational.

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<sup>7</sup> From here on, any reference in this thesis to "Africans" is to be understood as denoting black South Africans, unless otherwise stated. Although it is understood that the term is far broader in meaning than this, for the purposes of this thesis this shorthand will suffice.

Thereafter, I will trace his early political activity, interrogating the construction of Mandela's involvement in key political activities, and how these contributed to his status as a "leader-amongst-leaders" on the island in the eyes of the political prisoners incarcerated with him, the public and, in time, the South African government. In doing so, I will also necessarily engage with Mandela's visually performative nature, engaging with some of the key images of him which circulated during his period of incarceration. These images of the young, militant Mandela served to bolster the mythology building around him; his physical removal from the general populace meant that these images could never be contested or supplanted by the ageing and increasingly moderate individual.

Finally, chapter three will conclude with a look at key instances of Mandela's visual embodiment of his political strategy of racial reconciliation upon his release from Victor Verster in 1990 to his election to the presidency in 1994, culminating in his appropriation of the 1995 Rugby World Cup Final as a locus of national unification. I will argue that *Long Walk to Freedom* formed the literary correlatives to Mandela's displays of forgiveness and reconciliation, emphasising a cultural solidarity between Africans and Afrikaners, seeking to foster a sense of nationhood as a negation of the injustices of the past. Mandela, at this time, faced considerable opposition, not only from white South Africans who feared the young militant who had been imprisoned almost three decades before, but also from individuals within his own party who felt that he had betrayed their principles. Mandela, as one who had lost so much through his incarceration on Robben Island was, with his considerable local and international reputation, uniquely situated to embody this emphasis on racial harmony and forgiveness.

Ultimately, therefore, this thesis seeks to interrogate the literary construction of Nelson Mandela in *Long Walk to Freedom*, establishing it as a consolidation of the various disparate threats of the dominant narrative which had been developing up until that point. This study emerges at a time when South Africa has been seeing increasing dissatisfaction in the ANC as ruling party, the "South African Miracle," embodied by Mandela and which saw its climax in the Rugby World Cup final of 1995, has gradually given way to a stark reality. South Africans are increasingly fearful that the rhetoric of racial reconciliation and peace may now have served its purpose and become secondary to the ANC's continued pursuit of mass support,

particularly among the country's poor. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the underpinnings of the myth which forms the foundation of post-1994's rhetoric of racial solidarity and reconciliation. At this present moment, when the ANC, and the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) in particular, are steadily progressing towards the sort of nationalism which underpinned its rhetoric during the time of its initial mass mobilisation, it is necessary to reflect on not only why, but how, the 'miraculous' constitution of the New South Africa came about and, more particularly, how and why it was Nelson Mandela who would be the figurehead. The mortality of Mandela, who is ninety-three at the time of this writing, has been the subject of increasing media attention and public fears during the past few years; the miracle which has been in decline all these years, it is felt, may be lost altogether if its embodiment should die. As such, perspective on the extent to which the "South African miracle" was, in the words of Albie Sachs, "the most predicted and consciously and rationally worked-for happening one could ever have imagined, and certainly the most unmiraculous" (qtd. in Gevisser 1) is critical. This thesis seeks to show the way in which the constitution of Mandela as a mythical figure was the result of a confluence of historical, political and personal elements – partly conscious and partly incidental – which together resulted in the constitution of Mandela as the "Black Messiah," the man who symbolised racial reconciliation and harmony. I will argue that his performative actions, including the writing of *Long Walk to Freedom*, sought to augment and supersede the dominant narrative which had been developing over the previous four decades with a new, official narrative of the militant youth as a reconciler and man of peace. In other words, it is important, in a time of legitimate fears about the future of South Africa, to interrogate the mythological construction of Mandela, and to trace its constitution, locating it within its broader historical context, in order to ground Mandela, the myth, in reality.



## Chapter One

### 1.1 Background

#### 1.1.1 The Transkei

Rolihlahla Mandela was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1918, in the village of Mvezo, on the banks of the Mbashe River in the Transkei (Boehmer 21). He was born at a time of great social transformation and upheaval, in a place which, at that time, formed one of the practical and metaphorical centres of the changes the country was undergoing (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). Culturally, it was a time of consolidation in the wake of the Xhosa wars of the past century, which had stripped many traditional communities of their autonomy (Boehmer 21). Until its absorption by the Union of South Africa in 1910, the Transkei was a 'native reserve' of the British Cape Colony (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). When the government enacted the Native Land Act in 1913, the Transkei was the only large area left in the country where blacks could still own land; consequently, many of the hundreds of thousands of newly-dispossessed farmers flocked there (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). With this combined legacy of dispossession and cautious hope behind it, the Transkei had, by the end of the twentieth century, produced more black leaders than any other place in South Africa (Sampson, *Mandela* 4).

#### 1.1.2 The Tembu

The Tembu tribe, to which Mandela was born, was one of the last to be brought under British rule, during the eighth Xhosa War. This war saw Tembu chiefs confined to Robben Island, feeding its increasing notoriety amongst black South Africans (Sampson, *Mandela* 12). The dominant myth would come to make much of the link between Mandela and these Tembu chiefs, portraying him as a natural historical successor to their struggle against colonialism<sup>8</sup>. After the formation of the Union of South Africa, whites had captured the chieftaincy and used it to suppress the aspirations of tribesmen (Sampson, *Mandela* 12). The Xhosas did not share the martial reputation of the Zulus, and many defeated chiefs were left demoralised (Sampson, *Mandela* 13). Out of the Xhosa Wars, however, came mission schools

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<sup>8</sup> This link will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter two.



and Christian culture, which served to educate the new, disciplined Xhosa elite (Sampson, *Mandela* 13).

### 1.1.3 Mission Schooling

Mandela was born into a culture which represented a synthesis of Xhosa and English norms (Lodge 6). In the wake of colonialism, European religious institutions showed a willingness to educate black South Africans. This educated black elite embraced Western ideals while looking to restore their own people's dignity and rights. The British liberal tradition was reasserted in the Cape, which saw the expansion of the mission stations and the introduction of a qualified vote for blacks (Sampson, *Mandela* 13). Educated young Xhosas developed their culturally inherited aptitude for legal argument – which had long been noted by missionaries – leading many to have prominent roles in the oppositional politics of the 1950s and 1960s (Sampson, *Mandela* 13). In fact, the prevalence of Xhosa leaders in the struggle – and the later banishment of many of them to Robben Island like their antecedents – would often lead to this period being informally referred to as the “Tenth Xhosa War” (Sampson, *Mandela* 13). Much of Mandela's international appeal – of embodying a concurrently Western and traditional African identity – would derive from his immersion in this cultural context.

Even as Mandela developed into a self-confessed Anglophile (Boehmer 28), he would project a visual and rhetorical adherence to, and respect for, traditional culture and native history. The official syllabus provided to Africans ignored their oral histories, with British history and cultural judgements being enforced on them (Lodge 4). However, these oral cultures were unofficially presented as auxiliary to the curriculum by educated Xhosa teachers, allowing students to see their own history against the history presented to them by the British (Lodge 4); Mandela himself would come to be a life-long champion of these oral histories (Sampson, *Mandela* 13). As much as British history tried to impose the idea that it was only with their arrival that the Africans received a legitimate history, Mandela and other educated Xhosas saw white intervention as something recent; he would never forget that his own great-grandfather had ruled an entire region until only a century before (Sampson, *Mandela* 13).

## 1.2 Upbringing

### 1.2.1 Early Life

Mandela was born to Hendry Gadla Mpakhanyiswa, a prominent tribal figure from the Tembu left-hand house, a man who possessed wealth and power until he was deposed during Nelson's early youth (Sampson, *Mandela* 3; Lodge 1; Boehmer 22). Mandela's mother, Nosekeni Fanny, was Hendry's third wife (Boehmer 22). Mandela's father was a pagan; his mother, however, converted to Methodism, and he was consequently baptised into the faith, and later sent to mission school (Lodge 2). Following Gadla's deposition, the family to move to Qunu, where they lived, sharing necessities with relatives (Boehmer 23). When Mandela was around nine years old, his father passed away, leaving him to the care of the Regent, Jongintaba Dalindyebo (Boehmer 23). The Regent took him in and afforded him all the advantages his position could procure. At the Great Place, the young Rolihlahla was exposed to a comparatively metropolitan, aristocratic lifestyle, experiencing a tribal life which consisted of a blend of traditional and colonial norms (Sampson, *Mandela* 8 – 9).

This is, broadly, what we know of Mandela's early life, and even this broad outline touches on details which are contested, if not actively, then at least implicitly. Details, both significant and minor, vary from source to source, with the sources themselves rarely acknowledging their contested nature. This is unsurprising, as Mandela was born at a time when documentation around the lives of Africans was fragmented at best. The difficulty in tracing a definitive history of Mandela is exemplified by the case of his father.

### 1.2.2 Hendry Gadla

#### 1.2.2.1 Hendry Gadla as an Example of the Historically Unknowable

The plethora of available biographies dealing with Mandela rarely reach consensus on the details of his father's position and later deposition. What is widely accepted is that Hendry was an advisor, friend and confidant of King Dalindyebo and, later, his son, King Jongilizwe (Sampson, *Mandela* 6). Mandela and Sampson therefore portray Hendry as a "kind of prime minister," a position which would allow the young Mandela to command respect in the community, even after his father's deposition

(Lodge 1). This is in contrast to Sampson's offhand assertion that Mandela was the "son of an African chief" (Sampson, *Mandela* xxvi.) Even equating him with a "Prime Minister" is, however, according to Lodge, overstating the case; Hendry was, he asserts, accorded the post of village headman by the white administrators of the Transkeien territories (Lodge 1). Furthermore, Mandela was never in the line of succession, as he was born into the "*Ixhiba*, the lowest-ranking family in the royal hierarchy" (Guiloinneau 26). Richard Stengel recounts that, when he was working with Mandela on *Long Walk to Freedom*, people around Mandela "would always say to [him that he] must remember that [Mandela] was groomed to be chief" (Stengel n. pag.). Stengel discovered, however, that

...that was... a misnomer. His father was an appointed chief. He wasn't a blood chief. In fact, Nelson wouldn't have become a chief, because he wasn't in a direct line of succession, because his mother was the wrong wife for the succession. So he wasn't really a chief in the way that people think, but he was from a family that would be a kind of aristocratic, upper-middle-class family. And when he moved to the king's village, he was able to observe this. (n. pag.)

Although it can be argued that Sampson's assertion was meant purely metaphorically, that he was stating that, by his later being taken in as the regent's ward, Mandela was *effectively* the son of a chief, this serves to highlight the way in which myth and history have become freely interwoven and, essentially, inextricably linked. Sampson and Mandela are, it seems, attempting to create the impression of a position analogous to Western democratic modes of governance, de-emphasising the extent to which Mandela's position was, in part, a product of colonial structures. This suggests, for the dominant myth, a level of conscious narrative construction, which carries over into the account of Hendry's deposition.

#### 1.2.2.2 Hendry as a nexus between Mandela and African Struggle

Anthony Sampson's authorised biography of Mandela reflects the dominant ideology surrounding Hendry's deposition. It states that, when Mandela was one, Hendry was charged with insubordination for refusing to appear before the magistrate to answer a tribesman's complaint about an ox, and consequently lost most of his land and income (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). Mandela has, at other times, been more specific with

regards to the charge, referring to Gadla as being stripped of his headman's title “for snubbing a magistrate's investigation of his actions in 1920,” when he would have been around two years old (Philp n. pag.). With the discovery of a magistrate's court document in a backyard shack in Mthatha in 2010, however, these accounts were cast in doubt. This document includes an affidavit by Gadla from six years after the initial enquiry, contesting charges that he had accepted a bull in exchange for land. Hendry argues that the “story” that he had been “[given] a beast... for a land... ha[d] been fabricated against [him]”, that he had, in fact, accepted it “for dowry” (Philp n. pag.). It was, apparently, only around the time of this affidavit that Hendry was stripped of his title, meaning that Mandela would have been around eight years old at the time, and that Hendry had been formally stripped of his title only a year before his death<sup>9</sup> (Philp n. pag.). Although the questions raised by this divergent account – such as why the family moved to Qunu if Gadla was still in a position to contest the charges so long after the fact – are not strictly relevant, this incident does illustrate the fact that, when given the chance of applying contemporary historical documentation to seemingly basic facts, much of the telling of Mandela's early childhood can be cast into doubt. The question raised by this is not one of Hendry's guilt, or of how Mandela could have been unaware of the exact details of his father's deposition, but of why the *potential* for inaccuracy is never raised, and why, given the range of potential permutations, the standard account has settled into the shape that it has.

Regardless of whose version of the story is correct, and regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of Mandela's account, it is evident that his version has come to be considered definitive. This lack of certainty is conducive to the manufacturing of myth; the essential facts and chronology are in place, giving a basic form on which the dominant narrative can impose meaning. This is not to suggest, of course, that this aspect of the dominant myth is necessarily inaccurate, or to suggest that any inaccuracies present are necessarily deliberate; rather, it is to question how the present construction contributes to the neat, mythologised dominant narrative of Mandela's life. The answer to this seems to be that, in its present form, the

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Tambo's claim that Mandela was twelve at the time of his father's death, though historically unlikely, does illustrate the extent to which even ostensibly reliable sources can complicate the process of historical inquiry.

construction of the incident provides a neat link between Hendry's deposition, the broader colonial struggle of Africans, and Mandela's later political activism.

Consider how the following construction by Sampson adheres closely to the dominant myth, drawing an implicit link between Hendry's *deposition* and the *dispossession* of Africans at the hands of whites, going as far as to use the two words interchangeably:

[t]he British Cape Colony, which included the 'native reserve' of the Transkei, had been absorbed into the Union of South Africa in 1910, and three years later the Native Land Act dispossessed hundreds of thousands of black farmers, many of whom trekked to the Transkei... [which] produced more black leaders than any other region of South Africa... Rolihlahla's father... suffered his own dispossession. The year after his son was born the local white magistrate summoned Hendry... (Sampson, *Mandela* 4)

Hendry is, for the dominant myth, a nexus between Africans' history of dispossession and Mandela himself. Considering Mandela's comparatively sheltered upbringing, this link is essential in foreshadowing his role in the liberation struggle. This inferring of a link between the young Mandela and his later political leadership role is a standard characteristic of the dominant narrative. Sampson's account de-emphasises Hendry's role in the proceedings, whereas the actual charge was, as has recently been found, directed at Hendry personally; his refusal to attend the hearing would therefore seem to justify his deposition. The dominant narrative never attempts to ascertain Gadla's innocence; rather, it is content to create an air of *implicit* innocence. This allows the myth to contrast his 'unjust' deposition<sup>10</sup> with the family's move to the security of their extended family, emphasising the inclusiveness of African tribal custom. The form of the dominant narrative therefore emphasises the contrast between a *destructive* colonial presence, and the *nurturing* sense of community associated with African traditional culture, thereby positing Gadla as the nexus between Mandela, the dispossession of Africans at the hands of whites, and

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<sup>10</sup> An impression emphasised by Guiloineau, who states that "the minor white official... [took] the law into his own hands [and] deposed the traditional chief" (27), concurrently purporting historical inaccuracies (that Gadla was a "traditional chief") and taking a derisive view of the "minor white official" meddling in "traditional" business.

Mandela's later political leadership and rhetoric, which drew on this same contrast to lend legitimacy to his political methods.

### 1.2.2.3 Hendry and Mandela as Embodiments of the Theme of Progress and Maturation

Hendry is further constructed within the dominant myth as representing a *physical* link between traditional African society and Mandela himself. Sampson describes Hendry as being “illiterate, pagan and polygamous; but... tall and dignified... with no sense of inferiority towards whites” (*Mandela* 4). What is striking in this description is Sampson's use of the qualifier “but”; the implication here is that the qualities preceding the qualifier – as characteristic of his tribal lineage – are, in contrast to those *after* it, undesirable. The adjectives “tall and dignified”, as well as an emphasis on the lack of a “sense of inferiority towards whites” are almost obligatory in descriptions of Mandela himself; therefore, Gadla is posited as occupying a hybrid space between the past and the ideal future, one which his son, as the embodiment of the future, transcends. Mandela, as embodying the characteristics *after* the qualifier, and being the *inverse* of those presented *before* it, is therefore presented as representing a generational process of development and maturation. As a story of progression, this conforms to the form of the dominant narrative as a whole, indicating that, at the level of generations, there is an inevitable historical process of progression, which is later in the narrative shown to be reflected in the ANC as an organisation and, more importantly, Mandela as an individual. Sampson's account, with its focus on progression and a historical process of maturation is, therefore, in keeping with the thematic concerns of the official narrative, as represented by *Long Walk to Freedom*, published four years earlier. Depictions of Mandela's youth therefore show evidence of the dominant myth following Mandela's modernist tendency to construct the past as being *other*, as something to posit the present in contrast to. It shares his focus on progression and maturation, emphasising the extent to which the mode of expression adopted by the official narrative is Mandela's, or vice-versa.

### 1.2.3 Depictions of Mandela as Possessing Agency over his Destiny

This idea of historical progression being evidenced in the individual carries over to

Mandela's personal, psychological experience of his childhood which has, similarly, become a site for secondary elements of the dominant myth and narrative to be constructed. Often, the contradictions he embodies, by their very contrast, emphasise the enormity of his achievements. Consider, for instance, the introduction to *The Struggle is My Life*, which asserts that Mandela was a “spokesman for his people in a period of turbulent confrontation”, who had had a

...traditional pastoral childhood as a member of the Tembu ruling family in the Transkei... herding sheep... [who dreamed] of becoming a lawyer... and, when he listened to his cousin the paramount chief trying cases in the paramount court, the black heroes of the past (International Defence and Aid Fund 1)

In this passage, an implied connection is created between himself, his dreams of being a lawyer and the “black heroes of the past.” Here Mandela's later position, as a successor to the “black heroes of the past” he reflects on, is posited against his pastoral upbringing. It is implied that, even at this early stage, Mandela was not only conscious of his path in life, but was also *defining* it. His dreams of becoming a lawyer, joining the ranks of the black heroes of the past, are immediately succeeded by his move from a “Methodist school” to “Fort Hare to study for a BA degree” (International Defence and Aid Fund 1) Mandela is, therefore, portrayed as claiming agency, of both choosing and pursuing a destiny of his own choosing<sup>11</sup>. This construct necessitates certain liberties being taken with history. For instance, it is doubtful that Mandela, at this point, had even been exposed to the concept of a lawyer in the Western sense. Additionally, the chief was not strictly his cousin, and his upbringing – as a member of a “ruling family” within a colonised community – can hardly be considered “traditional” (International Defence and Aid Fund 1). This illustrates again the extent to which individual texts, in enforcing the dominant narrative, see fit to take liberties with history, either distorting that which is known, or filling in gaps – noticeably here, Mandela's psychological space – with elements which support said narrative, regardless of strict historical accuracy or verifiability.

### 1.3 Tradition and the Construction of the Past-Repository

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<sup>11</sup> The link which the dominant narrative later draws between Mandela's leadership style and the consensual forms of democracy he experienced at the Great Place is foreshadowed here, lending its later construction legitimacy.



Mandela's rejection of many of the traditional elements which were integral to his own development is a troubled site for the official narrative. In order to integrate this partial rejection into the official narrative, Mandela constructs these traditions as part of a past which is *distinct from* the present, a past situated in an *other* space, one which can be objectively assessed from a remove. Therefore, each element of that past can be assessed within a largely artificially constructed context, in light of, or in contrast to, the present. The past, therefore, becomes less a history than a repository of ideas or images which can be drawn on at will, either to vindicate or condemn, some element of the present.

### 1.3.1 The Young Mandela's Community as a Cultural Hybrid

In his formative years, Mandela lived in a community which already represented a fusion of various traditional and colonial norms. When Hendry died, for instance, his body was dragged on a sledge to his first wife's house and a cow was slaughtered; he was, however, also given a Christian burial. When Mandela was born, his father slaughtered a goat and erected its horns in the house (Sampson, *Mandela* 4); shortly after, Mandela was baptised into the Methodist faith. As such, traditions, while being integral to their lives, were at the same time largely interchangeable and malleable. Mandela learnt from an early age to deal with disparate centres of meaning and, despite his ostensible continued respect for Xhosa traditions, this cultural fusion would make him more receptive to Western ideas. The prestige he came to long for during his formal education was located squarely within a Western paradigm, causing a shift in his cultural centre away from Xhosa ideas. His traditions, providing him, as they did, with a stable base and a wealth of respect and connections, were convenient, but his sense of self-worth came to be constructed around very Western ideas, within the context of a Western economy. This would, therefore, establish him as a Western thinker, drawing on his African roots largely to supplement his identity and political rhetoric.

Mandela's lineage has, throughout his life, lent him an air of respectability and prestige; as such, it has been in his best interests to embrace and respect this culture. As a youth, Mandela "was fortified by the knowledge of his ancestors," in particular Ngubencuka, the great king of the Tembu people until his death in 1832, in a time before the British imposed their rule on Tembuland (Sampson, *Mandela* 6).



Despite being poor and seemingly dependent on whites, the Tembu family retained a special grandeur in the Transkei, commanding the loyalty and respect of their people. Furthermore, the Madiba clan, which Mandela is a part of, are the most prestigious of the Tembuland tribes (Bam n. pag.). Though from a junior house, and not in the line of succession, Mandela was, regardless, a minor royal. Furthermore, Hendry's close relationship with King Dalindyebo and, later, King Jongilizwe, enhanced their standing in the community (Sampson, *Mandela* 6). They were seen, in short, as a royal family under an occupying force (Sampson, *Mandela* 6). Mandela's continued expression of respect for tradition can, among other factors, be read as largely self-serving; by doing so, he is fortifying the dominant myth and narrative. To separate himself from his cultural lineage would be to sever the thread which runs through his life, disrupting the largely coherent and intelligible progression found in both the dominant and official narratives. His admiration for tribal traditions and democracy was, according to the dominant narrative, reinforced by the chiefs and headmen who visited the Great Place, who would tell stories of Xhosa heroes and Africa's history (Lodge 3). Mandela often draws on this idealised image of African tribal society. He paints it as a classless age, without exploitation or inequality, seeing the tribal council as a model of democracy (Mandela<sup>12</sup> 19 – 20). There were older men who could remember the time before their defeat; despite this conquest, however, the pride and autonomy of the Transkei's Xhosa-speaking tribes had survived (Sampson, *Mandela* 11). Mandela's own place, within two generations of the last of the great Tembu chiefs, it is reasoned, would undoubtedly have increased his receptivity to these traditions. Thus, in vindicating tradition within its historical context, while distancing himself from it in a modern context, by opening a space between history and the present, Mandela can emphasise his lineage, his links with his formative past, but without needing to justify or adhere to archaic philosophies, or seeming to endorse the Apartheid government's insistence on a qualified return to traditional chieftaincies.

### 1.3.2 Polygamy as Rejected Tradition

The polygamous family of Mandela's youth is credited in the dominant narrative as having been integral to the development of his self-confidence, providing him, as it

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<sup>12</sup> Due to this thesis' focus on *Long Walk to Freedom*, all in-text citations referring to Mandela are - unless otherwise stated - to be understood as referring to this text.

did, with a sense of security and belonging. His mother, Nonqaphi Nosekeni (or Fanny, after her conversion to Methodism), was the third of his father's four wives (Boehmer 22). Each wife had her own, largely self-sufficient kraal, and each seemed to be on good terms with the others (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). There is no Xhosa word for step-mother; consequently, all four women would have been referred to by Mandela as “mother”. Each of the four women treated Mandela as their own son, instilling in him, from an early age, a feeling of confidence and acceptance (Sampson, *Mandela* 5). Paradoxically, however, Mandela would, in later years, reject polygamy within a modern context, calling it “quite inexcusable”, stating that it “shows contempt for women, and... is something which [he] discourage[s] totally” (Sampson, *Mandela* 5). Mandela, then, rejects as archaic and unacceptable a custom which imbued him with much of the confidence and stability, which supposedly allowed for his self-assured intellectual and, later, political development. This seemingly odd contradiction is in keeping with Mandela's rhetoric, portraying the past as a time utterly removed and distinct from the present, with its own morality and internal logic which is non-applicable in a modern context. Thus, his rejection of this tradition, though seemingly counter-intuitive, is in keeping with the idiom of the official narrative.

### 1.3.3 Circumcision

The rituals and traditions of Mandela's early life are commonly credited with providing him with a stable foundation, allowing for the development of the confidence and self-assurance he would later exhibit in his political career. His circumcision would provide, in his later years, a central incident in the narrative of his life, rich in symbolism and metaphorical value. There is evidence to suggest that, during his early adulthood in Johannesburg, he initially distanced himself emotionally from this incident but that, as he grew older and started using the narrativisation of his experiences as a political tool, it became an interesting and loaded junction in his development (Lodge 8). As a story of personal and political development, his is a story which requires central occurrences standing as catalysts for his development, milestones against which his progress can be marked. His circumcision therefore stands as symbolic of his progression to manhood, while concurrently symbolising the negated promise of cultural ‘manhood,’ of self-determination and autonomy, of black South Africans (Lodge 8 – 9). This ritual, in its performativity, fits into the

official narrative's dominant mode of functioning, of presenting symbolically-loaded events marking progression and maturation. It also provides a junction at which Mandela is first confronted with the realities of what it means to be a black South African, to be someone whose traditions and their promises have been rendered empty, their centres of meaning negated by an alien presence. As an authentic African symbol of masculinity rendered empty by colonial domination, the practice of circumcision would be appropriated by the liberation struggle as a site of resistance, of a 'rite of passage' into the liberation struggle as a new site of masculinity, and of reclaiming a cultural "adulthood" and autonomy (Suttner 195).

In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Chief Meligqili's speech to the recently circumcised young men forms a powerful counterpoint to the celebratory incident of their circumcision. He tells the young men that the promise of their new-found manhood is an empty one; they can never truly be men, because they are slaves in their own country, robbed of any real self-determination (Mandela 27 – 28). This is a central incident for the dominant narrative, illustrating the way in which the pride which was Mandela's birthright could be denied him by an alien culture; he stands here as a symbolic microcosm of colonialism's attack on intimate centres of meaning for Africans. As one already knows by this point in the dominant narrative,<sup>13</sup> Mandela is one who will, through self-sacrifice and discipline, personally contribute to the reclaiming of this birth-right for Africans<sup>14</sup>. The destruction of a critical centre of meaning contributes to excusing his future rejection of the educational opportunities he is given, for they are given to him within the context of the same colonialism which had robbed him of his birthright. The structure of the dominant narrative infers that, by opting for self-determination, Mandela is rejecting and superseding these structures. It also makes provision for his rejection of various aspects of African tradition in his ostensible quest to regain pride and a sense of *Ubuntu*<sup>15</sup> for all Africans; while he tends to

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<sup>13</sup> Crucially for the functioning of the narrativisation of the dominant ideology, the telling of it invariably begins with its end, i.e. with some aspect of Mandela's post-release political triumph.

<sup>14</sup> The dominant narrative, as argued throughout this thesis, generally constructs this as a conscious decision. This tendency remains as a residual element of the pre-1990 dominant narrative, reflected in texts such as Guiloineau's *Nelson Mandela: the early life of Rolihlahla Madiba*, which states that "Only one of [South Africa's oppressed people], Rolihlahla, would decide that, because the world has no place for him, the world must change" (89).

<sup>15</sup> A "traditional African ideal" emphasising "mutual responsibility and community" (Boehmer 25).

praise their *spirit*, the *form* of these traditions represents an archaic and defeated past. Finally, Mandela's shifting attitude towards this ritual – his initial investment in, and later emotional remove from, it – provides another instance of maturation in his story of development. Later, at university, he is “shocked” to discover that a friend is not circumcised, and it is only in Johannesburg, when he enters into politics, that he is able to “crawl out of the prejudices of [his] youth and accept all people as equals” (Sampson, *Mandela* 15). Therefore, despite the depths of meaning that these rituals carried for Mandela, his later distancing of himself from them within the context of his political conscientisation, is portrayed as being part of his process of development and maturation. He will continue, however, to retrospectively contextualise and utilize these incidents to his political advantage.

Mandela's public image developed at a time of increasing emasculation of African men and, even as he embodied an idealised modern identity, he concurrently embodied and paid homage to a more traditional identity and its rituals of manhood. Rhetorically, at least, he promoted an adherence to traditional values as a means of retaining an essentially African identity while pursuing Western norms, as well as of reclaiming the sense of communal pride which had been negated by Apartheid structures. The evocation of these traditional rituals of masculinity was not uncommon amongst even the most urbane and self-consciously modern of African men. Todd Matshikiza, for instance, whose “Matshikeze” writing style presented a vibrant, colloquial alternative to the dry, rote phrases of the African intelligentsia, felt strongly the appeal of traditional African initiation rites. After his circumcision, he had been told that he “[was] now welcome into the society of men,” which he credits with giving him “a sense of confidence and responsibility” (Sampson, *Drum* 71). He wanted this for his feeling of communality for children, too, saying that “[he]’d hate [for them] to have less than [him]”; however, “apartheid ma[de this] difficult” (Sampson, *Drum* 71). This is part of Mandela's appeal, for he can assert a modern identity, but at the same time respect and promote traditional African rites which foster a sense of community. Apartheid led to a negating of the ritualistic promise of the African rite of passage, attacking this potent symbol of African masculinity, leaving both the signifier and the signified hollow and meaningless. Mandela, in his projection of an unrelenting masculinity, projected a promise of a reclaiming of that idea of lost African agency and self-determination. He speaks fondly of these rites

and, although he moves beyond them, they are a site at which he is “conscientised” about the threats which white minority domination posed to his culture; furthermore, they give him a sense of history in an urban world where he is disorientated and where traditional values have broken down. Mandela could retain his old-world patrician mystique and authenticity, while embodying a more modern, urban identity as part of the “new aristocracy of doctors, lawyers, ministers and teachers” that had replaced the “ancient hierarchy of chiefs and witch doctors in the reserves,” able to appeal to the new urban population, “to whom mud huts and tribal rites [were] as remote as trains [were] to their country cousins” (Sampson, *Drum* 218).

For Mandela, the depiction of his circumcision in *Long Walk to Freedom* represents a progression for him, from a youthful naivety to a cognisance of the social and political injustices of the society he lived in, and of the cultural imposition of the colonial powers and their descendants. The burying of his foreskin symbolises the burying of his childhood, an image of “planting” the roots of his personal pride and strength in his heritage. What Mandela engages with less in this text is, however, the way in which, for the dominant ideology, circumcision came to be appropriated as a rite of passage into the struggle and, in particular, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

Circumcision would, in time, come to gain a powerful, if augmented, symbolic role within the ANC-led liberation struggle, and Umkhonto we Sizwe in particular, particularly as a means of establishing entry into the liberation struggle as an authentically African rite of passage, an entry into manhood which served to negate the rhetorical and political infantilisation of African men. The ANC’s conception of masculinity has been largely constructed in relation to “belief systems that precede and coexist with the organisation’s existence, including initiation and other *rites of passage* to manhood” (Suttner 195), tying into “pre-union notions and values of manhood... connot[ing] martial bravery...” (Suttner 202). As Suttner argues:

[t]he assertion of a need to restore manhood was a legitimate claim, a legitimate part of a struggle for liberation... The struggle to be a man meant the struggle for dignity and reclaiming of rights and to be treated as an adult human being<sup>16</sup>. (Suttner 199)

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<sup>16</sup> This resistance to the infantilisation of Africans, and African men in particular, though

Circumcision therefore presents a performative resistance to the infantilisation of Africans, and African men in particular. Working African men were colloquially referred to as “boys” by whites (Boehmer 139), the product of a discourse which rhetorically and politically reduced Africans to the status of children as a means of “justify[ing] political domination” (Suttner 197). As General J.B.M. Hertzog, South Africa’s prime minister, said in 1926:

[n]ext to the European, the Native stands as an 8-year-old child to a man of great experience – child in religion, a child in moral conviction... [and] if ever a race had a need of guidance and protection from another people with which it is placed in contact, then it is the Native in his contact with the white man. (qtd. in Suttner 197)

According to Suttner, this “discourse of denial of manhood coexists with that of regaining manhood through the struggle or struggle-related activities” (201). Entry into MK would come, in itself, to represent a new initiation rite, of becoming a man who could protect his family, home and nation (Suttner 203). Mongezi Radebe, for instance, states that a friend “gave [him] *The Struggle is My Life* by Mandela, [saying that it will] *make [him] a man*” (Radebe qtd. in Suttner 201; emphasis added). Joining the struggle therefore becomes associated with a transition to manhood, “becoming part of the process that would end the infantilisation of men and regain... their place as adults” (Suttner 201). This entry into the liberation struggle would come to be accompanied by circumcision. Although circumcision was specific to the Xhosa tribes (Buntman 148), and was considered “backwards” and ‘un-modern’ by many urban Africans, it was appropriated largely because of its status as an authentically African ritual, making it a symbolic locus of resistance to the negation of the promises of traditional African masculinity, self-determination and adulthood. In the ANC-led liberation struggle, then, circumcision came to be reclaimed as a site of “resistance to overlordship,” and a catalyst for the conversion of Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) members to the ANC and MK (Suttner 196), both on the mainland and on Robben Island.

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engaged with here, is also given a close reading in chapter two in the context of Mandela’s time as the “Black Pimpernel.”

The island's symbolic value on the mainland as representing the "heartbeat of the revolution" meant that, having been to the island was considered a "coming-of-age," a rite of initiation which also culminated in circumcision (Guiloinneau 6). However, subsequent to the liberation struggle, where this site of reclaiming masculinity became redundant, Africans seeking a modern identity came again to distance themselves from this (historically Xhosa-specific) ritual, and the performance of this ritual on Robben Island is scarcely engaged with in *Long Walk to Freedom*. Mandela's recounts his circumcision in *Long Walk to Freedom* as part of promise of *traditional* masculinity which is then denied, i.e. as representing a fall from a pre-colonial paradise. The text retains it as part of Mandela's initial cognisance of political injustice, but the imposition of this culturally-specific ritual on those who had entered into MK and/or arrived on the island is never directly engaged with. It can, therefore, be said that, within the context of the struggle, Mandela's circumcision gained additional retrospective significance, as a negated symbol of entry into manhood, a symbol which around which a discourse of reclaiming Africans' birth-rights could develop.

#### 1.3.4 The Many Names of Mandela

The name Mandela received after his circumcision – *Dalibunga* – would be a source of great pride to him (Sampson, *Mandela* 14), and formed part of a growing series of names for Mandela, each of which he would be known by during his lifetime: the 'official' names he amassed – "Rolihlahla," "Nelson," "Dalibunga," "Madiba" and "Mandela" – would be supplemented by several informal or *ad hoc* ones, including "The Black Pimpernel" and "*Tata*." This variety of names have each, in their own way, contributed to the store of association with Mandela, especially his confluence of Western and traditional, patrician African elements, his status as a liberation fighter and his status as South Africa's 'father of the nation.'

The name Mandela received at birth, "Rolihlahla," has popularly been inferred to portend his destiny. In traditional Xhosa culture, a child is only named after a period of up to two years. The name chosen for the child generally reflects some aspect of their early personality, or an event around their birth (Guiloinneau 20). "Rolihlahla" translates as "pulling the branch of a tree," or, more broadly, "troublemaker"



(Mandela 3), a name which has satisfied the popular craving for signs and symbols of Mandela's 'inevitable destiny.'

In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Rolihlahla is subjected to his first major cultural imposition of his first day at primary school. The British could not conceive of a legitimate "African culture" and, as such, Mandela – who had already been baptised a Christian – was given the Western name "Nelson" – a British naval war hero – as part of the process of acculturation which young Africans underwent in missionary schools (Boehmer 1). The dominant ideology commonly seeks to personalise this imposition, as in *Mandela the First Year of Freedom*, wherein Van Dijk states that "Mandela's white teacher had difficulty pronouncing his Xhosa name... and so he was given the new name 'Nelson'" (8). In *Long Walk to Freedom*, this aggressive cultural imposition – the replacement of his Xhosa birth name – is mediated and legitimized by the replacement of his traditional clothing with a pair of his father's trousers, their legs cut shorter and a cord tied around his waist to keep them up. Mandela, who states that he had "never... [been] prouder" (13), is creating a potent symbolic link with his heritage, legitimising this cultural fusion by constructing it as being part of a *new* tradition, a prerogative inherited from his father. This image emphasises again the malleability of tradition for Mandela, and his ability to construct, and selectively draw on, traditions as a means of – in this instance – ameliorating a very personal, and potentially volatile, site of colonial imposition.

Mandela's circumcision name, *Dalibunga* is popularly translated to "founder of the council"<sup>17</sup>; a more specific translation is, however, "founder of the Bunga." The Bunga was, at that time, a new colonial administrative structure, representing the colonial imposition on local administration (Guiloinneau 81). It is not surprising then that translations which de-emphasise the name's grounding in colonial oppression have found greater currency. In fact, some sources go as far as to translate the name as "founder of parliaments," a curiously pervasive, attempt to emphasise a link between Mandela's heritage and the Western forms of governance he would ultimately engage in (Lodge 8). As his circumcision name, this would be the name that traditional Xhosas would prefer over his previous names (Guiloinneau 81).

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<sup>17</sup> Although some of the dominant narrative's texts have sought to translate this as "founder of parliaments," emphasising further still the supposed pre-destiny of his later political role, this is something of a stretch.



During his time underground, Mandela came to be known as The Black Pimpernel, a persona which won him much of his fame and rich symbolic value. Although an extensive section on this phase can be found in Chapter two, it will suffice for the moment to note that this moniker, however short-lived, represented a display of African defiance. As it immediately preceded his initial incarceration on Robben Island, this name reinforced Mandela's embodiment of the ANC's rhetoric around self-sacrificial leadership at that time.

"Madiba" has, however, come to be the name by which he is affectionately known by the public (Sampson, *Mandela* 7). This name reflects his patrician prestige, while concurrently being associated with his time underground, as well as being a term of endearment (Bam n. pag.). Madiba, Mandela's clan name, is both an honorific and inextricably linked with political resistance and his time underground, and is the name he prefers to be called by friends and associates (Lodge 1). For people underground, it "became a habit not to use first names, but to use... pseudonym[s]" (Bam n. pag.); for "traditional Africans", clan names were often favoured as they were commonly known among themselves, but rarely known by the authorities (Bam n. pag.). As such, Madiba is inextricably linked with Mandela's time underground<sup>18</sup>. Concurrently, however, it is a vestige and signifier of his cultural heritage; clan names serially represent fathers, grand-fathers and so on (Bam n. pag.). The automatic associations with Mandela, regarding his patrician lineage, are summed up by Fikile Bam, who states that

[i]t's just all about this aura ... if you're a black African with this history and you know you and your fathers and so on were serving under chief so and so. The whole history is cast in terms of who is your chief, and who was your family's chiefs and who were the ancestors and so on. It's something you grow up with. It's a kind of a folklore which you get to know, and you get to love. As it happens, the Madiba clan is also a very well-known one in the Eastern Cape ... the most important clan in Thembuland in fact, are the Madibas, and they rule the roost there. So to be a Madiba is actually to be something quite special" (n. pag.).

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<sup>18</sup> The significance of this period will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

Clan names are, concurrently, a less formal means of address, more “intimate” and “endearing” (Bam n. pag.). “Madiba” is therefore suited to Mandela’s projection of a revered, yet approachable, public image after his release from prison. This name is commonly augmented by references to Mandela as *Tata*, meaning “father.” As such, the variety of names by which Mandela is known serve to emphasise his embodiment of a cultural hybridity, reflecting his patrician heritage, his Anglo-centric education and formal training, his status as freedom fighter and ‘father of the nation,’ contributing to the consolidation of these disparate elements of his identity.

### 1.3.5 The Construction of Mandela’s Inherent Dignity

*Long Walk to Freedom*’s construction of Mandela as inherently and unshakeably dignified – one of his most commonly cited characteristics – necessitates a selective construction of his youth, highlighted in the period of his mission schooling. Throughout the text, Mandela stresses incidents which assured him of the equality of Africans to whites, emphasising the early development of his pride in his African heritage. When the Xhosa poet Mqhayi speaks at Healdtown, for instance, he enters through the door to Dr. Wellington’s house, which

...no one ever walked through... except Dr. Wellington himself...the sight of a black man in tribal dress coming through that door was electrifying. It is hard to explain the impact it had on us. It seemed to turn the universe upside down. (Mandela 39)

After a faltering start, Mqhayi further electrifies the students by proclaiming the

...brutal clash between what is indigenous and good, and what is foreign and bad... predict[ing] that one day, the forces of African society will achieve a momentous victory over the interloper... [no longer] succumb[ing] to the false gods of the white man [b]ut... emerg[ing] and cast[ing] off these foreign notions. (Mandela 39)

Mandela can “hardly believe [his] ears” at Mqhayi’s

...boldness in speaking of such delicate matters in the presence of Dr. Wellington and other whites... at the same time [however] it aroused and motivated [the students], and began to alter [his] perception of men like Dr.

Wellington, whom [he] had automatically considered [his] benefactor.  
(Mandela 39)

Reverend S.S. Mokitimi, the housemaster of Mandela's dormitory at Healdtown, is another figure of African pride. Although his "head did not even reach Dr Wellington's shoulders... [he] stood his ground," he refused to allow Dr Wellington to interfere in his duties (Mandela 37). This led to Mandela's realisation that "Dr Wellington was less than a god and Reverend Mokitimi more than a lackey, and that a black man did not have to defer automatically to a white, however senior he was" (Mandela 37).

However, as much as the work succeeds in accounting for Mandela's ostensibly intense emotional and rhetorical investment in his heritage through these figures of a masculinised African agency<sup>19</sup>, their actions stand in contrast to, or denial of, a sense of inferiority which is never explicitly engaged with in the official narrative. Mandela himself grew up at a time when whites were feared among many Africans, being seen as figures of an often-malign authority; Mandela, it is argued by his kinsmen, could not but have been subject to this sense of inferiority. Chief Joyi, for instance, asserts that in the area where Mandela was raised, "the blacks [particularly the children] were dead scared of the white people" (qtd. in Mtirara). Chief J. Mtirara asserts that Mandela would "definitely" have shared this fear, particularly as he "grew up as a herdboys" (Mtirara n. pag.). This is exemplified by Mandela's view of the simple white shopkeeper he was sent to buy goods from in his youth as "like a god to [him]" (Stengel n. pag.). This admission, made informally to Stengel, did not form part of the finished text of *Long Walk to Freedom*. Although these chiefs of Mandela's tribe insist that he would not have been exempt from these feelings of fear and inferiority, the official narrative does not engage with them directly; rather, the official narrative locates several incidents in Mandela's early life which recount his realisation that blacks did not have to defer to white, i.e. which function as a negation of, or reaction to, this sense of inferiority. Therefore, the official narrative asserts his reactionary cultural pride, without engaging directly with a *personal* sense of inferiority, i.e. the impulse necessitating this negation. As such, the official narrative's

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<sup>19</sup> These figures form modern counterparts to the figures of African lore supposed to have first awoken this cultural pride in Mandela, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Mandela reconstructs this lineage throughout the text, implicitly positing himself as the modern and culmination thereof.

construction of Mandela as inherently and unshakeably dignified is reflected through the omissions implied by these incidents.

#### 1.4 Mandela's Mission Schooling

Mandela's mission schooling is a problematic concept for the dominant narrative, for mission schooling, as has been mentioned, was used partly as a means of subjugating native populations, enforcing English cultural prejudices and norms. Simultaneously, however, it was one of the few means available to Africans under English colonialism by which they could reclaim some measure of agency. Missionaries, though often viewed as being complicit with the white governments, were just as often at odds with them, and played an independent role in the development of the Xhosa people (Mandela 42). Mandela, though he condemned British imperialism, would profess an admiration for their religious institutions' willingness to educate blacks (Mandela 291; 42). Although problematic and symptomatic of many of the negative aspects of colonialism, they provided Africans with an education, with a voice through which they could, eventually, resist their conditions and subjugation.

One of the greatest strengths of the Mandela of the dominant narrative is his ability to use the very structures designed to oppress and other him as a means of claiming personal agency. The coloniser, in imposing his own language and culture on an uneducated – in a formal, Western sense – people, sought to establish Africans as *other*, by providing an English education. However, the missionary schools were allowing them to reclaim a measure of the agency they had been denied. The mission schooling Mandela received would not only facilitate his adoption of personal traits to which his Western supporters would be receptive, but would also provide the dominant and official narratives with instances which reassert Mandela's retention of a personal investment in traditional cultural values in the face of the temptations of Anglo-centrism; ultimately, it provides a powerful image of Mandela, as a traditional African, finding emancipatory promise within a system generally considered subjugative. The dominant narrative's construction of Mandela as being conscious, and in control, of his destiny, therefore constructs this period of time as Mandela's claiming of a personal agency. The official narrative has, however, subsequently integrated this period by constructing it as a period of time in which Mandela was

allowed several largely unique insights into white authority for a young African, namely that Africans did not necessarily have to defer to white authority, and that there existed a shared humanity beyond this visage of authority.

During his time at Healdtown and, later, Fort Hare, Mandela was being increasingly integrated into a more modern, Anglo-centric community; however, the dominant narrative continues to use tradition as a repository of imagery which can be drawn on to contextualise and excuse his personal shortcomings. Mandela graduated from Healdtown in 1938, before going to the University of Fort Hare in 1939. For the move, the Regent bought him a wristwatch and a new three-piece suit<sup>20</sup> (Boehmer 28; Sampson 21). Fort Hare represented the pinnacle of the black intellectual elite of South Africa (Boehmer 29). The student body was both meritocratic and autocratic. It also, for the first time, exposed Mandela to a unisex educational environment, and he was shocked to find that some of the female students outperformed their male counterparts (Sampson, *Mandela* 21). Mandela's upbringing would not have prepared him for this; the style of rule he had been exposed to was patriarchal, with men adopting dominant intellectual positions by default. Sampson's text quickly asserts that, despite his initial shock, he was mindful of his strong female forebears (Sampson, *Mandela* 21). His patriarchal prejudices are neutralised by his awareness of strong, historical female figures; here, tradition is again used as a repository of images and connotations which can be used in order to qualify the present. It is as though, for Mandela, his strong female forebears *justify* the excellence of the female students. The lengthy process of psychological shock and gradual acceptance is compressed down to an instant's reaction, highlighting Mandela's traditional prejudices, while locating the possibility of moving beyond them within that same history.

The dominant narrative retrospectively constructs Mandela as being intuitively privy to the knowledge of his future greatness, which seems to excuse the lack of political wherewithal he possesses at this stage. Although Mandela could see the formal suppression of the Xhosa culture, to attribute to Mandela at this point a politicised view would necessitate the question of why he never publicly rejected or denounced the cultural imposition he was being subjected to. Although I refrain from speculating

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<sup>20</sup> As such, it forms part of a thematic thread throughout *Long Walk to Freedom*, of clothing and appearances as physical representations of personal dignity and desires.

on this point, what is noteworthy is that this contradiction remains unresolved in even the more speculative texts which constitute the dominant narrative. Mandela was convinced at this point that his job as councillor was assured, and that the same society he had left would be there to welcome him as an educated, respected member (Boehmer 22); the benefits to him far outweighed any political reservations he may have had. The idea of his awareness of the inevitability of his greatness is supplemented in the dominant narrative by its mention of the teachers who told their students that they would, one day, be the leaders of their people (Sampson, *Mandela* 24). As true as this story may be, to draw a direct link between leadership within the context of the hybrid missionary / traditional context and the form of leadership Mandela would later claim is a false one, constructed by the dominant narrative. It is far more likely that they were referring to leadership within colonial structures, and not predicting the revolutionary phase of the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the dominant narrative is again appropriating history and subtly conforming it to its own construction of Mandela as having been aware of his future greatness as a leader of his people, i.e. South Africans. The teachers would have been referring to their respective tribes and settlements, not an 'African nation'; African nationalism as a realistic proposition in South Africa was fledgling at best, and it was only in the 1940s that the movement would take broader hold in South Africa. The dominant narrative is therefore, again, implying knowledge on Mandela's part, not only of his future leadership position but, to an extent, the *form* of that leadership.

This is supplemented by the idea that these early missionary school-based gatherings of an African intelligentsia were a microcosmic embodiment of a fledgling African cross-cultural cooperation towards a new South Africa, with Mandela located at its centre. At Fort Hare, Mandela was “thrust into a vibrant intercultural social network” (Boehmer 29), where, according to Non Jabavu, “[one could see] the tribes welding into a new [South African] nation” (Sampson, *Mandela* 25). As such, Mandela's ‘instinctive’ African nationalism is implicitly constructed as finding expression during his days of mission schooling, with Mandela seeing his education as a means of gaining a position from which he would be able to emancipate his people; however, despite the broadening of his horizons, advising the royal family would still undoubtedly have seemed all-but inevitable: in short, Sampson asserts,

Mandela felt at this time that “[his] roots were [his] destiny” (*Mandela* 17). Mandela himself asserts that the ANC, and politics in general, were for him, at this stage, still “something vague located in the distant past” (Sampson, *Mandela* 20).

Later, at Fort Hare, Mandela was still largely disinterested in politics, expressing discomfort and embarrassment at his friend, Paul Mahabane's, rebelliousness in refusing to run an error for a magistrate (Mandela 47; Sampson, *Mandela* 25). Rather, he states that, at that time, he had his “heart set on being an interpreter or a clerk in the Native Affairs Department... [because] a career as a civil servant was a glittering prize for an African, the highest that a black man could aspire to” (Mandela 43). He saw a degree not as a path to political leadership, but as a means towards supporting his family. Even at the age of twenty two, “neither war nor politics were [his] concern” (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). Although he could not but have noticed the racism inherent to Healdtown, with white staff remaining aloof from black (Lodge 4 – 5), there is no record – either real or apocryphal – of a sort of politicised indignity or reaction on Mandela's part. As such, this period in Mandela's life presents a pertinent case study in considering the power of the dominant ideology to overshadow objective historical fact, to the point where even largely critical or speculative texts seem invested in the dominant ideology to the point of being unconcerned with potential contradictions and obvious fallacies.

Although Mandela was, at Fort Hare, not at the centre of the intellectual elite, it included many of his friends (Sampson, *Mandela* 23); his consistent association with such circles lend the Mandela of the time an implicit intellectualism in the dominant ideology. This atmosphere of progressive intellectualism was fostered by several influential, liberal lecturers. Z.K. Matthews and D.D.T. Jabavu, for instance, were greatly admired by Mandela (Mandela 42), giving their students a liberal but rigorous scholarship which is credited by both the dominant and official narratives with fortifying these students during the later revolutionary phase (Sampson, *Mandela* 23). While at Fort Hare, Mandela took to cross-country running and boxing; his heroes at the time were sportsmen, not intellectuals. He also enjoyed ballroom dancing and drama, playing John Wilkes Booth in a production (Mandela 44 – 45). Therefore, while others were honing their intellectual arguments, Mandela was developing and refining his charismatic showmanship. Mandela would, later, come to see the courtroom as a performative space in which to show off his intellectual



pro prowess. Though not, at this stage, considered an original thinker, he possessed a flair for argument and performance which, when combined, made him an ideal candidate for arguing other people's ideas. This is, in part, responsible for his more reticent colleagues' encouragement and fostering of his later public persona.<sup>21</sup>

Mandela's rebelliousness at Fort Hare would seem to smash his bright prospects (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). His expulsion provides the myth with the political fuel it needs to create a sense of unity between the young Mandela yearning to regain *Ubuntu* for all Africans, and the political activist of later years<sup>22</sup> (Lodge 3). At Fort Hare, the food provided was notoriously terrible, and protests over its quality were common-place (Lodge 12). In his second year, Mandela was voted to the SRC, but only 25% of the student body voted due to a boycott calling for better food and more power for the council. Kerr, their principal, had a re-vote at dinner but, again, only 25% of the students voted and the same six students, including Mandela, were elected (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). Feeling, however, that he "could not ignore the views of the majority," he refused to take up his position, a decision that was encouraged by Matanzima (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). Kerr gave him a final chance, but Mandela refused, feeling that the principal was "infringing [on] students' rights" (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). Following his expulsion, he returned home. The Regent angrily insisted that Mandela apologise and return; however, it is implied that his pride would not let him (Mandela 51). Here we find the first instance of Mandela's pride seemingly autonomously controlling him. *The Struggle is my Life* claims that Mandela was "suspended – with other students including Oliver Tambo – for helping to organise a boycott of the Student's Representative Council after it had been deprived of its powers by the authorities" (International Defence and Aid Fund 1). The overwhelming consensus is, however, that Mandela was expelled rather than suspended (Lodge 12), sans Oliver Tambo. Mandela's stand was, according to Lodge, a lone one (Lodge 12). The question is then, of course, why this particular text includes Tambo with Mandela. At the time of the book's publication (1978), Mandela was on Robben Island along with the other Rivonia Trialists, while Tambo

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<sup>21</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> Lodge notes that this is the view emphasised by Fatima Meer in her biography of Mandela, *Higher than Hope*. Published in the 1980s, the biography emphasises a respect for authority at a time of violent uprising and divided loyalties, quite contrary to the 1950s rhetoric around the youth not needing to defer to the authority of their seniors.



was in exile as Acting President of the ANC, following Luthuli's death. This detail therefore emphasises a sense of unity between Mandela – as representative of those on the island – and Tambo, as representative of those in exile. At this point, the liberation struggle was, for the ANC, at low ebb, and emphasising the unified dedication of their leaders would have appealed to those involved in the struggle within South Africa, and garnered confidence amongst foreign sympathisers as well, showing their mutual struggle. It is noteworthy that the text refers to those depriving the SRC of their powers simply as “the authorities” (International Defence and Aid Fund 1); they are, therefore, effectively interchangeable with other malign forms of authority, creating an instinctive, unwarranted sense of outrage at the actions of this body, which is connotatively constructed as prefiguring the apartheid regime.

Mandela's abandonment of his studies is further justified by the text by constructing his traditional duties as a threat his self-determination. It states that Mandela

...might then have been drawn back into tribal duties and politics in the Transkei but for the fact was that he wanted to complete his studies, and because of the threat of an arranged marriage, both of which drove him to Johannesburg. (International Defence and Aid Fund 1)

The Regent, feeling he would not live much longer, had arranged marriages for Mandela and Justice. Mandela's betrothed was, however, both unattractive and in love with Justice and, according to Mandela, “no more anxious to be burdened with [him] than [he] with her” (Sampson, *Mandela* 26). Though the Regent was ill and in need of support and care, Mandela and Justice fled to Johannesburg. Mandela was determined to “have his own freedom” (Sampson, *Mandela* 27). Mandela asserts that “[l]ife has a way of forcing decisions on those who vacillate” (Mandela 51); his impulsiveness is, therefore, excused by the implication that any hesitation would have made life force a decision on him, robbing him of his self-determination. It is interesting to note *The Struggle is my Life's* use of the word “threat” in referring to his arranged marriage (International Defence and Aid Fund 1), which Mandela himself blames with “forc[ing his] hand” (Mandela 51). This retrospectively creates the impression of the burgeoning self-determination of Mandela was being “threat[ened]” by an archaic tradition. This is emphasised by Van Dijk, who asserts that Mandela, “a rebel at heart... decided that he was not willing to enter into such a marriage or be

*forced into a chieftainship*" (Van Dijk 9)." Van Dijk is here implying not only that the chieftainship was Mandela's for the taking, but that he consciously rejected this position in order to pursue his political struggle, transcending his context. The threat of this tradition is emphasised when he states that, when Mandela was in Johannesburg, "[r]epresentatives of the Paramount Chief were... trying to track him down, and soon he was on the run from his tribal duties" (Van Dijk 9). This incident therefore marks an important break between Mandela and tradition, a point at which he chose to actively pursue an identity independent of traditional centres of meaning<sup>23</sup>.

It is interesting that Mandela, who had abandoned his education on matters of principle through taking a largely unnoticed, lonely stand on an issue of minimal consequence, portrays himself as being subject to malign forces beyond his control, of his "beautiful dreams" being "crushed" (Sampson, *Mandela* 27). His pride, therefore, comes to seem almost autonomous, subject to currents beyond his control, causing him to make decisions which are not consciously his; the implication, through his inter-text, however, is that this affront to his pride has its roots in colonial oppression. As such, this inconsequential, banal student protest comes, symbolically, to be representative of the broader cause for which he would fight, lending it a disproportionate symbolic significance. Furthermore, his impulsive actions would, in time, he says, broaden his horizons, allowing him to "see the history and culture of [his] own people as part and parcel of the history and culture of the entire human race" (Sampson, *Mandela* 27). Mandela's poorly justified and, later, traitorous actions are, therefore, retrospectively justified, as they are portrayed as widening his horizons, granting him the scope and perspective necessary for him to pursue his 'inevitable' path.

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<sup>23</sup> This discussion will be concluded at the beginning of chapter two, forming as it does the starting point for that chapter's concerns.

## Chapter Two

This chapter will present a critical reading of *Long Walk to Freedom*, looking at the construction of the work as a consolidation of the dominant narrative. In constructing the work, Mandela and Stengel are not simply telling the story of Mandela's life; rather, they are seeking to construct a cohesive identity for Mandela and, by extension, the South African nation. His militancy and his non-violence, his non-racialism and his Africanism, his selflessness and his egotism all need to be accounted for and integrated into a cohesive whole. In order to achieve this, Mandela is located within the historical narrative of South Africa's freedom struggle.

This chapter will argue that *Long Walk to Freedom's* celebrated departure from the largely uncritical depictions of Mandela presented by numerous contributors to the dominant narrative facilitates its thematic focus on maturation and 'rebirth.' As much as Mandela humbly and selflessly attributes his successes to the guiding hand of destiny, so he can also attribute his *flaws* to this same guiding force. The personal progression which forms one of the work's central motifs is portrayed as being historically inevitable and necessary. The text therefore succeeds in acknowledging Mandela's personal shortcomings without troubling the dominant construction of him as a "secular saint," allowing him to acknowledge his shortcomings, while constructing him as having moved beyond them. As he locates himself in relation to his forebears, Mandela engages the same process of historical-mythological narrativisation which underpins his early political and cultural education. As such, Mandela and the history surrounding him form part of a historical repository of symbols and stories, forming a narrative which only occasionally intersects with historical fact.

### 2.1 Robben Island

Robben Island had, by the time of Mandela's incarceration, long been established in the popular African consciousness as a symbol of oppression at the hands of Europeans. The ideological underpinnings of the island's utilization as a prison and place of exile are persistent historical trends, stretching back to before the first permanent European settlers. Although the myriad details of the island's history are not necessarily common knowledge, they have contributed collectively to Robben Island's place in the popular consciousness, representing a confluence of historical

associations. The historical motifs of dispossession and disenfranchisement which echoed through the island's history determined the connotative significance of the island in the popular consciousness at the time of its official appropriation as a prison by the Apartheid government. The Nationalist government's racial policies were a continuation and intensification of policies and attitudes inherited from their British and Dutch antecedents, and their incarceration of African political leaders on the island was lent a powerful historical resonance, integrating them – initially, at least – into an extended historical narrative of political oppression and martyrdom.

Today, Robben Island is a tourist attraction, a symbol of the struggle against apartheid, inextricably bound in the popular consciousness with Mandela, who is commonly considered the spiritual father of the democratic, post-apartheid South Africa. It is here that the dominant narrative constructs the process of political maturation which Mandela and his fellow political prisoners underwent, deliberating on their vision for a democratic South Africa, based on shared understanding and co-operation. It is, therefore, a site symbolic not only of the opposition to tyranny and of patient martyrdom, but of nation-building, hope and freedom. The same island which lent historical resonance and significance to the incarceration of numerous political leaders during the apartheid era has come, in turn, to be integrated into the official narrative of Nelson Mandela and the "New South Africa," defined in relation to its most famous prisoner. This process of inversion has been largely facilitated and affected by the official narrative, predominantly represented by *Long Walk to Freedom*.

### 2.1.1 Early History

Robben Island sits in Table Bay, a seemingly innocuous, largely barren piece of land approximately seven kilometers from Blouberg Strand ("World Heritage Site" n. pag.). Known to three generations of political prisoners as "Esiquithini" – "The Island" – (Smith 5), it is difficult, at first, to fathom how this lonely, diminutive piece of land could have amassed such a vast, almost mythical set of connotations. The myriad shipwrecks which litter the shore and the surrounding ocean floor bear witness to the temperamental nature of the island's weather, poetically mirroring the island's stormy past. In their appraisal of the Island, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) found that, among the penitentiary islands utilized during the period

of European colonization, Robben Island had no direct parallels (Fleminger 9-10). Simply put, no other site of comparable utility can be said to historically parallel its parent nation's political and social climate as consistently and uncannily as Robben Island has South Africa's. From its early active days as a pantry for European sailors, to its use as a depository for society's unwanted, to its current status as a symbol of triumph and forgiveness in the face of tyranny, Robben Island has consistently been an accurate barometer for the political climate on the mainland (Deacon, "Introduction" 1-2).

Robben Island is named for the seals (from the Dutch word "*robbe*") which, along with colonies of penguins, littered the island at the time of the arrival of the first European sailors en route to the East (Penn 10). The earliest written mention of the island dates from 1496, by the Portuguese sailor Vasco da Gama (Fleminger 13) and the first Europeans to land there were likely members of his fleet, in 1498 ("World Heritage Site" 101). The route around the Cape gained in popularity through the 1500s (Penn 9). Frequent misunderstandings and skirmishes with the indigenous Khoikhoi made bartering for cattle on the mainland an often-volatile practice; the Khoikhoi would continue to resist foreign incursions at the Cape for the next two centuries (Smith 16). Their resistance, along with the mountainous terrain, made it nearly impossible for the Europeans to get to the wildlife further inland; consequently, sheep and goats were often left on the island to breed, as a fresh meat supply for the crews of passing ships, to supplement the "seal steaks, penguin breasts [and] penguin eggs" already freely available (Smith 19; Penn 10). Almost as soon as they initiated trade, the Europeans found the island to also be a convenient dumping ground for native political dissidents and criminals from the mainland, where they would be rendered harmless, isolated from their support base (Deacon, "Introduction" 2). Robben Island's early role was thus one of larder for early European sailors, concurrently providing a way for the Europeans to circumvent diplomacy and compromise.

The stakes in this initial inter-cultural conflict remained relatively low until the seventeenth century, when two competing companies – The Dutch East India Company (the V.O.C.) and the English East India Company (the E.E.I.C.) – both sought to establish permanent settlements at the Cape of Good Hope. In so doing, they hoped to gain control of the lucrative spice trade route to the East. Early

attempts – those preceding the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 – were, however, unsuccessful. The E.E.I.C. had made the first attempt at a permanent settlement in 1614 (Smith 8). Their plan was to send one hundred diplomats a year to negotiate with the native tribes (Smith 8). These ‘diplomats’ would be criminals who had been given the choice between execution and deportation in the service of their nation (Smith 8; Penn 11). Ten such convicts landed at the Cape in 1615, with Captain John Crosse being voted in as their leader; the rest of their number had died en-route (Penn 11–12). There followed two violent conflicts with Chief Xhore<sup>24</sup> in quick succession. The first of these was attributed to a “misunderstanding”, with Xhore subsequently stating his willingness to assist the English in exchange for their assistance against neighboring tribes. The second of these altercations – this one of a far more serious nature – resulted in the ex-convicts being driven out by Xhore, fleeing the mainland for Robben Island, where many of them perished (“Robben Island: A Timeline” n. pag.). Miserable, shadeless and isolated for six months, these men were effectively Robben Island’s first prisoners, setting a dismal precedent for all those who would follow (Smith 38). The three who survived were ‘rescued’ and sent back to England to be executed for their original transgressions (Smith 38). Xhore was later murdered by Dutch settlers in 1625, and his sons – inheriting a distrust of the white settlers – would be instrumental in the first Dutch-Khoikhoi war of 1658 (“Robben Island: A Timeline” n. pag.), which was the year after the first slaves from West Africa arrived in the Cape, and by which time the island was a popular stop-over for Europe’s great shipping nations (Smith 30).

### 2.1.2 The Island as a Prison

Therefore, the Island’s early, Euro-centric history saw it primarily utilized as a convenient larder and post office, and only incidentally as a place of banishment. The island had, however, the twin advantages of being both difficult to escape from, and of being remote enough to hide its invariably horrifying conditions, and was therefore the ideal site to offload any of society’s undesirables, free from the moral scrutiny of the public. Robben Island’s destiny as predominantly a place of banishment was realised in March, 1636, when Hendrik Brouwer – an influential

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<sup>24</sup> Xhore was a Xhosa chief who had been kidnapped by the British and sent to England in 1613, along with a companion who died en-route. He constantly requested to be sent home, finally being returned to Table Bay a year later (Robben Island).

Dutchman – banished the ringleaders of an attempted mutiny to Robben Island (Smith 9). Far more famous was Jan van Riebeeck's banishing of his Khoi interpreter, Autshumao – the island's only official escapee to date – there, in 1658 (Boehmer 152). By the end of the 17th century, the Dutch had incarcerated political prisoners from Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia on the island. These were among the first political prisoners put to work digging limestone and tending gardens on the island (Smith 17). By the 18th century, there were a variety of crimes which could earn one banishment to the island, and punishments there were consistently severe (Penn 27-29). The island's "sergeants and corporals... [were] virtually unrestrained in handing out punishments," including severe beatings and being broken alive on the wheel (Penn 28). In addition to its status as a place of punishment, it became a site of the denial of human rights when two prisoners, Jacobsz and Blank, found guilty of sodomy were weighted and thrown into the sea off its coast in 1735 (Penn 29).

As of 1846, however, on the recommendation of John Montagu, many criminals were moved to the mainland, where they provided labour for the building of roads and the like (Deacon, "The British Prison" 37). In their place, lepers, the terminally ill, the blind, the impoverished and the worst of the criminal element were removed from the mainland to the island. Immediately preceding this, there had been 183 convicts on the island, of which only 8 were "white natives of the colony" (Smith 40). It was into this desperate mire that the proudest of the Xhosa chiefs were banished after the Eighth Frontier War (1850 – 1853), a humiliation which would reverberate into the twentieth century (Smith 52-54).

### 2.1.3 Robben Island and the Xhosa People

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, the island was a consistent counterpart to the decline of the Xhosa nation. The expansion of the frontier of the old Cape Colony – known at the time as British Kaffraria, later known as the Ciskei – meant that the colonizers encroached further and further onto Xhosa territory (Sampson, *Mandela* 12). The Xhosa were essentially a peaceful people, who often rescued shipwrecked sailors; in time, these sailors were allowed to take Xhosa wives and be incorporated into their culture (Smith 43). The Xhosa lived communal lives, which ensured that the entire community shared in its wealth, which was represented



by cattle (Sampson, *Mandela* 11). They were not opposed to sharing their land, as they themselves had migrated there from the African interior centuries before (Smith 43). However, in the face of gradually intensifying exploitation, their trust proved to be fatal the colonizers considered the natives to be incapable of making able use of the territory, and felt that they would be better suited to lives lived in the service of the Europeans (Smith 43). In time, many great chiefs would live out their days in lonely squalor on the island, including Makona, Maqoma, Siyolo and Sandile and, a century later, their heirs in the ANC would be imprisoned only meters away from the sites of their mud-and-sapling huts (Smith 43).

#### 2.1.3.1 The Advent of Legislated Control

In 1817, the British made the first move towards the legislated control of the Africans when they introduced a system of passes for the Xhosas visiting the biannual fairs in Grahamstown and Fort Wilshire (Smith 43). By the 1820s, this system was being used to regulate Xhosa labour and, by 1823, they were being coerced into service of the British under threats of banishment to the island (Smith 43). Raiding parties stole Khoikhoi and Xhosa women and children for use in slavery, as well as the Xhosas' cattle to supplement the Cape Herds (Philip 33). The Boers often massacred the locals, who started sporadically to show resistance. La Valliant wrote that the Xhosa were "pillaged, harassed, nay often murdered by whites" and felt that they, the natives, "[were] obliged to take up arms in their own defence" (qtd. in Smith 45). For a long time, however, there was no focused, concerted attempt at repelling the foreign insurgents.

Although there was a need for an organized attempt at resistance, the Xhosa, rather than fight their mutual oppressors, continued to fight petty internal battles amongst themselves, often relying on the prophecies of soothsayers and war doctors for guidance. Witchcraft and superstition were looked to when active resistance was met with British firepower and, unwilling to betray their essential cultural values, they often spared those they captured in battle (Smith 45). Also, at this time, some African chiefs were finding it more lucrative to cooperate with the colonial powers, trading the territory and freedoms of their people in exchange for military protection against neighbouring tribes and other incentives (Guiloinneau 23-25). It was into this void that Nxele Makana, amongst others, stepped.



#### 2.1.4 Makana's Island

Nxele Makana was an archetypal South African liberation fighter. A Xhosa prophet, his influence was still felt 150 years later amongst his successors on Robben Island, many of whom referred to the island as "Makana's Island" (Buntman 71). Through his wisdom and his caring demeanor, he became the principle advisor to many of the most important chiefs. An article expounding his virtues was published in *Umkhonto we Sizwe's*<sup>25</sup> monthly journal, "Dawn", in 1979. The article states that Makana "[symbolizes] unity, patriotism and [demonstrated] the sacred qualities needed in any freedom fighter" and that "in him [they were] called to emulate the resolute stand in the struggle [they were] waging against the intrigues of colonialism and imperialism" (Diale n. pag.). He, along with other historical figures, became an iconic representation of the liberation struggle's ideal. It was also an acknowledgement that their struggle was not one which affected their generation alone, but one which was ongoing over a number of centuries. Makana (or "Nxele") enjoys a continued prominence in the popular African consciousness; the term Xhosa *Ukuza kuka Nxele*, for instance, means "shattered hopes" (Guiloinneau 8). It was into the mould of Makana that the dominant narrative often sought to cast Mandela.

##### 2.1.4.1 Makana's Growing Influence

Makana settled on the mission of Van der Kemp, a British missionary who had moved to the colony to spread the Christian gospel in 1798 (Smith 47). Van der Kemp's influence in the area was growing exponentially, and eventually became such that the Boers unsuccessfully tried have him assassinated, gaining him a reputation of invincibility with the Xhosas (Smith 47). By the time he died in 1811, Makana had become his chief follower, and soon rose to prominence (Smith 47). Makana encouraged Xhosa unity in the face of colonialism, while "inculcating a stricter morality, and boldly upbraiding the most powerful chiefs with their vices" (Philip 386). Crucially, he resisted the colonialists' attempts to implement exploitative policies with the aid of native chiefs (Philip 386-387).

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<sup>25</sup> The military wing of the ANC, which Mandela co-founded and was the first Commander-in-Chief of.

#### 2.1.4.2 The Birth of the Makana Myth

By 1817, Makana had amassed an “extraordinary” influence over the chiefs and common people in the colony (Philip 386). In that year, the government attempted to enforce the restitution of cattle through Ngqika, a chief with relatively little influence amongst his contemporaries. In 1818, Ngqika’s uncle, Ndlambe, defeated him; he was, however, soon afforded support in the form of the British and their firepower. Makana encouraged Ndlambe to strike at the British, insisting that the gods willed it, and that the British “bullets would turn to water” (“This day” n. pag.). He rallied the Xhosas to strike at the British troops in Grahamstown, “whom they should drive... into the ocean” (Philip 387). The Xhosas were summarily defeated, and Makana surrendered himself so that his comrades might be spared (“This day” n. pag.). He was shackled and sent to Robben Island. This self-sacrifice overshadowed his prophetic shortcomings, and from then on Makana lived in Xhosa mythology as a figure of resistance, wisdom and selfless martyrdom:

[t]he barbarism and sadism of the British [...] forced Makana to hand himself to [them] in an effort to stop the senseless killing [...] and to bring peace and calm. The British, astonished by the fearlessness of Makana [...] locked him in Robben Island together with some of his followers. (Diale n. pag.)

Makana’s status as a martyr was cemented with his subsequent failed escape attempt. He, along with around thirty other prisoners, overpowered the guards on the island, stole weapons and a boat and made for Blaauwberg. The boat beached on rocks and many, including Makana, drowned (Deacon 43). The prisoners who had masterminded the plot were decapitated, and their heads placed on spikes as a warning to other would-be escapees (Smith 40). Makana died in defiance of his oppressors, reportedly clinging to a rock and shouting encouragement to his comrades before sinking below the waves (Deacon 43).

#### 2.1.4.3 Makana and Mandela

The young Rolihlahla first heard of Makana at the Great Place, as a great Xhosa chief who, in 1819, had led an army of 10,000 in an attack on Grahamstown (Guiloinneau 62). Guiloinneau reflects the sentiments of the dominant narrative when he states that

[t]he glory of such African warriors excited young Rolihlahla's imagination. And the memories of the tales he heard in his childhood would always remain with him. One might even say that it is in those memories that he finds his deepest roots, and his human dignity. His pride in his own African heritage would later become the source of his legitimacy as a political activist. This was manifest in his struggles as leader of the ANC, in his leadership of the armed, clandestine group, Umkhonto we Sizwe, as well as in his years of arduous work in his prison cell at Robben Island. (62)

This cultural heritage was, however, only part history, for as Guiloinneau says:

[t]he elders' narratives were also accompanied by stories which evoked a more imaginal past, similar to tales of a golden age that occur in many cultures. And this mystic past which nourished young Rolihlahla's imagination would also nourish the political understanding of Mandela the activist. (62)

For the young Mandela, then, his cultural heritage, in which his cultural pride and identity were invested, was an intermingling of history and myth; an “imaginal past” (Guiloinneau 62). This constructed history is credited with informing Mandela’s “political understanding,” implying an inherent understanding of the socio-political power of historical-mythological narratives. These mythological constructs “are virtually indestructible because they do not depend merely on concrete facts. They live simultaneously in the collective imagination of a people and in the most intimate dreams of the men and women who are its members” (Guiloinneau 10). Herein, crucially, lies the power of the Mandela myth: if concrete facts alone were accountable for the massive emotive and imaginative power of the Mandela myth, then, by rights, Tambo, Sisulu and others would enjoy a similar status. Respected and revered though they are, they could hardly be said to wield the same mythological power and personal agency as Mandela. Rather, as this chapter will

subsequently illustrate, Mandela's own history – as well as the mythology built up around him – falls into this mingled repository of images and stories, reality and fiction, freely intermingling in a popular consciousness, creating a narrative which runs parallel to, but only selectively intersects with, fact. Mandela and Makana both disappeared in the wake of their greatest shows of defiance. The anticipation of their respective 'second comings' gained religious and mythical overtones; Mandela's myth is complicated in this respect for, unlike Makana, *his* return materialized<sup>26</sup>. The construction of the dominant narrative can, therefore, be said to form part of the same narrative tradition which constructed Makana and Robben Island in the popular African consciousness (Guiloineau 8). Mandela's status as a member of a royal Xhosa family, in one of the most powerful Xhosa tribes – the Tembus – and with a royal genealogy stretching back to sixteenth century, helped legitimize his leadership of the ANC; his subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island would, therefore, in the words of Guiloineau, contribute to the popular perception of him as the "New Makana" (9).

#### 2.1.5 Increasing Oppression

Native attempts at self-assertion – both real and imagined – were met with surprise and increasing oppositional force by the British. In 1851, for instance, there were rumours of Chief Sandile's – son of Ngqika – vast forces, comprised of Africans and coloureds, being mobilized to attack the colonizers in the winter. Governor Smith, in response, wrote of his desire to have investigated the "inexplicable disaffection of the coloured people and their fraternization with the kafirs – their hereditary enemies who drove them from their country" (qtd. in Smith 51). He seemed utterly surprised, especially considering that the coloureds "enjoyed every privilege accorded to the most favoured people (Europeans)" and that they "[lived] under the laws of the colony and [possessed] the civil and religious rights of British subjects [such as being] provided with pastors and teachers" (Smith qtd. in Smith 51-52). The commission he requested found that the Khoikhoi and coloured people's "strange revolt [could be] traced to some feeling of ancient right to the whole of the land on the confines of which they [then held] but a nook" (Smith 52). Later that year, Chief Siyolo's men killed all 60 men of an inexperienced Queen's Regiment in the Fish

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<sup>26</sup> The implications of this will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

River Bush. Smith's successor, George Cathcart, was instructed that the war against the "Hottentots and Kafres should be prosecuted with unremitting vigour until [they were] reduced to complete and unconditional submission" (qtd. in Smith 52). Siyolo was subsequently imprisoned on Robben Island for 14 years, from 1855 to 1869 (Deacon 49). The gradual criminalization – first by implication and later in legislature – of the natives' desire for autonomy, would progressively internalize their sense of servility, resulting in the historically-ingrained sense of inferiority and, ultimately, animosity, which Mandela would performatively react to.

#### 2.1.5.1 The Abolition of Slavery

The emancipation of the Cape slaves, in the form of the Slavery Abolition Act, was passed in the UK in 1833, with slavery being officially abolished throughout most of the British Empire on 1 August 1834. The event was delayed by four months at the Cape Colony, until 1 December 1834. At this time, around 35000 Cape slaves were 'freed', but were retained as "apprentices" for another four years, until 1838 (Hinks, McKivigan and Williams 13-14; 61). In 1836, shortly after the freeing of the Cape slaves, many Boers – who were dissatisfied with the English rule of the colony – started to migrate inland, in what became known as the Great Trek (Hinks, McKivigan and Williams 150). It was the abolition of slavery which would, ironically, mark the beginning of eighty years of war between the Africans and the settlers.

It was in 1854, during a time of relative prosperity, that the destruction of the Xhosa nation entered a new phase. Sir George Grey, the Governor of the Cape called for "the submission of every chief of consequence; or his disgrace if he were obdurate" (qtd. in Sampson 12). Up until this point, the treatment of the Xhosa chief had been abysmal. Chief Umhala had written a letter to "the great chief of the government", complaining bitterly of the lack of respect afforded him, and his disgraceful treatment at the hands of petty magistrates (Smith 52). Rather than having his grievances addressed, however, it was decreed that the Fingo labourers in East London should be paid more than African labourers, as the African were seen as inherently "indolent" (Smith 52, 53).

#### 2.1.5.2 Unwitting Complicity

In 1857, in the face of intensifying opposition, Africans were again tragically complicit in their own subjugation. Left with few options, they turned to prophesy. Some of these were disastrous, such as those of the young Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse (also spelled Nongqase) (Sampson, Mandela 12), which led the Xhosa to “slaughter... their stock and destroy... their crops in the expectation of the resurrection of ancestral spirits, accompanied by the provision of food from heaven” (Davenport and Saunders 142). The population of the chiefdoms involved in the cattle killing fell from “fell from an estimated 105,000 to a mere 38,500.” (Davenport, Saunders 142). Nongqawuse was arrested and imprisoned on Robben Island (Smith 53 – 54). A further effect of these actions was that numerous Xhosas had to seek work in the Colony, with the number rising from 31 in 1856 to 28,892 in 1857 (Davenport and Saunders 142); the increased volume of city labour meant that the pass laws of 1853 were extended, with magistrates required to keep a register of “all native applicants for service” (Smith 53). This system formed the precedent for the labour bureau of the Apartheid-era mining houses (Smith 53).

Sir George Grey claimed that the cattle killings were a result of a conspiracy, and subsequently put fourteen “chiefs and senior headmen” on trial (Davenport and Saunders 142). Major Gawler, who had been the chief subject of Umhala’s letter, suggested a “clean sweep of all the chiefs” to be “pursued with [caution] and certainty” (qtd. in Smith 53). Numerous prominent members of the Xhosa nobility were imprisoned on Robben Island for up to ten years. Like the leaders of the ANC imprisoned there years later, they found their chains and shackles so heavy and tight that their wrists and ankles were left bleeding (Smith 54). The proliferation of Xhosa chiefs on the island meant a dearth of leadership on the mainland<sup>27</sup>. By the time the last of them – Maqoma, Siyolo and Xhoxho – were released in 1869, their lands had been divided between the Dutch, German and English settlers. They were alone, forbidden to return to their lands or to summon their followers (Smith 53 – 54). 1877 would see the ninth, and last, of the Cape-Xhosa Wars, referred to by Govan Mbeki as the “Wars of Dispossession” (Davenport and Saunders 144; Smith 55). The sons of Sandile, Umhala and Maqoma were amongst the first of the next generation of Xhosa chiefs to be imprisoned on the island and, by 1879, the island was seeing an

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<sup>27</sup> A strategy which the Apartheid government would adopt in dealing with African political leaders.

influx of black prisoners, with no improvement in conditions (Smith 55). The overburdened sewers, for instance, were prone to bursting, spreading disease and misery (Smith 55). The Xhosa nation had, in short, been crippled by deceit and superstition.

#### 2.1.5.3 The Formation of the ANC

The eighty years of war with the African tribes, the beginning of which had been marked by the freeing of the Cape slaves, was effectively won by the British with the passing of the Land Act of 1913 (Guiloinneau 16). The Act served, in large part, to protect Afrikaner farmers; between 1910 and 1912, Africans had bought 78 farms, often through cooperatives, leading to fears of black integration into economy (Guiloinneau 16). The Act dictated that Africans could no longer own land in the colony (Sampson, *Mandela* 4). The Africans had already foreseen the consequences of this pending law and a resistance movement, the African National Congress (ANC), had been formed the year before, in 1912. This was a turning point in the African liberation struggle, and marked the beginning of eighty-two years of organized resistance to colonial oppression. The ANC, in its rhetoric, would adopt symbols of masculinity located in this traditional, martial past, constructing itself as the logical continuation of their militant anti-colonial forebears. This tendency would become even more prominent with the formation of the Congress Youth League, which “expressed nationalist aspiration via images of combativeness and virility,” an ideal which Mandela consummately embodied (Boehmer 139).

#### 2.1.6 Robben Island as an Apartheid Prison

Mandela’s imprisonment on Robben Island would, therefore, represent a potent confluence of historical and symbolic connotations. In 1948, the Nationalist government came to power, implementing their policy of Apartheid, accelerating and legislating the racially-delineated oppression within the country. The regime’s opponents and outspoken critics would once again find themselves imprisoned, banished and banned (Lodge 40). Apartheid represented a final attempt to fight against the African majority and the British influence, reversing the momentum of history, enforcing a “fantasy of the country’s Afrikaner past” (Guiloinneau 8). South Africa would come to have the largest prison population, relative to its population size, as well as the highest number of executions, in the world (Sampson, *Drum*



150). The vast majority of those imprisoned and executed by the state would be Africans (Sampson, *Drum* 150). In 1959, John Vorster – Minister of Justice – would designate Robben Island as a maximum-security prison (“World Heritage Site” 26). It would thus be adopted as one of the numerous measures employed by the government to subjugate defiant Africans. The iron-fisted measures the South African government used to oppress the native population would resonate strongly with the events of the expansion of the colonialists’ frontiers during the preceding centuries. As such, when Mandela entered the prison in 1962 and, even more so, when he re-entered it in 1964, he was seen as forming part of this tradition of royal and political anti-colonial agitators; this would play a crucial role in the construction of the dominant narrative, which draws an explicit link between Mandela and the royal and political African agitators imprisoned there before him.

#### 2.1.6.1 Mandela and Robben Island

When the Nationalist government sent Mandela to the island in 1962 and, more so, in 1964,

...they became unwitting players in the long African saga of struggle symbolised by that place... whether they liked it or not the island made them villains in the great South African story of struggle against white invaders... By the same token, Nelson Mandela became the spiritual heir of all the heroic chieftains who had resisted this inexorable force of colonialism, often with vastly inferior weaponry and numbers, against the European armies. (Guiloinéau 8)

Mandela, as “one of the first eminent Africans to make use of this mythic drama of African emancipation with modern skills and perspectives,” well understood his place in this extended narrative (Guiloinéau 8). Guiloinéau argues that this modernity exuded by Mandela, while still projecting an intense pride in tradition, is one of the reasons that imprisoning him on Robben Island would seem “like an anachronism, a mythic act in itself,” helping to develop and propagate Mandela’s image as a “sacred liberator,” and contributing to the development of his own, exceedingly powerful, myth (8). Crucially, says Guiloinéau, “[i]f the authorities had decided to keep him in a modern prison with no such history (the maximum security facility at Pretoria, for example), the Mandela story might have had a different outcome” (Guiloinéau 8).



Moreover, Mandela himself would have been conscious of his part in this narrative; as Guiloineau states:

Rolihlahla, only a boy of twelve, listened eagerly in the tiny village of Mqekezweni to Joyi's stories of the great deeds of the past... [and] listened with a lump in his throat to the narrative of his ancestors' defeats, especially their military defeats and their susceptibility to cattle-killing prophecies. (66)

Guiloineau goes on to say that "[t]hirty years later, as Nelson Mandela, he would add his own revolutionary actions to this long record of the African chiefs' struggles against white tyranny" (66; emphasis added). We therefore see the influence, concurrently, of the dominant and the official narratives; the official narrative's idea of Mandela *progressing* from being "Rolihlahla" to "Nelson Mandela," along with the dominant narrative's focus on a wounded cultural pride embodied in Mandela from childhood, a pride which he, from those early days, sought to restore. It is this "authentic history... [t]his living heritage of pain and pride" which, Guiloineau asserts, played a critical, early role in "forming his conscience... [h]is insistent evocation of his tribal African past during his trials thirty years later are witness to its importance for him" (69). This evocation of an *African* past is of critical importance for the dominant narrative in its construction of the dominant myth. As Guiloineau asserts, "[i]n the collective consciousness of South African blacks, the modern struggle against apartheid and for full emancipation has deep roots in the struggle of Africans against European invaders ever since they landed at the Cape in 1652" (9). "Mandela would never forget these roots," says Guiloineau,

...and neither would the Africans who shouted his name from the rooftops when he walked out of Victor Verster prison on February 11, 1990. If the Afrikaner authorities had been more astute, they would have tried to inform themselves about the roots and heritage of this bright, British-trained lawyer, who also happened to be a chief's son, giving him a profound legitimacy in the eyes of his black compatriots. They might have begun to understand that this man represented a unique and powerful confluence of indigenous and modern traditions. (69)

The Island of the popular consciousness is located somewhere between myth and history, forming what Guiloineau calls the "historical roots of the Mandela myth" (8).

When Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, he came to be integrated into this historical-mythical past, serving to reinforce the dominant narrative.

## 2.2 Mandela's Time in Johannesburg as a Parable

*Long Walk to Freedom*, as has been said, integrates and consolidates key episodes from the dominant narrative, integrating them into the familiar form of the *Bildungsroman*. Mandela's rejection of the regent's patronage, and his subsequent journey to Johannesburg, marks a clear break in the dominant narrative, providing a transition in his character development. The dominant narrative has, traditionally, seen this as a cathartic moment of self-assertion, of Mandela seeking an arena in which he could affect political change, driven by a wounded pride and irrepressible political conscience, a refusal "to rule over an oppressed people" (Lodge 13). The preferred white liberal view of his "escape" – as reflected in Mary Benson's *Nelson Mandela: The Man and the Movement*, a work which constructs Mandela as a "liberal democrat" as a means of "reassuring sceptical Western audiences" (Boehmer 6) – is as evidence of his rejection of tradition (Lodge 13). More prosaic interpretations include Mandela finding the traditional life at the kraal "dull," and seeking alternate sources of stimulation (Lodge 13). According to Chiefs J. and N. Mtiri, however, Mandela told them that his fear of revealing to the Regent that the "very, very ugly" girl who was intended for him was in love with Justice was the catalyst for his escape (Mtirara n.pag.). The disparity in attributed motives for Mandela's actions is indicative not only of their importance within the dominant narrative, but also of the potential they carry as a vindication for a variety of constructions of Mandela. The construction of the Mandela of this period in the official narrative, however, serves primarily to emphasise the text's theme of political conscientisation as salvational, and the necessity of retaining traditional values even when embracing a modern, urban identity. From the outset, Mandela is threatened on three levels, by three bastions which he had depended on all his life: formal education has provided an affront to his pride; tradition has conflicted with his self-determination and the Union of South Africa, as a whole – and microcosmically represented by Johannesburg – threatens his financial and physical security<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> It must be noted, at this point, that the Johannesburg Mandela is constructing here is very much the Johannesburg as represented in African literature up until that point. Mandela

As such, Mandela is left without a point of reference, without security, and the reader sees him trying to re-establish a sense of moral direction. He is seemingly lost between the security of the Regent's patronage, which he has left behind, and the security and guidance of the ANC still to come. The Mandela described in this chapter is, therefore, necessarily distinct from any other characterisation of him in the text, and is portrayed as naive, avaricious and deceitful. Although he is not *aware* of his political drive, of his desire to emancipate his people politically, Mandela still constructs this desire as something inherent; he is, through his development and maturation, becoming what he already is. It is another key episode, forming one of a number of incidents which sees Mandela exposed to new sources of inspiration and temptation, which must be overcome. These character 'faults' provide him with a point from which he can develop, allowing this period to be integrated into the larger narrative progression of his life.

### 2.2.1 Succumbing to Temptation

Mandela's evocation of the theme of destiny allows him to present a text which concurrently displays the ostensible honesty for which it has been so widely praised, while framing his actions as being outside of his control, of attributing agency to the currents of history. On his arrival at the mines in Johannesburg, Mandela notes that:

[o]nly the presence of cheap labor in the form of thousands of Africans working long hours for little pay with no rights made gold-mining profitable for the mining houses — white-owned companies that became wealthy beyond the dreams of Croesus on the backs of the African people. I had never seen such enterprise before, such great machines, such methodical organization, and such backbreaking work. It was my first sight of South African capitalism at work, *and I knew I was in for a new kind of education.* (Mandela 59; emphasis added)

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himself comes to partake in the project more or less pioneered by the *Drum* writers of reconstituting Johannesburg as a locus of opportunity and progress, of being concurrently a dangerous, oppressive microcosm of South Africa as a whole, and a locus of empowerment and of a fledgling modern African identity. As such, Johannesburg is another site for Mandela's mode of mythologizing throughout *Long Walk to Freedom*, of consolidating two opposite sets of connotations into a single, cohesive symbol.

Despite Mandela's clear – and, it must be assumed, retrospective – insight into the exploitative functioning of the mines, his awe is evident. It must also be remembered that, during his youth, "working in the mines was almost as powerful a symbol of passage into manhood as circumcision" (Guiloinneau 88-89). As such, this scene is constructed to neatly encapsulate the conflict between the naive preconceptions of his youth, the temptations of the city and the sort of political consciousness he had yet to accrue. His jarring integration into this society will, therefore, necessitate "a new kind of education" in order for him to survive, both morally and physically. The incident forms an echo of his journey with his mother from Qunu to the Great Place, and leaving behind the huts of his circumcision ritual. On his arrival at Jongintaba's court, Mandela writes that:

[s]uddenly a new world opened before [him]. Children from poor homes often find themselves beguiled by a host of new temptations when suddenly confronted by great wealth. [He] was no exception. [He] felt many of [his] established beliefs and loyalties begin to ebb away. The slender foundation built by [his] parents began to shake. (Mandela 16)

However, rather than entering an environment with a clear moral code, Mandela is, for the first time, entering the individualised space of the modern city, with its temptations and moral ambiguity. He abandons safety and security, leaving behind his metaphorical 'burning bridges' to the safety and security of the Regent's patronage and his privileged education as he enters Johannesburg.

This liminal period in the text carries an unusual emphasis on the negative facets of Mandela's character, behaviour and motivations, emphasising the theme of the salvational potential of political conscientisation. In order to flee the Transkei, Mandela and Justice sell "two of the regent's prize oxen" to a local trader; the trader "assume[s] that [they are] selling the animals at the regent's behest, and [they do] not correct him" (Mandela 53). Later, they lie to Chief Mpondombini about why they need the requisite travel documents, and smile at each other "in complicity" as he convinces the magistrate to provide them (Mandela 54-55). Piliso, the headman at the mining compound, had received a letter from the regent some months before, asking for Justice to be given a clerical job, which is "the most coveted and respected job in the mine compound" (Mandela 59). They convince him that Mandela

is Justice's brother, and Mandela is given the comparably coveted position of mine policeman, with a possible promotion to a clerical post in three months' time, integrating him into the same system he so strongly critiques (Mandela 60).

"The influence of the city," says Sampson, "worked fast on tribal Africans, on the surface at least: it soon rubbed out the memories of a slower, gentler life" (*Drum* 15). Justice was, at this time, treated as a visiting chief, and was given gifts of cash, which he shared with Mandela, who says that

[f]or those first few days, [his] pockets jingling with newfound riches, [he] felt like a millionaire. [He] was beginning to think [he] was a child of fortune, that luck was shining on [him], and that if [he] had not wasted precious time studying at college [he] could have been a wealthy man by then. (Mandela 60)

Mandela lives comparatively luxuriously off Justice's status, which derives, at least in part, from the traditional chieftainship's complicity in the cruel, oppressive mining industry Mandela is so appalled by. He states that

[t]he regent's word carried weight at Crown Mines. This was true of all chiefs in South Africa. They wanted the chiefs to encourage their subjects to come to the Reef. The chiefs were treated with great deference; the mining houses provided special lodgings for them whenever they came to visit. One letter from the regent was enough to secure a man a good job, and Justice and I were treated with extra care because of [their] connection. [They] were to be given free rations, sleeping quarters, and a small salary... For [their] first few days, Piliso, out of courtesy to the regent, invited Justice and [him] to stay with him. (Mandela 60)

To integrate his abuse of his cultural heritage into the broader narrative, Mandela evokes the theme of destiny, stating that "[o]nce again... *fate was busy setting snares around [him]*" (60; emphasis added). Mandela therefore attributes his newfound wealth and success to the same destiny to which he broadly attributes all the currents of his life. Mandela's attribution of his successes to fate allows him, conversely, to qualify his shortcomings, as it implies that the misfortunes he was to encounter were not of his making, and that he was, once again, at the mercy of a fate which, it is implied, provided him with these opportunities in order to facilitate his

moral education. He and Justice “boast... of [their] cleverness” to a mine-worker, saying that they had “run away and tricked the regent in the bargain,” showing an almost malicious revelling in their besting of the regent (Mandela 60-61). Their lack of discretion leads to their secret being revealed to Piliso and, consequently, the regent, who orders them to return. Mandela seems taken aback by this turn of events when he states that

Piliso... vented his anger on us, *accusing* us of lying to him. He said we had presumed on his hospitality and the good name of the regent... Justice protested... [b]ut Piliso turned a deaf ear. We felt ashamed and humiliated... (61)

They are forced to leave the mine, and there follows a further series of unfortunate deceptions which, ultimately, leads to their rejection from their accommodations, and the disappointment of those who had placed their trust in them. Mandela reflects that “[their] fortunes [had been]... reversed. [They] were without jobs, without prospects, without a place to stay” (Mandela 62). It is at this most desperate of moments that Mandela is serendipitously introduced to Walter Sisulu. Lodge expresses the sentiments of the dominant and official narratives when he states that “[i]t was only at the time of his meeting with Walter Sisulu that [Mandela] finally left his world of childhood and lineage behind” (18).

## 2.2.2 Finding a New Moral Code

First, however, Mandela has to symbolically separate himself from the traditional structures which have provided him with a moral structure up until this point; he has abandoned his traditional responsibilities and must, therefore, also abandon the privileges which tradition afforded him. As such, we see Mandela becoming invested in a new, urban set of principles as a means of integrating him into his new environment, most notably represented by his shifting attitude towards formal education, which he had, to that point, considered the only means of attaining influence and leadership:

[i]t was another lesson from Fort Hare that I had to unlearn in Johannesburg. I had been taught that to have a B.A. meant to be a leader, and to be a leader

one needed a B.A. But in Johannesburg I found that many of the most outstanding leaders had never been to university at all. (Mandela 64-65)

Gaur Radebe, a member both the ANC and the Communist Party, had no degree, but was “more knowledgeable... bolder and more confident” than many of those who left Fort Hare with degrees (Mandela 68). It is to him that Mandela’s initial political conscientisation is attributed. As such, we see Mandela realising the necessity of reconsidering his deeply-held system of values, opening the space for the integration of new modes of thought. He reflects on his “new education,” saying that

[i]n my brief stay in Johannesburg, I had left a trail of mistruths, and in each case, the falsehood had come back to haunt me. At the time, I felt that I had no alternative. I was frightened and inexperienced, and I knew that I had not gotten off on the right foot in my new life. (Mandela 65)

As such, through his acknowledgement of his shortcomings, Mandela claims agency over them. He comes to embrace a sort of rural simplicity, boarding in a local man’s back yard. Although he stays in a “tin-roofed room at the back of [the man’s] property, no more than a shack, with a dirt floor, no heat, no electricity, no running water... it [is] a place of [his] own and [he is] happy to have it” (Mandela 65). His moral awakening within this urban context is already constructed as a progression beyond the morally vulnerable individual who entered Johannesburg. He has, therefore, in this image of rural simplicity within the urban environment, succeeded in transcribing the idyllic, simple imagery of his youth to the context of his new environment, reconciling the traditions he has left behind with the new environment he now inhabits. This initial progression, from naivety to an understanding of the temptations which the city presents, opens the space for a new set of guiding principles, while marking the synthesis of an idyllic rural purity with an urban understanding as an ideal which he embodies. As such, Mandela’s behaviour during his early days in Johannesburg is neatly shaped into the form of a moral tale and thematically integrated into the official narrative; ultimately, distance is created between Mandela and these actions, adding to his lived experience, while separating himself from the mistakes of his youth.



Therefore, rather than glossing over the less attractive aspects of this time period – which the text is guilty of at other times – the official narrative *emphasises* them instead. The implication is that this period, and all it entails, was *necessary*, as it formed his initial education about Johannesburg; he had been seduced by the temptations of the city, and the temptation to abuse his tribal heritage for personal gain. It was not only necessary for Mandela to have pursued this path; it is implied that it was *inevitable*. There is a literary neatness to the chapter's progression, beginning as it does with an awkward and reactive integration into a strange, threatening society, his seduction by this society, his being brought low and, ultimately, his reclaiming of a sense of self-determination with his sense of social responsibility. This will progress naturally into a political consciousness, marking the end of his dependency on his tribal origins. Each of Mandela's tribulations during this period is contextualised with a deviation to highlight the plight of Africans in South Africa at that time, universalising his experience (Mandela 60-66). As such, it forms one of the numerous parables which permeate the text.

As a clearly constructed dividing line within the text, Mandela is creating a space between himself and his naive, a-political self. By saying that “[he] knew [that he] was in for a new kind of education” (Mandela 57), the entire chapter is established, from the outset, as being transitional. This is, ultimately, how the text succeeds in reconciling the Mandela of this chapter, and the ones before it, with his subsequent, moral and political selves. Mandela resists the temptation to emphasise the dominant narrative's construction of him as consciously, inherently political; if he were constructed as such, the narrative would no longer work as a story of development, of a gradual political awakening as part of a greater process of personal and moral maturation and development.

### 2.2.3 Appropriation of this Period by the Dominant and Official Narratives

The dominant narrative has traditionally constructed Mandela as inherently and consciously political, granting him agency and foresight, and attributing his move to Johannesburg to a conscious pursuit of his ‘destiny.’ In 1953, for instance, the ANC-affiliated *Fighting Talk* wrote that Mandela had joined the Congress at Fort Hare, where his “burgeoning nationalism” was stimulated by his close friendship with Oliver Tambo (Lodge 10). Mandela himself, however, portrays his commitment to African



nationalism as more hesitant, allowing for a steady, measured progression in his development. As a student, he was at odds with the militant currents within the ANC in his approval of Smuts' support of the war on Germany (Lodge 11). Political displays of defiance – such as a fellow student's refusal to run an errand for a local magistrate made him uncomfortable, and he felt that he was “not ready” to do the same (Lodge 11). When, during Mandela's early days at Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelman, Gaur Radebe refused to drink from his ‘own’ cups, opting instead to drink from the secretaries’ cups, Mandela, rather than doing likewise, “didn’t drink the tea for months” (Lodge 50). He was also willing to save a typist from embarrassment when a client walked in while he was dictating to her, playing along as she sent him on an errand (Mandela 67). His growing political conscientisation would, in time, erode this reticence, removing the distinction between his private and public faces. In the official narrative, then, Mandela's political conscientisation forms a neater narrative development, starting with Gaur Radebe convincing him to take part in the Alexandra bus boycott of 1943, which meant walking 12 miles to work and back again (Lodge 31).

Furthermore, this period is often constructed in the dominant narrative as a vehicle for illustrating the power of Mandela's royal connections, and the almost mythical respect he enjoyed on account of it. Remarkably, Justice is rarely included at all; when he is, acknowledgement that it was *his* personal prestige which procured Mandela favour on his arrival in Johannesburg is almost unheard of. This serves to emphasise Mandela's autonomy, as in Van Dijk, who states that “Mandela began looking for a job, ironically finding one as a security guard at the Crown Mines compound” (9). This is illustrative of the divergent goals of the dominant narrative, particularly dating from the period of Mandela's incarceration, and the official narrative which is ostensibly told in his own voice. The dominant narrative had generally constructed this period, when it was focused on at all, as illustrative of the power of Mandela's own status, and used it for the symbolic resonance of his time as a ‘mineworker.’

### 2.3 Initial Activism

Mandela's entry into politics was fortuitously timed, coinciding with the end of ten years of near-inactivity on the part of the ANC. His arrival immediately preceded the

formation of the Congress Youth League (CYL), which has been constructed by the dominant and official narratives as marking the ANC's progression beyond its sedentary politics of the previous decade. He was part of the first generation of full-time political activists, marking a more assertive character and an increased focus on vibrant, youthful leadership. As volunteer-in-chief of the Defiance Campaign, a campaign which enjoyed a massive rhetorical investment on the part of the ANC, his reputation as a great leader who was simultaneously 'one of the people' was cemented. He possessed a distinct advantage in the form of his patrician lineage; at the time, most politicians were commoners (Lodge 39). This, according to Lodge, expedited his ascent through the ranks (39). Mandela could, furthermore, feel and show empathy across racial borders, especially with people of different backgrounds, something facilitated by his regular exposure to, and relationships with, whites during his formative years (Lodge 40), an ability assisted by his imposing height, impeccable grooming and charisma. His leadership role in the CYL and, later, the Transvaal ANC (TANC) played into the ANC's 1940s leadership discourse, which employed virile masculine metaphors, portraying the youth as no longer needing to defer to their seniors, an image which he fit perfectly<sup>29</sup> (Lodge 39).

A concurrent problem was that of African intellectuals cutting themselves off from their people, eager to show off their learning through dry phrases and constructs appropriated from Western writers (Sampson, *Drum* 13). This distance of the African intellectual community from "common" Africans was a problem which faced African political leaders and activists, contributing to the youth's perception of the senior leadership as being aloof and out of touch. Their state of being "mad with education," as the Basuto proverb goes, was a problem which also plagued African political leaders and thinkers (Sampson, *Drum* 94). Mandela was, therefore, established early in his political career as a powerful exponent of, and visual correlative to, the ANC's policies. Mandela, though a founding member of the CYL, was at this time only an advocate, not a creator, of these ideas; at this time, he was, according to

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, at a major protest meeting on 6 April, 1952, in the presence of Dr. Maroke, the then-president general of the ANC, as well as numerous other senior ANC members, Mandela, as president of the Youth League, made a speech in which he "predicted that he would be the first president of South Africa." Mandela distinguished himself from the senior leadership, who were all wearing black ties, by wearing his brown suit. As such, Mandela consciously constructed himself as conforming to this leadership ideal.

Lodge, “content to defer to the intellectual authority of others,” considered the “show boy” in contrast to Oliver Tambo, who was seen as “the brains.” (35). Regardless of whether the ideas were his own, by representing and propagating them Mandela associated himself with them in the minds of the general populace. As such, Mandela was associated from early on with being a leader in tune with the desires of the masses, on the forefront of a more assertive, vibrant and large-scale liberation struggle.

This period, conversely, provides numerous problematic elements which needed to be integrated into the dominant and, subsequently, official narratives. Although in many ways a failure, the Defiance Campaign has been constructed as a military victory for the liberation struggle. The Sophiatown removals, another objective failure, also served to legitimise the ANC as a threat to the apartheid state, and their adoption of violent struggle. Ultimately, elements which problematise the dominant construction of Mandela as inherently non-racial and non-violent arise from this period, but have subsequently also been integrated into Mandela’s process of maturation and development.

### 2.3.1 The Defiance Campaign

The Defiance Campaign was touted as “the most powerful action ever undertaken by the oppressed masses in South Africa” (Mandela 120). It took place in 1953, and involved groups of ‘defiers’ acting in defiance of petty Apartheid laws, resulting in their arrest and imprisonment (Naicker n. pag.). Its stated goal was the repeal of six unjust laws (Mandela 118). It has subsequently been credited as the catalytic event for multi-racial, mass struggle in South Africa, while concurrently being responsible for Mandela’s “[coming] of age as a freedom fighter” (Mandela 130). The Campaign received an unprecedented level of publicity, with Mandela taking the opportunity to develop a media presence and personality, revelling in the spotlight which many other leaders eschewed. Much of his later prestige and legitimacy as a non-racial leader would consequently derive from this incident. The amount of rhetorical currency invested in the campaign is striking, considering the extent to which it can be considered a practical failure with regards to its stated objectives. This, I argue, is because the Defiance Campaign was, firstly, constructed as a *performative* event and, secondly, because it provides a convenient historical delineation, for both the

ANC and Mandela, between youthful, naive incarnations and their subsequent active, experienced and overtly masculinised incarnations.

### 2.3.1.1 Volunteer-in-Chief

At the time of the Defiance Campaign, the dominant narrative was already in the process of being constituted; Mandela, as a prominent member of the Congress Youth League, was already being subjected to, and participating in, the mythologizing of the new, more assertive, youthful and accessible leadership generation. Mandela's title in the Defiance Campaign – “volunteer-in-chief” – is a subtle misnomer which has served to create a lasting popular impression of a politician willing to lead from the front, of Mandela as being the ‘first among equals,’ in contrast to the stereotypical ANC leadership up until that point<sup>30</sup> (Boehmer 36 – 37). However, Mandela's position was, in practise, that of volunteer *co-ordinator*. As such, “volunteer”, refers to those he was charged with co-ordinating, rather than denoting a voluntary position. By contrast, a more accurate title such as “Volunteer co-ordinator” would, for instance, have created an impression of a remove from, and superiority to, the campaign's volunteers. Although these may seem petty historical concerns, the very fact that the title, in its inaccuracy, strongly lends itself to emphasising the sort of assertive, “firebrand” image being developed around Mandela, and the youth league as a whole, warrants closer attention.

Mandela's practical role has, similarly, been subject to misrepresentation: the then-fledgling dominant narrative – subsequently echoed by authors like Anthony Sampson – asserts that the “‘national organisation’ of the campaign was ‘Mandela's achievement’”; this fails to acknowledge, however, that the national coordination was of negligible importance: the National Volunteers Coordinating Council which Mandela headed never met (Lodge 52). In fact, the campaign's greatest success was to be found in the Eastern Cape, where individual branches tended to act on their own initiative (Lodge 52). Likewise, the idea that he campaigned “house-to-house,” engaging in grass-root issues like recruiting and branch-building is also somewhat misleading; rather, his greatest practical contribution was explaining the campaign to middle-echelon leaders and resolving their issues (Lodge 52).

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<sup>30</sup> Mandela constructs Dr A.B. Xuma as representative of this older, more complacent leadership, unwilling to give up his lucrative practise for the struggle

Regardless of objective facts, however, the title – misnomer though it may be – along with popular misconceptions about his role, have served to attribute to him a voluntary ‘leading from the front’ of this crucial campaign<sup>31</sup>. As such, the construction of Mandela during the campaign served as a negation of the increasing divide between newly urban Africans – who largely constituted the leadership of the ANC parent body and who were popularly considered “conservatives and snobs” – and the “ordinary” Africans (Sampson, *Drum* 219) whom they tried to distance themselves from.

Ultimately, however, Mandela’s greatest strength in the Defiance Campaign lay in his prominence as a public personality, lending prestige to the party, the cause and, ultimately, himself (Lodge 53). Mandela revelled in the very limelight which many other ANC officials avoided, “[u]sing opposition journals such as *Liberation* and *Fighting Talk* [to] advocate... his strategy of mobilizing the black masses against apartheid” (Van Dijk 19). The Defiance Campaign, “the most powerful action ever undertaken by the oppressed masses in South Africa,” (Mandela 120) was a groundbreaking black media event, coinciding with the rise of an African-orientated photojournalism. At the time of the Defiance Campaign, “[p]olitics [was beginning] to rival boxing in popularity with [the] readers [of *Drum*]” (Sampson, *Drum* 111); in October 1952, *Drum* published an eight-page photo history of the campaign, which sold a record 65,000 copies (Sampson, *Drum* 111). Politics captured the popular imagination, giving hope, and a focal point for the channelling of a desire for liberation and the right to self-determination. Mandela used the burgeoning African photojournalism, and *Drum* in particular, to popularise the Defiance Campaign, as well as to bolster his personal celebrity. As the public face of this movement, Mandela became inextricably bound with it, representing what amounted to a perfect combination of imagery and association (Sampson, *Drum* 111).

#### 2.3.1.2 The Defiance Campaign and the ANC’s Performativity

The Defiance Campaign has been afforded a considerable rhetorical investment by the dominant, and official, narratives, suggesting the event’s mythologizing is part of

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<sup>31</sup> This thesis does not speculate on whether or not this was a *consciously calculated* misnomer; rather, it serves simply to illustrate the connotative effect of this misnomer, regardless of any specific intent.

a larger narrative construct, especially when considering that the Defiance Campaign could, in many, be described as a failure. It can be argued, for instance, that the government's disproportionate response, more than any action on the part of the ANC and the 'defiers,' won it the widespread acclaim it enjoyed. Sampson argues that the Defiance Campaign would have "collapsed into obscurity" had not been publicised by the display of armed police confronting the "defiers" (Sampson, *Drum* 220). According to Mandela, on the first day of the campaign:

...more than 250 volunteers around the country violated various unjust laws and were imprisoned. It was an auspicious beginning. Our troops were orderly, disciplined, and confident... [and] over the next five months, 8,500 people took part in the campaign. (Mandela 123)

Objectively, this is an unimpressive statistic when one considers that 8500 arrests over a period of five months is an average of around 57 a day. Around 250,000 people a year were being imprisoned in South Africa at this time – mostly Africans – at an average of 685 a day, which renders this figure all-but insignificant (Sampson, *Drum* 150). In 1958, more than 397,000 petty offenders would be arrested for pass law offences alone (Pogrand 114). Although those going to jail were taken from all walks of life, many of whom would generally not end up in prison – "[d]octors, factory workers, lawyers, teachers, students [and] ministers" (Mandela 123) – their numbers could not have posed any great threat to the running of the nation's prisons. Although Mandela and other ANC leaders liked to paint themselves as "professional revolutionaries" who must "never be against the mass movement of the people", they promoted restraint at a more practical level (Lodge 59). There was criticism of the ANC's conservative strategy during the Defiance Campaign, particularly with reference to their selective recruitment and training, as well as their tendency to wait for a group of defiers to be released before the next group defied (Lodge 59).

For the Mandela of the official narrative, however, the Defiance Campaign provides a clear dividing line between disparate incarnations of himself, between his more hard-line Africanist stance and his advocacy of non-racialism<sup>32</sup>. For the ANC, too, it

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<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the ANC's campaign against the Sophiatown removals – a complete practical failure – was appropriated by Mandela as a platform and justification for the advocacy of violent resistance. In a June 1953 speech, Mandela called non-violence useless, advocating

provides a renewed rhetorical embrace of multi-racial resistance. On 30 August, 1952, Mandela published an article in *Drum*, titled “We Defy – 10,000 volunteers protest against unjust laws.” In it, he states that:

[The ANC] welcome[s] true-hearted volunteers from all walks of life without consideration of colour, race or creed. Europeans can also join [their] ranks to defy these unjust laws... [and] *unity between the Africans, Indians and coloured people has now become a living reality.* (Mandela, “We Defy” n.pag.; emphasis added)

The ANC echoes this sentiment, framing it as a catalytic event which allowed for a truly multi-racial resistance in South Africa, resulting, almost inevitably, in the Freedom Charter<sup>33</sup>:

[t]he Defiance Campaign was the beginning of a mass movement of resistance to apartheid.... It brought closer co-operation between the ANC and the SA Indian Congress, swelled their membership and also led to the formation of new organisations; the SA Coloured People’s Organisation (SACPO) and the Congress of Democrats (COD), an organisation of white democrats... [t]hese organisations, together with the SA Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) formed the Congress Alliance. The Congress Alliance came together to organise the Congress of the people – a conference of all the people of South Africa – which presented people’s demands for the kind of South Africa they wanted. (“A Brief History” n. pag.)

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the abandonment of passive resistance. Despite the ANC’s fiery campaigning, including the slogan “Over Our Dead Bodies,” the ANC had “no real strategy for resistance” beyond a few palliative attempts at relocating families (Sampson, *Drum* 220; Mandela 153-154). On the day, Mandela told Joe Modise and his 500 volunteers to stand down (Mandela 153-154). As such, the Sophiatown removals were, like the Defiance Campaign, more a site for campaigning and garnering support, rather than a practical attempt at resistance.

<sup>33</sup> The Freedom Charter was a document drawn up as a result of the National Action Council for the Congress of the People – established by the ANC and its ally organisations - collecting and collating the demands of the people (Lodge 65). The Congress of the People saw 3000 delegates meeting and voting in favour of each clause on 26 and 27 June 1956. The meeting was broken up on the second day on suspicion of treason. The resultant marathon Treason Trial served to further legitimise the ANC-led coalition of parties as a threat to the Apartheid government. The Freedom Charter affirmed Africa’s multiracial nature, and led to an Orlando-based Africanist ANC contingent breaking off to form the PAC (Lodge 66).



The interracial cooperation it marked, especially between Indians and Africans, is said to have troubled the government to the point where

[t]he minister of justice announced that he would soon pass legislation to deal with [their] defiance, a threat he implemented... with the passage of the Public Safety Act, which empowered the government to declare martial law and to detain people without trial, and the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, which authorized corporal punishment for defiers. (Mandela 124)

Mandela's framing of the Defiance Campaign also integrates it into the historical narrative of African battles for emancipation. This is most clearly evidenced by his use of military parlance: "Our *troops* were orderly, disciplined, and confident... [and] [t]he ANC emerged as a truly mass-based organization *with an impressive corps of experienced activists* who had braved the police, the courts, and the jails" (Mandela 129; emphasis added). Mandela, in painting the Defiance Campaign as a military action, can use it to distance the ANC from the relatively sedentary period which preceded it, stating that "[p]rior to the campaign, the ANC was more talk than action," indentifying it as a marker of progression for both the ANC and himself (Mandela 129). The Defiance Campaign is not only constructed as demarcating a historical junction between an African-orientated struggle and an embrace of multi-racialism, but also as heralding a more assertive, active period in the liberation struggle:

[a]t the ANC annual conference at the end of 1952, there was a changing of the guard. The ANC designated a new, more vigorous president for a new, more activist era: Chief Albert Luthuli. In accordance with the ANC constitution, as provisional president of the Transvaal, [Mandela] became one of the four deputy presidents. Furthermore, the National Executive Committee appointed [him] as first deputy president, in addition to [his] position as president of the Transvaal ANC. (Mandela 133)

Mandela's ascent through the ranks therefore coincides with the advent of the ANC's "more activist era" (Mandela 133), again reinforcing the associations with him as a more militant, 'firebrand' activist. Moreover, the Defiance Campaign forms part of Mandela's personal development throughout the text, and is constructed as a personal victory for him, a militant-political rite of passage which goes beyond his election to the presidency of the TANC:



I... felt a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction: I had been engaged in a just cause and had the strength to fight for it and win. The campaign freed me from any lingering sense of doubt or inferiority I might still have felt; it liberated me from the feeling of being overwhelmed by the power and seeming invincibility of the white man and his institutions. But now the white man had felt the power of my punches and I could walk upright like a man, and look everyone in the eye with the dignity that comes from not having succumbed to oppression and fear. I had come of age as a freedom fighter. (Mandela 130)

Mandela here claims a personal agency, framing his political development as a rite of passage, forming a continuation of the theme of a reclaiming of masculinity, represented here by the metaphor of boxing,<sup>34</sup> stating that the “white man had felt the power of [his] punches” (Mandela 130). Thus, he presents the reader with the culmination<sup>35</sup> of the years of ‘training’ he has undergone as a fighter, from his early youth as a stick-fighter, then as a boxer and, finally, as a political activist. This claiming of masculinity within the realm of political struggle also serves as a vindication of his independence from traditional structures. Where the traditional rites of passage he underwent failed, their promise negated by South Africa’s racial policies, politics have triumphed, allowing him to truly take his place as a man; for the inherently political Mandela of the dominant narrative, this is his real “com[ing] of age” (Mandela 130). For Mandela, the Defiance Campaign also legitimizes the liberation struggle as a whole, seeing the government’s disproportionate reaction as evidence that it viewed them as a “threat to its security and its policy of apartheid” (Mandela 124). As such, the government’s reaction has contributed to legitimizing the struggle not only in the eyes of the public, but for Mandela himself.

Finally, the Defiance Campaign is credited with galvanising support for the ANC and the liberation struggle as a whole. Before the campaign, the ANC had “no paid organizers, no staff, and a membership that did little more than pay lip service to [its] cause. As a result of the campaign, [however, its] membership swelled to 100,000” (Mandela 129). As such, the achievement of multi-racial cooperation, the advent and

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<sup>34</sup> A metaphor which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter

<sup>35</sup> Naturally a temporary one, to be succeeded and superseded by to further “culminations” throughout the text

legitimization of a more militant mass struggle and the bolstering of the ANC's ranks are constructed as being the *de facto* goals of the Defiance Campaign; these were, however, not its *stated* aims. In "We Defy," written at the time of the campaign, Mandela propagates the contemporary rhetorical aims of the campaign, promising his readers that:

[t]hough it takes [them] years, *[they] are prepared to continue the Campaign until the six unjust laws [they] have chosen for the present phase are done away with.* Even then [they will] not stop. The struggle for the freedom and national independence of the non-European people shall continue as [long as] the National Planning Council sees fit. (Mandela, "We Defy" n. pag.)

This stated aim is never achieved; in fact, Mandela asserts in *Long Walk to Freedom* that:

[t]he six laws we singled out were not overturned; *but we never had any illusion that they would be.* We selected them as the most immediate burden pressing on the lives of the people, and the best way to engage the greatest number of people in the struggle... [s]ome within the ANC had unrealistic expectations and were convinced that the campaign could topple the government. We reminded them that the idea of the campaign was to focus attention on our grievances, not eradicate them. (Mandela 129; emphasis added)

The evident contrasts between these texts emphasises the performative nature of the rhetoric and propaganda which the ANC had constructed around the campaign: the *ostensible* goal of the campaign – the repeal six unjust laws – is a means of attaining its *actual* goal, i.e. disseminating the grievances of Africans and garnering support for the ANC. Ultimately, "[t]he campaign received an enormous amount of publicity," says Mandela, "and the membership of the ANC shot up from some 20,000 to 100,000" (123). Rather than explicitly engaging with what seems to be a core failure, Mandela paints their increased membership as being indicative of a new-found legitimacy, both for the ANC and the liberation struggle as a whole. As such, the Defiance Campaign, though it failed in its stated or *explicit* aims, is constructed as a victory because it achieved its *implicit* aims.

Considering Mandela's assertion that they never really expected the laws to be repealed, the entire Defiance Campaign can be read as a performative event, a visual correlative and introduction to the ANC's 'new' embrace of multi-racialism<sup>36</sup>. Thus, for Mandela, this key event is mirrored on a personal level; the divide constructed between the ANC's past and its subsequent multi-racial focus is concurrent to Mandela's own. The politically "immature" philosophies which dominated Mandela's early political thinking are subsequently taken up by the PAC, who provide *others* for Mandela and the ANC as a whole, representing the embodiment of their discarded philosophies<sup>37</sup> (Mandela 215). The Defiance Campaign's integration into the theme of progress and maturation for both Mandela and the ANC is emphasised when he states that, though they "made many mistakes... the Defiance Campaign marked *a new chapter in the struggle*" (Mandela 129), forming part of the narrative of progress and maturation of both Mandela and the ANC as a whole.

### 2.3.1.3 The Breaking Off of the PAC

For Mandela, and the ANC in general, the PAC is a convenient political other to construct themselves in contrast to; the construction of the PAC as adhering to redundant and archaic ANC policies facilitates the ANC's construction of itself as politically advanced, mature and disciplined. For the ANC, as has been said, the Freedom Charter's adoption was a moment of culmination, of progressing beyond naïve youthfulness. The PAC, by continuing along lines closer to Lembede's Africanist project (Boehmer 41-43), which had originally informed the formation of the CYL, are constructed by the ANC as politically immature. As such, the PAC provides, for the ANC, a convenient *other*, the embodiment of their discarded policies. The reflection of this view in literature, though only obliquely present in *Long Walk to Freedom*, was a common political-literary strategy throughout the development of the dominant ideology, and is well-represented in Indres Naidoo's *Island in Chains*. At the time of Robben Island's adoption as an Apartheid prison, the overwhelming majority of its political prisoners were PAC (Pogrud 192), and their initial successful galvanisation of the liberation struggle, their raising of the

<sup>36</sup> Again, although this thesis does not speculate on whether this was intended, it is, objectively, how it has subsequently been constructed.

<sup>37</sup> This will be discussed later in this thesis.

international community's awareness of the situation in South Africa, and their popularity throughout the rest of Africa posed a threat to the ANC's dominance of the liberation struggle.

The Sharpeville massacre on 21 March, 1960, was a direct result of the PAC's anti-pass campaign, which saw numerous members burning their passbooks (Lodge 81). The ANC's pass-burning campaign looked tame by comparison, and their actions – including Mandela burning his pass “in front of specially invited journalists” (Lodge 82) – seemed to be more focussed on saving face and keeping the ANC relevant than effecting change (see figure 1). As such, the construction of the PAC as inferior served a contemporary political purpose, the need for which had largely dissipated by the time of *Long Walk to Freedom*'s publication. As such, a brief close-reading of Naidoo's construction of the PAC, in comparison to Mandela's more restrained – though still obviously negative construction – is of interest.



Figure 1

Mandela burning his pass in 1960<sup>38</sup>

Naidoo's primary literary device in this regard is the inversion of sites traditionally reserved for representations of political solidarity – such as the plays put on by prisoners, as well as sporting activities – and appropriating them as sites for the enumeration of political difference. Their respective cultural endeavours are constructed as representing their differing levels of political relevance and legitimacy. Naidoo states that the PAC's plays “offered so little about suffering and oppression in

<sup>38</sup> For a full list of illustrations, see bibliography.

SA, never showing the way forward, never giving them courage to fight, or showing a way out (Naidoo 226). Despite good acting and beautiful singing, they “always felt empty” watching the PAC plays (Naidoo 226 – 227), reflecting the ANC’s view of the PAC’s policies as superficially appealing but empty, such as their much-criticised “Freedom in 1963” campaign (Mandela 215). The ANC’s plays, by contrast, “united [them], inspired [them], made [them] feel warm to each other, and part of a struggle that was worldwide and was winning its own victories” (Naidoo 226 - 227). As such, what is generally a site for transcending political differences<sup>39</sup> is constructed as a site of political conflict.

Similarly, their respective attempts at gaining the right to play soccer are constructed as a site of conflict, and of highlighting the ANC’s moral and organisational superiority to the PAC. When the PAC prisoners are allowed to play soccer, they return excited, “completely insensitive” to the feelings of the ANC men who had not been afforded this opportunity (Naidoo 218). Naidoo claims that, when ANC members later gain the right to play soccer, members of the PAC quietly made derisive comments during the resultant game, claiming that without the PAC the game will be a fiasco (Naidoo 218-220). This seems to be only tenuously grounded in reality, for the game was attended by over a thousand enthusiastically cheering prisoners; how he heard these muttered comments is not explained. Naidoo then asserts that the ANC were unhappy about inter-party split in the soccer league, suggesting that the teams become integrated (222). Therefore, after asserting the PAC’s personal and political immaturity, he asserts the ANC’s willingness to reconcile, to magnanimously allow the PAC to join with them. Naidoo constructs this magnanimity as slowly eroding the PAC’s resentment, while concurrently asserting the ANC’s exclusive legitimacy as a political party, saying that “[h]undreds of spectators watched, and the PAC people did not even think of themselves as PAC – they were just prisoners *watching along with us*” (Naidoo 233; emphasis added). For Naidoo, then, the ANC constitutes the body of political prisoners, with the PAC functioning as a cast of ancillary characters. The antagonistic PAC has been won over by the ANC’s magnanimity, which has allowed them to feel as though they were

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<sup>39</sup> A good example of this is in Moses Dlamini’s *Hellhole*, where the respective parties’ choirs are supported by an objective crowd of political prisoners, with victory being awarded based on merit.

included by the ANC, who are constructed as constituting the body of political prisoners.

This magnanimity does not, however, extend to the political realm, as the PAC, as has been said, is constructed as embodying the policies the ANC had rhetorically progressed beyond. Naidoo states that, “[p]olitically, there was never any chance of uniting with the PAC; their whole philosophy was totally opposed to the ANC vision of a truly liberated and non-racial society (229).” It is only when a PAC member acts in concordance with the ANC that he is credited with being “politically disciplined” (Naidoo 89). This political discipline is one of the characteristics by which ANC members define themselves<sup>40</sup>, necessitated by their investment in martial forms of traditional masculinity. Naidoo mentions that, although several PAC members – demoralized by stories of ANC’s advanced preparations and growing strength, as well as the superior media coverage of the “ANC terrorists” – wanted to switch over to the ANC during their imprisonment, the ANC asserted that prison was not the place for such a conversion, and that this step should be taken outside of prison (Naidoo 230). This is not only in contrast to Mandela’s political philosophies, which Naidoo repeatedly asserts his adherence to – in this instance, his view of the ANC as a “great tent that included as many people as possible” (Mandela 177) – but is also historically inaccurate.

As such, Naidoo’s account, written at a time of active competition with the PAC, aggressively propounds the ANC’s rhetoric around political maturity, resulting in an account which incongruously promotes political exclusion while emphasising unity and inclusiveness. Mandela’s account, written at a time of consolidation, seeks again to frame a shortcoming on the part of the ANC – here, its then-inability to match the PAC’s activism and popularity – as a sign of strength and political moderation. The PAC serves as another marker in the text of Mandela’s progression beyond the faults of his youth as he projects onto them shortcomings of his own either acknowledged or implied throughout the text:

I found the views and the behaviour of the PAC immature... [as one gets older and] one matures and regards some of the views of one’s youth as

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<sup>40</sup> Exemplified by Mandela’s post-release speech in 1990, where he asserted that he is a “disciplined member” of the ANC

undeveloped and callow. While I sympathized with the views of the Africanists and once shared many of them, I believed that the freedom struggle required one to make compromises and accept the kind of discipline that one resisted as a younger, more impulsive man. (Mandela 215)

As such, this single paragraph serves to remove Mandela from the often-reckless excesses, as well as the shortcomings, of his youth, projecting these onto the PAC. Furthermore, the integration of the ANC's shortcomings during the Defiance Campaign and Sophiatown removals is facilitated by his construction of the PAC as making these mistakes at a time when the ANC has moved beyond them:

[t]he PAC put forward a dramatic and overambitious program that promised quick solutions. Their most dramatic — and naïve — promise was that liberation would be achieved by the end of 1963, and they urged Africans to ready themselves for that historic hour. 'In 1960 we take our first step,' they promised, 'in 1963, our last towards freedom and independence.' Although this prediction inspired hope and enthusiasm among people who were tired of waiting, it is always dangerous for an organization to make promises it cannot keep. (Mandela 215-216)

Mandela is, therefore, attributing to the PAC the same rhetoric which the ANC had employed to excuse their failure to achieve their stated aims during the Defiance Campaign. Similarly, the project Mandela had played a role in, of boycotting or disrupting the political activities of other parties, is taken over by the PAC:

[w]hile we welcomed anyone brought into the struggle by the PAC, the role of the organization was almost always that of a spoiler. They divided the people at a critical moment, and that was hard to forget. They would ask the people to go to work when we called a general strike, and make misleading statements to counter any pronouncement we would make. (216)

It is relevant here to recall that an early interparty cooperative attempt to win the extension of the franchise to all black South Africans – the First Transvaal and Orange Free State Peoples Assembly for Votes for All – was abandoned by the ANC when it became clear that the ANC would not be leading the campaign. Mandela's "idea at the time was that the ANC should be involved only in campaigns that the



ANC itself led [and he] was more concerned with who got the credit than whether the campaign would be successful” (Mandela 103). As late as 1950, Mandela – along with other African nationalists – had been involved in “breaking up meetings of ANC and SAIC communists... ‘tearing up posters and capturing the microphone’” (Boehmer 95). The fault of dividing the people, which the ANC, and Mandela himself, had been guilty of, comes, therefore, to be transferred to the PAC.

Mandela then continues, showing the same political strategy as Naidoo, following his critique of the PAC with an expression of a desire to unite with them:

[y]et the PAC aroused in me the hope that even though the founders were breakaway ANC men, unity between our two groups was possible. I thought that once the heated polemics had cooled, the essential commonality of the struggle would bring us together. Animated by this belief, I paid particular attention to their policy statement and activities, with the idea of finding affinities rather than differences. (216)

As such, Mandela is giving out a self-contradictory message, concurrently emphasising the ANC’s willingness to potentially ally with the PAC, while justifying their separation from them. Therefore, for both dominant narrative – as represented by Naidoo – and the official narrative, the PAC provides a convenient political other which to construct the ANC in contrast to. Although the agenda between the two texts is different – the dominant ideology emphasising the ANC’s claim to being the dominant liberation party in South Africa, and the official narrative emphasising a willingness to reconcile with them, despite their political ‘immaturity’ – they both serve to emphasise the ANC’s magnanimity, and their movement beyond the immaturity of their ‘youth.’

Mandela and Naidoo are then, in their literary construction of the ANC as being magnanimous and politically mature, concurrently constructing themselves – as members of the ANC – as embodying these same characteristics. Unlike Naidoo, however, whose construction of himself in relation to his party is an expression of his being subsumed by it, Mandela’s construction of himself emphasises an innate individuality, at once of his party and distinguished from it. In fact, Mandela’s considerable personal prestige – as Xhosa royalty, lawyer and political advocate,



amongst other elements – would come, in time, to serve the inverse purpose, with him lending prestige to, and ultimately defining, his parent party.

## 2.4 Mandela and African Photojournalism

Mandela, as the embodiment of the image of an educated, empowered African man, rooted in tradition but invested in a modern, urban identity, proved to be a great asset to the ANC; the promotion of him as an individual served to lend legitimacy and prestige to his parent party. Mandela's emergence as a public figure and his development of his public identity was concurrent with, and facilitated by, the development of this African-orientated photojournalism, best represented by *Drum* magazine. *Drum*, originally known as *African Drum*, was a pioneering instance of photo-journalism aimed both at Africans in South Africa, as well as a pan-African readership, and its development was influenced by – and, concurrently, served to influence – the desire for a modern, uniquely African identity (Boehmer 118). Mandela embodied all that was desirable in this new African identity, combining the stature and respectability of his legal training with an old-world prestige and a powerful political leadership. His embodiment of this uniquely modern African identity also came at a time when the ANC's rhetoric around leadership was focussed on youth, virility and self-determination, which allowed him to become a popular embodiment of this leadership ideal, especially powerful as it occurred at a time when African men were being ever-more aggressively emasculated.

### 2.4.1 Beyond Heritage: *Drum* and the Search for an Urban African Identity

Although Mandela's patrician prestige won him some admiration on his arrival in Johannesburg, it would, in part, be his willingness to develop *beyond* this heritage that would earn him much of his appeal. Sampson, who took over the editorship of *Drum* after its fourth issue, argues that its initial run presented a skewed European vision of what Africans wanted, and needed, to read, reflecting the identity which Europeans felt that they should embody (Sampson, *Drum* 4). In its first few issues, *Drum* featured stories and poems in addition to articles on the "Music of the Tribes" and a segment entitled "Know Yourself" (Sampson, *Drum* 3), detailing the histories of the Bantu tribes. The government sent copies of *Drum* to their information offices abroad as examples of Bantu achievements (Sampson, *Drum* 4). In Johannesburg, however, a city which was at this time, in the words of Sampson,

“fast, tough, rich, vulgar, new, and proud of it” (Sampson, *Drum* 4), the magazine’s circulation remained disappointingly low. Sampson recalls being confronted by a ‘non-reader’ who expressed the sentiments of those *Drum* failed to appeal to:

Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don’t care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars... anything American. You can cut out this junk about kraals and folk tales and Basutos in blankets – forget it! You’re just trying to keep us backward, that’s what! Tell us what’s happening right here, man, on the reef!” (Sampson, *Drum* 7)

Sampson argues that the Nationalists and white liberal were, at this time, essentially pushing the same agenda: by denying Africans education and admission to centres of modernity, the nationalists were ensuring that industry would have a vast supply of cheap labour; concurrently, white liberals were loathe to see Africans reject their traditional identities, fostering an idealised and sentimental view of African tribalism, seeing it as somehow representative of a lost cultural “youth” or “childhood,” of a simplicity and purity lacking from the modern West. Even well-meaning white sympathisers wondered why they would want to live in slums, half-African, half-Westernised. Africans, by contrast, saw the homelands as “impoverished” and “backwards” (Sampson, *Drum* 9). Although seemingly altruistic, this desire to grant Africans a ‘traditional’ identity, independent of the normative South African identity, supported the project to deny them a self-determined identity. By propagating this traditional, rural African identity, *Drum* made itself suspect of having, in the words of Job Rathebe, “the white hand on it,” representing “what white men [wanted] Africans to be, not what they [were]” (qtd. in Sampson, *Drum* 7); Rathebe says that Africans, conversely, were “trying to get away from [their] tribal history just as fast as [they could]” (qtd. in Sampson, *Drum* 7). Urban Africans in the early 1950s were desperately seeking to adopt an identity derivative, yet independent, of the Western identities they were being exposed to. In short, they wanted to be “‘let in on’ the Western world,” on their own terms (qtd. in Sampson, *Drum* 8). What they wanted, said Rathebe, was “a paper which [belonged] to [them] – a real black paper” (qtd. in Sampson, *Drum* 7). *Drum* would help to foster a sense of an exciting, vibrant African modernity along glamorous American lines, publishing pictures showing urban African life, including gangs, duels, drug dealers and beauty queens, all largely unexplored before (Sampson, *Drum* 16). As Boehmer states,

[Mandela's] showcasing as the archetypal African cosmopolitan and bespoke nationalist politician is... to a degree attributable to the efforts of the talented and widely accessible *Drum* generation of writers... as aware of the importance of self-presentation as of self-representation, of black style as of black pride, the smart politician with the film-star smile appeared as a *definitive leader* in so far as he was *also* an unparalleled *urban sophisticate*. (118 – 119)

Although *Drum* sought to capture the image of this burgeoning urban African identity in its pages, the “African African”, i.e. the African untouched by Western civilisation, remained its “ultimate” target; Sampson saw rural, unsophisticated Africans embodying the emotional and cultural core of their modernised, urban counterparts (Sampson, *Drum* 93). Sampson refers to an “aaaah” of recognition which he looked for when watching a rural African page through a copy of *Drum* (Sampson, *Drum* 93); this sound, he believed, indicated the recognition of the self in *Drum*. He sought to communicate through a visual medium, creating images which they could relate to at a visceral, emotional level. There were several images which Sampson considered integral to achieving the “aaah” of recognition and solidarity in any given issue of *Drum*, what he called the “Me in *Drum*” effect (Sampson, *Drum* 95): the effect of an often unprecedented visual representation of an authentic personal identity. These visual images were integral to crossing the barriers of literacy, and Mandela would derive much of his popularity from his public embodiment of just this identity. The elements which Mandela best embodied were: the boxer, the successful African businessman, the African political leader and the African hero in an idealised domestic environment.

## 2.4.2 Visual Archetypes

### 2.4.2.1 Boxing

Before being superseded by politics, boxing was the pastime which most interested the *Drum* readership (Sampson, *Drum* 111). For Sampson, one of the images which evoked strong, positive reactions among his readership was the “African boxing champ, stepping under the ropes into the ring, with a sea of black faces gazing behind him, smiling confidently, swathed in a silk dressing-gown, a symbol of black power and achievement...” (*Drum* 95). As a figure of black power, the boxer became,

for the average African male, a means of projecting onto himself the masculinity otherwise denied him by Apartheid structures. Mandela, as a boxer himself, embodied this image. As with his spell as the Black Pimpernel<sup>41</sup>, Mandela, as a boxer (figures 2 and 3), embodied an idealised incarnation of the black South African male. This idealised image of the boxer stood in stark contrast to the reality for many black African boxers, who,

...like all black athletes and artists, were shackled by the twin handicaps of poverty and racism. What money an African boxer earned was typically used on food, rent, clothing, and whatever was left went to boxing equipment and training. He was denied the opportunity of belonging to the white boxing clubs that had the equipment and trainers necessary to produce a first-rate, world-class boxer. Unlike white professional boxers, African professional boxers had full-time day jobs. Sparring partners were few and poorly paid; without proper drilling and practice, the performance greatly suffered. Yet a number of African fighters were able to triumph over these difficulties and achieve great success. Boxers like Elijah (Maestro) Mokone, Enoch (Schoolboy) Nhlapo, Kangaroo Maoto, one of the greatest stylists of the ring, Levi (Golden Boy) Madi, Nkosana Mgxaji, Mackeed Mofokeng, and Norman Sekgapane, all won great victories, while Jake Tuli, our greatest hero, won the British and Empire flyweight title. He was the most eloquent example of what African boxers could achieve if given the opportunity. (Mandela 181-182)

As such, boxers were symbols of the African struggle to triumph over adversity but, at the same time, could lend the comparatively affluent Mandela connotations of being 'one of the people,' an idealised everyman. Mandela revelled in this image, evidenced by the photograph of him sparring with Jerry Moloi on top of a Johannesburg building, which was shot for publication in *Drum* magazine (figure 3). As such, Mandela – both consciously and incidentally – was garnering connotations of African masculinity, virility and triumph through the fledgling African photojournalism, communicating symbolically through the images he embodied.

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<sup>41</sup> Which will be discussed later in this chapter

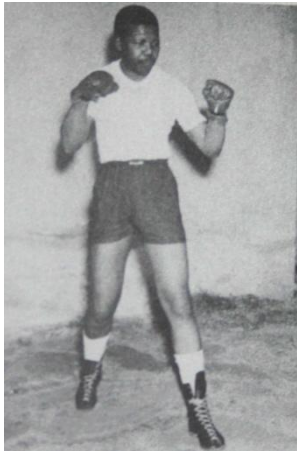


Figure 2

Mandela the Boxer



Figure 3

Mandela sparring with Jerry Moloi

#### 2.4.3.1.1 Boxing as Part of Theme of Combat in *Long Walk to Freedom*

Boxing forms an integral part of the theme of fighting and conflict which runs through *Long Walk to Freedom*, which serves to integrate the progression of Mandela's combativeness into his greater personal development. Even though his militancy and support of violent political struggle are broadly considered historically justifiable, the conflict between Mandela's peaceful nature and militancy never sat comfortably in the dominant narrative, with individual retellings opting to emphasise either one or the other. As such, the official narrative constructs his militancy as forming an expression of his traditional identity and pride, as inherent to him as the idyllic surroundings of his youth, inextricably linked to old-world rituals of community and masculine pride. For Mandela, his combativeness is divided into several epochs, beginning with his early stick fighting, and progressing to his boxing, political struggle, military training, prison negotiations and, ultimately, his negotiations with the apartheid government. In representing a resistance to the depiction of the African male as emasculated, his combativeness is linked to his asserting his masculine agency, and of reclaiming the promises of African tribalism denied them by colonialism.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> This forms the inverse of Mandela's appropriation of the garden as a metaphor: while the garden, which carries connotations of growth and nurturing, is re-appropriated by Mandela as a site of masculine self-assertion and leadership (Roux), Mandela takes the metaphor of

From the outset, Mandela's sense of self-worth is largely defined by his masculine combativeness, and his personal development is constructed as being represented by the progression of the modes of combat which he engages in, forming an 'emotional core' which counterpoints the Western forms of prestige he expresses an admiration for. Mandela's exposure to Jongintaba and his court marks a catalytic, transitional moment for him. He feels "like a sapling pulled root and branch from the earth and flung into the centre of a stream whose strong current [he can] not resist," marking his progression beyond the point where he "had no thoughts of anything but [his] own pleasures [and] no higher ambition than to eat well and *become a champion stick-fighter*" (Mandela 16). Jongintaba's Ford V8 and European suit are, for the young Mandela, "impressive sign[s] of his power... wealth and authority," (Guiloinéau 58) and a new world of "money... class... fame [and] power... open[s] before [him]" (Mandela 16); he sees, in short, that "that life might hold more for [him] than being a champion stick-fighter" (Mandela 16). Banabakhe Blayi embodies an early expression of this ideal for the young Rolihlahla, as he is not only the wealthiest and most popular boy in the circumcision school, with numerous girlfriends, but is, crucially, a "champion stick-fighter"; and, seemingly even more impressive, he has been to Johannesburg (Mandela 24). As such, traditional values – represented here by being a "champion stick-fighter", i.e. engaging in a mode of combat rooted in a masculinised, militant lineage – are defined as being at the core of Mandela's value system, to be augmented by, but always measured against, other (Western) forms of power, personal agency and prestige.

Furthermore, stick-fighting is established early in *Long Walk to Freedom* as a site for the development of a sense of brotherhood and community. Mandela asserts that

[he] spent most of [his] free time in the veld playing and fighting with the other boys of the village. A boy who remained at home tied to his mother's apron strings was regarded as a sissy. At night, [he] shared [his] food and blanket with these same boys. (Mandela 9)

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combat and re-appropriates it as a benign, pastoral symbol, inextricably linked with the love for nature he acquired as a boy.

As such, engaging in these activities constitutes an expression of masculinity, of not being “a sissy,” allowing a boy to enter into an alternative space of nurturing and security, “shar[ing his] food and blanket” with the other boys, rather than being “tied to his mother’s apron strings” (Mandela 9) *Thinti*, the most popular of the boys’ games, is a “youthful approximation of war”; the practice of this game is concurrent to the development of their communal identity (Mandela 10). As the boys grow older, they “organiz[e] matches against boys from neighbouring villages... [and] those who distinguish... themselves in these fraternal battles [are] greatly admired, as generals who achieve great victories in war are justly celebrated” (Mandela 10). As such, Mandela establishes this “youthful approximation of war” as a site where one’s personal development is reflected in the mode and stakes of combat, promoting ideas of military prestige, of strategic combat as a site for glory and pride. Therefore, the resistance struggle is prefigured by, and constructed as a continuation or extension of, this idyllic, inherent sense of community and brotherhood. After the Defiance Campaign, for instance, Mandela states that

[i]t was the first time [he] had taken a significant part in a national campaign, and [he] felt the exhilaration that springs from the success of a well-planned battle against the enemy and the sense of *comradeship* that is born of fighting against formidable odds. (Mandela 111)

As such, for Mandela, his political engagements evoke the idyllic camaraderie of his youth. The violence of Mandela’s early youth is interwoven with, and constructed as inherent to, the idyllic spaces of his youth:

[i]t was in the fields that I learned how to knock birds out of the sky with a slingshot, to gather wild honey and fruits and edible roots, to drink warm, sweet milk straight from the udder of a cow, to swim in the clear, cold streams, and to catch fish with twine and sharpened bits of wire. I learned to stick-fight — essential knowledge to any rural African boy — and became adept at its various techniques, parrying blows, feinting in one direction and striking in another, breaking away from an opponent with quick footwork. From these days I date my love of the veld, of open spaces, the simple beauties of nature, the clean line of the horizon. (Mandela 12)



His techniques and proficiency in this combative practice are, therefore, connoted to the idealised spaces of his youth, constructing it as being as inherent to him as his love of nature. This tendency to naturalise and idealise his youthful combat training is further developed by creating connotations with a nurturing maternalism. *Thinti* is, for instance, concurrent with a nurturing mythology which is an interweaving of maternal and paternal influences:

[a]fter games such as these, I would return to my mother's kraal where she was preparing supper. Whereas my father once told stories of historic battles and heroic Xhosa warriors, my mother would enchant us with Xhosa legends and fables that had come down from numberless generations. These tales stimulated my childish imagination, and usually contained some moral lesson. (Mandela 10-11)

The prestige of warfare is, therefore, established as being concurrent with a repository of Xhosa myths and fables, establishing, in their association with his mother, the cherished, nurturing and maternal role which these stories serve. As such, Mandela inextricably links and interweaves the idea of combat as a means of asserting a masculine agency with the mythical underpinnings of his cultural heritage. As such, for Mandela, the ultimate expression of his cultural identity is to be found in mythical tales of African warriors. The official narrative establishes the idea of Mandela as a warrior engaging in combat, and of this forming a natural progression from his authentic rural boyhood, and the narrative discourse of warrior pride and masculine agency; concurrently, it interweaves this with ideas of cultural heritage and pride expressed through nurturing maternal myths. As such, as Mandela's official narrative traces a path from his stick-fighting, to boxing, to political activism, to negotiating prison conditions to his negotiations with his government, he is constructing himself as part of that same heritage which inspired him and which is constantly evoked as a means of asserting cultural pride and legitimacy.

In referring to the military training he underwent while abroad in 1962 (see figure 4) he further interweaves combat and rustic imagery, re-appropriating violence and its connotations, rendering it benign by connoting it to rustic idyll. He states that

[w]hat [he] enjoyed most were the "fatigue marches" in which [one is] equipped with only a gun, bullets, and some water, and [one] must reach a



distant point within a certain time. During these marches [he] got a sense of the landscape, which was very beautiful, with dense forests and spare highlands. The country was extremely backward: people used wooden plows and lived on a very simple diet supplemented by home-brewed beer. Their existence was similar to the life in rural South Africa; poor people everywhere are more alike than they are different. (Mandela 293)



Figure 4

Mandela the militant revolutionary (second from left) in Algeria in 1962

Elsewhere, Mandela credits this military training with having “made [him] a man” (Suttner 209). As such, as with his earlier stick-fighting, the rural and the combative are interwoven, reinforcing the thread which runs throughout the text, linking Mandela’s combat with his reclamation of cultural pride, identity, self-determination and, ultimately, masculinity.

In addition to the connoting of violence with this sort of idyll, Mandela’s adoption of increasing violence is constructed as being against his inherent nature. When he takes up boxing at Healdtown, for instance, is it a “sport which [he] seem[s] less suited for” than long-distance running (Mandela 37). Boxing for him is less about an enjoyment of violence than the “science of it... [he is] intrigued by how one move[s] one’s body to protect oneself, how one use[s] a strategy both to attack and retreat, how one pace[s] oneself over a match (Mandela 180). Mandela later portrays himself as similarly unsuited to military training:

I was now embarking on what was to be the most unfamiliar part of my trip: military training. I had arranged to receive six months of training in Addis

Ababa...where I was to learn the art and science of soldiering. While I was a fair amateur boxer, I had very little knowledge of even the rudiments of combat. (Mandela 292 - 293)

This serves to ease, for the official narrative, the conflicting symbolism presented by Mandela as both a man of peace and reconciliation, and a militant revolutionary. This is helped by the fact that, although Mandela was present for MK's first test bomb detonation, he was not directly involved in any sabotage (Lodge 95).

Politics are implicitly constructed as being the next logical step in the development of Mandela's combativeness:

[a]lthough I had boxed a bit at Fort Hare, it was not until I had lived in Johannesburg that I took up the sport in earnest... Boxing is egalitarian. In the ring, rank, age, color, and wealth are irrelevant. When you are circling your opponent, probing his strengths and weaknesses, you are not thinking about his color or social status. I never did any real fighting after I entered politics. (Mandela 180)

Boxing is a site where Mandela can assert his masculinity and individual agency; politics, as the succeeding mode of combat, replaces it, marking the next stage in his personal and political progression. Combat in its various guises is established as a means of self-betterment, of facilitating Mandela's personal and political progression, maturation and self-empowerment. The implicit link between boxing and politics, for instance, is emphasised when Mandela frames the conflict at his boxing club within political discourse:

I soon became involved in mediating a bitter political dispute right in Johannesburg. It pitted two sides against each other, both of which were seeking my support... [both had] legitimate grievances and each side was implacably opposed to the other. The altercation threatened to descend into an acrimonious civil war, and I did my best to prevent a rupture. I am speaking, of course, of the struggle at the boxing and weight lifting club at the Donaldson Orlando Community Center where I trained almost every evening. (179)

The metaphor becomes even more prominent when the reader finds that he has been politically conscientising his son, Thembi, at the same time as he has been introducing him to boxing. He has been taking Thembi with him “[f]or the pre[ceding] few years” and by this point, 1956, when he is ten years old, “he [is] a keen if spindly paperweight boxer” (Mandela 179). This is the year after Evelyn’s – his first wife – ultimatum to Mandela to choose between her and politics, a conflict which had, in large part, revolved around the children’s education, specifically whether they were to be religious or political. Thembi had by then been a member of the Pioneers, the juvenile division of the ANC, meaning that “he [had] already [been] politically cognizant” (Mandela 192) at the time of the altercation at the club. As such, an implicit link is drawn between boxing and the political conscientisation of his children, which concurrently emphasises the theme of politics as personally empowering. The effects of boxing / political conscientisation are illustrated by Mandela, who says that the fighters

...took turns leading the training sessions in order to develop leadership, initiative, and self-confidence. Thembi particularly enjoyed leading these sessions... [and] he would single Mandela out for criticism... [e]veryone enjoyed [Thembi’s] jibes immensely, and it gave [him] pleasure to see [his] son so happy and confident. (180 - 181)

As such, the empowering qualities of boxing and politics come to be interchangeable, connoting his political activities to this site of masculine agency (see figure 5).



Figure 5

Mandela the political leader

During his trials in 1962 and 1964, Mandela would engage in a symbolic, performative mode of combat, realising that “[he] could carry on the fight even within the fortress of the enemy” (Mandela 304). He consciously came to project himself as the embodiment of Africans’ hopes and aspirations, as a man fighting for his beliefs against an autocratic state, representing “freedom, fairness, and democracy... in a society that dishonored those virtues.” Although he would be sent to prison, he would win a symbolic moral victory, constructing himself as a potent symbol of African disenfranchisement and resistance<sup>43</sup>. His fighting would continue into his prison term, in his negotiations and petitions for improved prison conditions:

Sobukwe responded that prison conditions would not change until the country changed. I completely agreed with this, but I did not see why that ought to prevent us *from fighting in the only realm in which we now could fight*. (Mandela 323; emphasis added)

Eventually, Mandela discovers a new mode of combat, a sort of combative diplomacy in which he engages. Although he tells the government that the time has come “for negotiations, not fighting, and that the government and the ANC should sit down and talk,” these talks would prove to be a form of engagement by other means (Mandela 517). This paradoxical mode of combative non-fighting represents Mandela’s ultimate triumph of personal development; Mandela can use his lifetime of combat training within the context of non-violent negotiations, framing his violence as benign, and concurrently representing his negotiations – which garnered criticism for betraying the struggle – as combative and militant. As such, the reader is encouraged to interpret Mandela’s negotiations with the government as the culmination of his development as a fighter, the ultimate consolidation of the two disparate characters presented by Mandela: Mandela the Militant Revolutionary and Mandela the Reconciler.

It can, therefore, be seen that Mandela’s various combative engagements are connoted to his rural upbringing, and ‘legitimate’, traditional core of values and traditions. They function as a means of reclaiming the masculinised agency at the core of his cultural heritage, while concurrently being inextricably linked with the maternal forms of cultural narrative and romanticised, nurturing environments of his

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<sup>43</sup> This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

youth. In other words, each stage in the development of his combativeness forms a logical step in a narrative of progression and development which spans his life, and therefore each of the parts, despite their disparate forms, serves a comparable ultimate function, i.e. to allow for the reclamation of his cultural pride and the restoration of the promise of the rituals of manhood denied his people by the coloniser.

#### 2.4.3.2 Winnie Mandela as glamorous African beauty Queen and domestic partner

Winnie stood as a glamorous, dynamic counterpart and compliment to Mandela (see figure 5). She embodied another image which Sampson sought to capture in *Drum*, that of the African “beauty queen in the bus queue, poised with her umbrella and vanity bag, dazzling and sharply in focus, with the blurred faces of ordinary Africans carrying paper bags in the background, looking round at this apparition of African glory” (*Drum* 96). Winnie combined this newfound celebration of African beauty with the increasingly popular political activism of the age, making her an ideal, authentically African face of the liberation struggle, especially in the context of her marriage to Mandela and her own royal lineage (see figure 6). During Mandela’s incarceration, Winnie would continue to represent him on the outside, helping to keep his name relevant. Harassed, and ultimately sent into “internal exile” in 1977 for her popularity with the young radicals of Soweto, she gathered a reputation for selflessness and fiery activism, complimenting and supplementing Mandela’s own prestige (Mandela 480). She was a champion of the schoolchildren’s revolt and helped establish and lead the Black Parents’ association (Lodge 149). She therefore “stood as a sort of bridge between the ANC’s ‘congress’ or ‘charterist’ resistance and the Black Consciousness’ insurgency,” lending more currency and political relevance to Mandela’s name (Lodge 149). Her banishment served only to increase her status, and she used the increase in donations to set up charitable organisations (Lodge 149). Within prison, too, Winnie won Mandela an additional measure of prestige:

whenever Winnie had come to visit Nelson, it was something which just set up the whole section alight... just knowing that Winnie was about to come brought such a change over Nelson to start with and it then flowed over to the rest of us... Every visit of Winnie's had something. She had information which

she gave to Nelson, which he in turn would come and give to us. (Bam n. pag.)

At the same time, there was also the image of the “African hero”, said Sampson, “almost compulsory in every number... sitting down to a meal with his wife and children in a small location house, like anyone else” (Sampson, *Drum* 96). Mandela and Winnie embodied this domestic existence, as a counterpoint to their glamorous and highly public lifestyle; they were the physical incarnation of this idealised image of new African domesticity, the effect heightened by their elevated social status.



Figure 6

Winnie, the glamorous African beauty queen and political activist

Furthermore, for the Mandela of the dominant and, later, official, narratives, romance is an important aspect of his personality. Early biographies paid very little attention to his personal life, as “representations of the life of a ‘professional revolutionary’ leave very little room for representations of the dual, conflicting loyalties which were the consequence of kinship and lineage, and reinforced by his marriage to Winnie” (Lodge 79). However, the official narrative emphasises his relatable, ‘human’ side through focussing on this aspect of his personality (Lodge 79). In the 1970s draft of his autobiography, Mandela makes reference to numerous male friendships from his early life. *Long Walk to Freedom*, however, removes these references, but tells of his first romance (Lodge 17). In spite of the controversy around Winnie, Mandela’s love letters to her have become enduring source of fascination and sentiment. In making Mandela a more accessible, romanticised icon, the dominant and official narratives

stress his 'softer', human or emotional side, with the relationship between him and Winnie being constructed as a great romance, adding international appeal and a measure of sentiment and accessibility to his years in prison. Mandela's relationship with Winnie would ultimately help to overshadow the less desirable aspects of his treatment of Evelyn, who he "betrayed and abandoned... [only paying her] bride price (lobola)... on the eve of [their] divorce (of which she learned about in a newspaper) so that he could see their four children afterwards" (*Guardian* qtd. in Van Dijk 18). In other words, although his marriage to Winnie would serve, before his imprisonment, to allow him to embody this visual symbol of African domesticity, it would be subsequently appropriated by the official narrative as a means of rewriting Mandela as a romanitised icon as a means of negating his connotations with militant resistance, while serving to overshadow the less desirable elements of his treatment of Evelyn.

#### 2.4.3.3 Mandela as the Successful African businessman

Another powerful image which Mandela embodied was that of the "African businessman sitting at the wheel of his large American car, tremendously sedate and respectable, with a dark suit and gold tiepin, a picture of success and stability..." (Sampson, *Drum* 96); in Mandela's case, his "success and stability" were alluringly offset by his status as a militant freedom fighter. As a lawyer, at the top of the Orlando social hierarchy, he embodied the intellectual, professional and material aspirations of the African majority (see figure 6).

According to Lodge, "[i]n the township, personal attributes, such as dress, speech and possessions, were more important indicators of personal affluence than one's home. Sometimes there were as many as ten people from different social classes sharing a tiny house" (Lodge 27). Mandela and Tambo's practice meant that, by 1951, he was already part of a genteel African South African society totalling only about 51,000 people, with Mandela boasting at this time that he shopped only at Markhams (Lodge 27). In this society, lawyers were at the top of the social hierarchy; they were seen as advice-givers, natural community leaders. This, combined with Mandela's already elevated social status as a Thembu notable, served to render him yet more towering. By 1952, he was qualified, though even before that he enjoyed an elevated social position, a combination of his professional status and his aristocratic



connections. In addition to this, his physical appearance – tall, well-groomed and stylishly dressed – won him immediate notice and admiration (Lodge 29).



Figure 7

Mandela the successful, charismatic African lawyer

In an impoverished community, powerless in the face of the government's antagonistic authority, Mandela provided an altruistic alternative (Lodge 81). As a lawyer, he was at the top of the social hierarchy, a source of advice and security (Lodge 81). As Kathrada states,

[i]n those years, any black person, who was either a university student or a professional person, immediately became a leader in the eyes of the people... [b]ecause there were so few [of them]. (n. pag.)

His high visibility meant that he was instantly recognised wherever he went, and the community became his family. As Evelyn would later attest, people's desire to consult with Mandela would mean that the short walk from a restaurant to their car could take half an hour; in short, she said, "[h]e belong[ed] to [the public]" (Lodge 81), a sentiment shared by Mandela, who asserts that "a freedom fighter subordinates his own family to the family of the people" (Mandela 215).

*Drum* could, therefore, communicate with, and relate to, its audience through a visual language of archetypal images, encapsulating a burgeoning, uniquely South African African identity; Mandela, as the embodiment of its ideal, was advantaged by this



burgeoning black African photojournalism. Both could appeal to a largely illiterate 'readership', appealing to an inherent, visceral sense of self. While incarcerated, the few images of him in his various guises could circulate endlessly, encapsulating an idealised, masculine African identity, allowing him to be used to whatever end the struggle needed (Sampson, *Drum* 96).

#### 2.4.4 Mandela's Speeches

Just as Mandela was using mass-media as a tool, so the absence of a more pervasive media was acting in his favour. By many accounts, Mandela was at best a dull, workmanlike speech-giver (Boehmer 134), an opinion confirmed in his many subsequent filmed speeches. However, at a time before filmed mass-media for Africans, his speeches could only be judged by those who were present when they were given; considering the fact that those present were, overwhelmingly, supporters of his, it is unsurprising that a mythos around his supposedly "electrifying" speeches should have developed (see figure 8). By the time of his arrest, none of his public speeches had been filmed, and even if they had been, his image and words were banned in his absence. At the conference which decided on the three-day strike from 29 to 31 May, coinciding with the government's proclamation of a republic, Mandela made what was, by all accounts, a surprising, exciting entrance. The speech itself, however, has been subject to mixed accounts. Years later, Michael Dingake would recall Mandela giving a "[fearless]" speech which "[electrified] the conference," which caused those present to pump their fists in the air and sing a new revolutionary song about Mandela (Lodge 83). At the time, however, the press only referred to the singing of one, older song about Luthuli. Pogrund, though he acknowledged Mandela as the "star of the show", described the speech itself as subdued, doing little to excite the audience after his electrifying, unexpected entrance (Lodge 84). Ngubane claimed that the absent Luthuli was sidelined during the conference by Communists who were eager to enhance Mandela's leadership status. The communist-edited *New Age* magazine later claimed that each of his sentences evoked cheers or cries of "shame" (Lodge 84). Pogrund, furthermore, was convinced that communists later embellished Mandela's image. One of Winnie's biographers was told that Mandela appeared and gave his speech in bare feet, though photographs show otherwise (Lodge 84). The lack of video evidence, therefore, means that his speeches would

be a site of mythologizing, allowing even his weakness as a popular speaker to be translated into a strength.



Figure 8

Mandela giving his speech at the All-in Africa Conference, 1961

## 2.5 The Black Pimpernel

On 29 March 1961, the Treason Trial ended with the accused being found innocent. In the days leading up to the verdict, it had been decided that, if they were acquitted, Mandela would go underground in order to lead the organisation of the ANC's protest against the declaration of a republic, which was to take the form of a mass work stoppage in May 1961 (Mandela 246). Going underground would allow him to develop "support and commitment" in both ANC and trade union networks, to meet with English language newspaper editors, broadening support for the ANC's strike beyond Africans while generating publicity for the strike's organisers and, lastly, to extend his own "moral and charismatic authority" (Lodge 85). The period between 30 March 1961, and 5 August 1962, would prove to be one of the most crucial periods with regards to the construction of the dominant narrative. It was during this time that Mandela, working from underground during a critical historical junction, not only did some of his most important work on behalf of the ANC, but also became a media darling through his well-publicised evasion of the police, gaining the epithet "The Black Pimpernel"<sup>44</sup> (Boehmer 124). He would be a key player in the establishment of

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<sup>44</sup> Mandela explains how he acquired this epithet as follows: "During those early months, when there was a warrant for my arrest and I was being pursued by the police, my outlaw

MK, and would represent the ANC at the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA) conference, seeking to procure support, funds and arms for the new, militant phase of the struggle they were entering into (Lodge 95). He would, furthermore, receive military training abroad, and be charged with what amounted to the formation of an army (Lodge 95; Mandela 262). His active resistance to the government, Lodge asserts, was the ANC's response to the popular impatience and discontent with its legalism (Lodge 86). In 1995, Sisulu would acknowledge that he knew that, when Mandela went underground, he was stepping into a dominant leadership position (Lodge 86). Due to the danger around underground resistance after the banning of the ANC, Mandela came to embody what Suttner terms a "heroic masculinity," (Suttner 201) playing into the ANC's discourse around the need for "messianic self-sacrificial leadership" (Lodge 85). Mandela was, therefore, embodying a resistance to "the... denial of manhood, which also signifi[ed] specific and overwhelming disempowerment and subjection to political domination," representing a "rejection of this overlordship and assertion of political freedom" (Suttner 196). Therefore, the Black Pimpernel forms part of the masculinised tradition around African resistance which the ANC took as an ideological basis.

By the time of his going underground, Mandela was already seen as the embodiment of leadership in traditional, urban and political spheres. The naming of the M-Plan,<sup>45</sup> for instance, took advantage of – and attested to – Mandela's national appeal, and his comrades' willingness to nurture his charismatic appeal. He has been popularly credited with its devising, a notion which he has done little to dispel (Boehmer 39). In its association with Mandela, the plan's name carried a certain weight and legitimacy. The plan had actually originated in the Eastern Cape, however,

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existence caught the imagination of the press. Articles claiming that I had been here and there were on the front pages. Roadblocks were instituted all over the country, but the police repeatedly came up empty-handed. I was dubbed the Black Pimpernel, a somewhat derogatory adaptation of Baroness Orczy's fictional character the Scarlet Pimpernel, who daringly evaded capture during the French Revolution" (Mandela 255).

<sup>45</sup> The ANC's organisational scheme from the early 1950s; although the new plan had been announced publically, the ANC leadership understood that it was suited to new modes of underground struggle (Lodge 57 – 58)

independently of Mandela (Boehmer 39). Mhlaba<sup>46</sup> claims that Headquarters called it the M-plan because, as volunteer-in-chief, it was Mandela's duty to promote and disseminate the plan to other areas (Lodge 58). Despite Mandela's efforts, the plan remained mainly confined to the Eastern Cape (Lodge 58). Its naming is, however, evidence of the movement's nurturing of Mandela's public leadership, as the man who embodied the party's philosophies.

The credibility Mandela won as the Black Pimpnel would be transferred to the ANC as a whole. At a time when more educated Africans were attempting to divorce themselves from 'ordinary' natives (Sampson, *Drum* 219), Mandela came to embrace this 'ordinary,' or stereotypically uneducated, identity as a means of resistance. His actions helped to negate the popular sentiment that the liberation movements had "stopped short of measures demanding personal sacrifice," at a time when it was felt that "Congress leaders [were] not prepared to risk five years' imprisonment and lashes for the sake of protest" (Sampson, *Drum* 219). Mandela's winning of popular trust and legitimacy parallels *Drum* Magazine's own aforementioned struggle to win the trust of the African masses. For *Drum*, it was only when "Mr Drum" published 'his' daring exposé of the brutal conditions workers lived under on Bethal – an infamous labour farm – that the magazine won wider acceptance and trust among Africans (Sampson, *Drum* 22). Like Mr Drum, The Black Pimpnel became "one of the people" (Sampson, *Drum* 34), while concurrently embodying an idealised, fantasy incarnation of one of the people, possessing both a relatable identity and extraordinary powers of resistance and mobility. Not surprisingly, the birth of Mr Drum had won *Drum* what they considered, "embarrassing new supporters," including "communists, African nationalists and revolutionaries" (Sampson, *Drum* 36): *Drum*, in reflecting a 'legitimately' African identity, in conjunction with its association with Mr Drum, had come to be seen as part of the liberation struggle. The voice with which the Black Pimpnel spoke was, in many ways, the same one with which Mr Drum spoke: "fearless, fair, human and critical, with the voice of Africa speaking unmistakeably through one of its people" (Sampson, *Drum* 213). The final parallel between the two is, of course, that both were purely fictional constructs, *nom de plumes*, representing the narrativised

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<sup>46</sup> Raymond Mhlaba, a member of ANC National Executive Committee member and Rivonia trialist ("Raymond Mhlaba" n. pag.)

embodiment of popular desire and fantasy. Rather than remaining aloof and distanced, Mandela was fighting the government as ‘one of the people’; as Sampson argues, “‘I did it myself’ [is] an unanswerable argument” (Sampson, *Drum* 213).

#### 2.5.1 Black Pimpernel as Archetype and Wish-Fulfilment

Much of the symbolic power of the Black Pimpernel would lie in Mandela’s adoption of an existence which constituted a heightened or exaggerated embodiment of the existence of an average black man in South Africa. It carried a powerful mythological resonance, providing Africans with a vicarious sense of empowerment, as he publically humiliated the government which had expended so much time and energy on unsuccessfully trying to convict him during the Treason Trial. Mandela himself suggests this, stating that, although going underground would generally require a “seismic psychological shift” with one having to “plan every action, however small and seemingly insignificant,” it was, “in some ways... not much of an adaptation for a black man in South Africa” (Mandela 241). He states that underground one “cannot be [one]self; [one] must fully inhabit whatever role [one has] assumed...” which is similar to being a black man, because “[t]o be a black man in South Africa meant not to trust anything... liv[ing] a shadowy life between legality and illegality, between openness and concealment... which was not unlike living underground for one’s entire life” (Mandela 254). The shift was, however, not simply psychological, but performative:

As a leader, one often seeks prominence; as an outlaw, the opposite is true. When underground I did not walk as tall or stand as straight. I spoke more softly, with less clarity and distinction. I was more passive, more unobtrusive; I did not ask for things, but instead let people tell me what to do. I did not shave or cut my hair. (Mandela 255)

Furthermore, as with any incarnation of Mandela, his costume is tailored to suit his purpose, abandoning his customary suits in favour of a range of urban African disguises:

My most frequent disguise was as a chauffeur, a chef, or a “garden boy.” I would wear the blue overalls of the field-worker and often wore round, rimless glasses known as Mazzawati tea-glasses. I had a car and I wore a chauffeur’s

cap with my overalls... I remained as unkempt as possible [and] [m]y overalls looked as if they had been through a lifetime of hard toil. (Mandela 255)

The disguises Mandela adopted carried a powerful symbolic currency. They represented, on the whole, occupations most commonly held by Africans. These were considered inferior modes of employment, with minimal opportunities for self-betterment. Although, on a practical level, these disguises would have been inconspicuous and convenient – as a chauffeur for Arthur Goldreich, for instance, he could “travel under the pretext of driving [his] master’s car” – the power of his re-appropriation of these negatively-connoted modes of employ as a means of resistance cannot be understated (Mandela 255; Lodge 94). Mandela did not only adopt the external appearance and mannerisms of the roles he played but also, out of necessity, largely *became* them – as when he posed as Arthur Goldreich’s chauffeur – adding to the store of common African occupations with which Mandela has subsequently become associated.

As the Black Pimpernel, Mandela projects the appearance of being a “man of the people,” which he considers a highly desirable quality in a leader (Mandela 279). This is evidenced when he meets President Julius Nyerere in Dar es Salaam, talking to him at his house “which [is] not at all grand.” Nyerere drives “a simple car, a little Austin [which] suggest[s] that he [is] a man of the people,” impressing Mandela. Mandela expresses admiration for Nyerere’s view that “class... [is] alien to Africa; socialism indigenous” (Mandela 279). As such, Mandela’s projected identity, as “one of the people,” is constructed as being somehow inherently, authentically African; for Mandela, in particular, this is critical because, with his lineage, qualifications and unusually privileged form of employment, there is always the danger of his coming to be seen as inaccessibly elite, the very quality for which he criticized both Dr A.B. Xuma and, later, Dr Moroka. His awareness of this is evident in his emphasis on the representative cross-section of African society with which he interacted with during this time in *Long Walk to Freedom*:

I travelled secretly about the country; I was with Muslims in the Cape; with sugar-workers in Natal; with factory workers in Port Elizabeth; I moved through townships in different parts of the country attending secret meetings at night. (Mandela 255)

He also travels to Port Elizabeth to discuss the ANC's new underground structures with Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba, meets with the editor of the *Evening Post*, a liberal Port Elizabeth newspaper, to discuss the campaign for a national convention and meets Patrick Duncan, "the editor and publisher of the liberal weekly Contact, a founding member of the Liberal Party, and one of the first white defiers during the Defiance Campaign" (Mandela 253). As such, Mandela constructs himself as being an accessible, ordinary African man, who performs extraordinary feats of daring, serving to elevate both his authentically African identity, and his personal prestige.

### 2.5.2 The Construction of the Black Pimpernel myth

Mandela understood during this time that he "had become a public symbol of rebellion and struggle" (Mandela 308) and he actively contributed towards the mythology which was being constructed around the Black Pimpernel:

I would even feed the mythology of the Black Pimpernel by taking a pocketful of "tickeys" (threepenny pieces) and phoning individual newspaper reporters from telephone boxes and relaying to them stories of what we were planning or of the ineptitude of the police. I would pop up here and there to the annoyance of the police and to the delight of the people. (Mandela 255)

As much as the purpose he served in his organisational capacity was practically critical, it would, in the long term, prove to be secondary to his excitement of the popular imagination. As such, historical fact only accounts for a portion of the power of the Black Pimpernel. The greatest strength of this myth is that, although it is grounded in reality, it is a rich site for the creation of auxiliary myths during the succeeding years. As Guiloineau says,

[Mandela] belong(s) to that rare category of human beings whose personal destiny is bound up with the history and destiny of a people [and] [w]hen the private individual is eclipsed, the idea and the myth remain, and may become more powerful. (10)

During his incarceration on Robben Island, the stories around Mandela's time underground would be augmented and supplemented by "many wild and inaccurate stories... [which p]eople love[d] to embellish," serving to further "[em]power... the



myth” (Mandela 255). Few were immune to the appeal of these stories. Even at the time of his arrest in 1962, numerous apocryphal accounts were already gaining currency; consider, for instance, this extract from *Time Magazine*, dated 17 August, 1962:

Mandela became a disguise artist: dressed as a garage worker, he once wheeled a spare tire down the main street of Johannesburg under the nose of the cops. On another occasion, when he wanted to retrieve some documents from his Johannesburg office, Mandela dressed himself as a Zulu janitor in the traditional blue jumper and shorts, stuck huge earrings through his ear lobes, grabbed a broom and walked through the police cordon outside his office. Once inside, he tucked the papers under his shirt and calmly walked out. (“South Africa: The Black Pimpnel”)

As such, as with Mandela’s youth, the historically unknowable nature of this period of time facilitates the myth-making process around it; this, in conjunction with its expression of “heroic masculinity,” allows it to be integrated into a broader African cultural heritage (Suttner 201).

#### 2.5.2.1 The Black Pimpnel’s Place in African Cultural Heritage

The Black Pimpnel fits neatly into the African oral tradition Mandela discusses early in *Long Walk to Freedom*. His acknowledgment of the value of these tales, in spite of – or, perhaps, partly because of – the fact that they were “not always so accurate” prefigures the construction of the Black Pimpnel myth (Mandela 22; Lodge 3). His appropriation of this story, and the story of his trip abroad, to his own ends is reflected in his telling of the story “to every newcomer” in prison (Bam n. pag.), with Mandela

never [telling] it in exactly the same way. It was always something different, depending on who his audience was, and it was slightly different on every occasion, on what he said about that trip, what his reactions were... [and] he hadn’t quite told the story like he told it in [*Long Walk to Freedom*]. (Bam n. pag.)

Therefore, Mandela shows an understanding of the value of historical narratives beyond merely accurate recollections of the past, as serving a socio-cultural

purpose. As with his youth, and any other period where historical documentation has proved inadequate, Mandela allows the site to remain inconclusive. He actively encourages the development of a mythology, stating enigmatically that he “did have a number of narrow escapes... which no one knew about” (Mandela 255).

Furthermore, as has already been touched on, the Black Pimpernel, in his resistance to “political... overlordship” (Suttner 196), embodied an idealised masculine figure, particularly at a time when political struggle was coming to supplement and supersede traditional sites of masculine rites of passage. As such, he formed a current embodiment, or culmination, of the African narrative of resistance to colonialism and its constitutive figures of “heroic masculinity” (Suttner 201). By doing so in the guise of, amongst others, a “garden boy” – a title which encapsulates the infantilisation of African men by whites – Mandela heightens the symbolic potency of his role.

#### 2.5.2.2 The Development of Mandela’s Individual Prestige

The Black Pimpernel phase is, crucially, the first time Mandela gains a public identity largely independent of the ANC. Although his personal celebrity had been established with the Defiance Campaign, especially as “volunteer-in-chief,” he had always been visibly bound to the ANC. Mandela states that “[i]t was decided that [he] would surface at certain events, hoping for a maximum of publicity, to show that the ANC was still fighting,” illustrating that his role during this period was still primarily to serve as a public face for the ANC (Mandela 245); however, the popularity of the epithet he gained attests to the individual power Mandela wielded. Rendered independent and spectral, appearing only intermittently and with calculated effect, Mandela’s moniker as the “Black Pimpernel” came to carry connotations of independent daring and defiance.<sup>47</sup> A contemporary BBC documentary, for instance, credits Mandela as “the man who organised the stay-at-home,” while neglecting to mention the ANC at all, highlighting the extent to which he was already coming to eclipse his parent organisation in the dominant ideology (“First Nelson Mandela Interview” n. pag.).

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<sup>47</sup> The Scarlet Pimpernel, for whom he was named, was the leader of the “League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.” The power structure within the League was “one to command, and nineteen to obey,” and, although this was certainly not the power structure of the ANC, it was an impression which the popular imagination would have been hard-pressed not to gain.

The impression of Mandela's individualism would be heightened by the fact that, since he had been publically calling for the adoption of violence long before it had been adopted as party policy, his part in the founding of MK would come to be seen as him realising 'his' vision of heeding the popular public desire for more militant forms of struggle<sup>48</sup>. In his letter to South African newspapers, released from underground, he reinforces this impression of individual agency within the confines of the party, stating that, although difficult, his life underground was a life "[he had] chosen" (Mandela 263); this serves to create the impression of a motivated "self-sacrificial" leadership, represented by Mandela. Ultimately, then, although Mandela's actions were to the benefit of the ANC, it was to the ANC's benefit for Mandela to be credited with working on his own volition. Mandela's going underground was a committee decision:

After many meetings... we had decided that we would work from underground, adopting a strategy along the lines of the M-Plan. The organization would survive clandestinely. *It was decided that if we were not convicted I would go underground* to travel about the country organizing the proposed national convention. Only someone operating full-time from underground would be free from the paralyzing restrictions imposed by the enemy... *It was not a proposal that came as a surprise to me, nor was it one I particularly relished...* (Mandela 244 – 245; emphasis added)

As such, for the dominant narrative, it was important that Mandela be seen as a fiery militant who was as tired of the ANC's legalism as the public.<sup>49</sup> The impression is created of an individual working independently of party structures, and although his exploits were only made possible by the ANC's underground structures, with SACP members providing places to stay, this support network was, for all intents and purposes, invisible (Lodge 85). This episode, therefore, added largely to Mandela's personal prestige, notoriety and visibility. The "Black Pimpernel" phase, therefore,

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<sup>48</sup> The text's construction of Mandela as concurrently being a disciplined member of the party, while also, at times, moving out 'ahead' of the party in order to agitate for what he considers necessary policy changes will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>49</sup> For the official narrative, however, Mandela's discipline as a party member, and his willingness to forgo his responsibilities to his family in favour of his obligations to the 'nation family' as a whole, is foregrounded.

took Mandela's personal representation and embodiment of the ANC to its logical extreme.

As the public voice of the ANC and, as has been shown, connoting independence and individual sacrifice and agency, Mandela is constructed as a lone counterpoint to the government's massive show of retaliatory force. As well-conceived as his guise as The Black Pimpernel was, however, it could never have attained the level of significance it did without the participation of the media and, largely unwittingly, of the government:

...the May 29 stay-at-home... was shaping up to be a virtual war between the state and the liberation movement. Late in May, the government staged countrywide raids on opposition leaders. Meetings were banned; printing presses were seized; and legislation was rushed through Parliament permitting the police to detain charged prisoners for twelve days without bail. Verwoerd declared that those supporting the strike, including sympathetic newspapers, were "playing with fire... [t]wo days before the stay-at-home, the government staged the greatest peace-time show of force in South African history. The military exercised its largest call-up since the war. Police holidays were cancelled. Military units were stationed at the entrances and exits of townships. While Saracen tanks rumbled through the dirt streets of the townships, helicopters hovered above, swooping down to break up any gathering. At night, the helicopters trained searchlights on houses. (Mandela 257)

On 26 June – the liberation struggle's Freedom Day – he released a letter to the press from underground, "commend[ing] the people for their courage" during the stay-at-home, and "calling for a national constitutional convention." He "proclaimed that a countrywide campaign of noncooperation would be launched if the state failed to hold such a convention" (Mandela 263). He goes on to say:

I am informed that a warrant for my arrest has been issued, and that the police are looking for me. The National Action Council has given full and serious consideration to this question . . . and they have advised me not to surrender myself. I have accepted this advice, and will not give myself up to a Government I do not recognize. Any serious politician will realize that under

present day conditions in the country, to seek for cheap martyrdom by handing myself to the police is naive and criminal. . . I have chosen this course which is more difficult and which entails more risk and hardship than sitting in gaol. I have had to separate myself from my dear wife and children, from my mother and sisters to live as an outlaw in my own land. I have had to close my business, to abandon my profession, and live in poverty, as many of my people are doing. . . . I shall fight the Government side by side with you, inch by inch, and mile by mile, until victory is won. What are you going to do? Will you come along with us, or are you going to co-operate with the Government in its efforts to suppress the claims and aspirations of your own people? Are you going to remain silent and neutral in a matter of life and death to my people, to our people? For my own part I have made my choice. I will not leave South Africa, nor will I surrender. Only through hardship, sacrifice *and militant action* can freedom be won. The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days. (Mandela 263-264; emphasis added)

Here, Mandela personalises the struggle. Despite his assertion that he has been “advised” by the National Action Council, the decision as to whether he accepts it or not is his own, inferring his personal agency within the structures of the ANC; in fact, this constructs him as *independent of* the NAC and, by extension, the ANC. Note also the powerful rhetorical flow, emphasised with a careful use of personal pronouns:

*I* have chosen this course... as many of *my people* are doing... what are *you* going to do? Will you come along with *us*, or... co-operate with the Government in... suppress[ing] the claims and aspirations of *your* own people? Are you going to remain silent and neutral in a matter of life and death to *my* people, to *our* people? (Mandela 263 – 264)

This rhetorical construct does not require the ANC in order to make sense. He first claims a personal responsibility for the people and their struggle, after which he asks “will you come along with *us*...?”; the “us,” it is inferred, refers to him and ‘his people’, rather than the ANC as a whole. The issue at hand here is, then, clearly one of leadership and of embodying the leadership of the ANC in Mandela as an individual.

By this time, his personal celebrity and prestige would have been considered a powerful weapon in the arsenal of the ANC, as well as for him personally within the ANC as a body. He asserts that he, personally, has made a sacrifice superior to any other leaders – i.e. the leaders of the PAC – who have chosen to sit in prison rather than struggling amongst the people. We therefore see an assertion of his personal moral and political authority, not only over the leaders of rival parties, but within the context of his own party.

### 2.5.3 A Conflict Between Freedom and Morality

Part of the power of the Black Pimpernel is his mobility at a time when Africans' movements were being ever-more curtailed by pass laws. The importance of escape and its consequent freedom are emphasised by Mandela once captured on his return from PAFMECSA:

Escape serves a double purpose: it liberates a freedom fighter from jail so that he can continue to fight, but offers a tremendous psychological boost to the struggle and a great publicity blow against the enemy. As a prisoner, I always contemplated escape, and during my various trips to and from the commanding officer's office, I carefully surveyed the walls, the movements of the guards, the types of keys and locks used in the doors. I made a detailed sketch of the prison grounds with particular emphasis on the exact location of the prison hospital and the gates leading out of it. (Mandela 309)

And, later:

During those weeks I had plenty of time to ponder my fate. The place of a freedom fighter is beside his people, not behind bars. The knowledge and contacts I had recently made in Africa were going to be locked away rather than used in the struggle. I cursed the fact that my expertise would not be put to use in creating a freedom army. (Mandela 322)

Despite Mandela's expression of frustration at being unable to be at the forefront of the liberation struggle, he does not seize the opportunity to escape. It highlights, however, a conflict between Mandela's political philosophy and his personal sense of morality established throughout the work:

Sergeant Kruger was a tall and imposing fellow who treated us with fairness. On the way from Pretoria to Johannesburg, he would often stop the car and leave me inside while he went into a shop to buy biltong, oranges, and chocolate for both of us. I thought about jumping out of the car, especially on Fridays, when the sidewalks and streets were busy and one could get lost in a crowd. (Mandela 233)

And, later:

We even stopped at Volksrust, a town along the way, and they allowed me to take a brief walk to stretch my legs. I did not contemplate escape when people were kind to me; *I did not want to take advantage of the trust they placed in me.* (Mandela 303; emphasis added)

The final line echoes the sentiments expressed in the “Johannesburg” chapter; in the official narrative, he has, by this point, progressed beyond the point where he will take advantage of those who have placed their trust in him. The inconsistency between the two quotes – “I thought about jumping out of the car” to “I did not contemplate escape when people were kind to me” – shows an emphasis in the latter on Mandela’s maturation and moral development. Despite the fact that he *can* escape, and that freedom is crucial for a liberation fighter, he will not repeat the mistakes of his past, and will not allow his enemy to drive him to the point of amorality; this emphasises his insistence on fighting on his own terms, and his unwillingness to allow his enemy to drive him to compromise his values. He considers escape when imprisoned, as it is then the state and its aberrant legal underpinning which are denying him his freedom; the two instances highlighted, by contrast, show him under arrest, but still with the opportunity to be legitimately tried and to state his case. Thus, the text, as a narrative of progression, uses the apparent conflicts between Mandela’s philosophy and actual behaviour to illustrate his moral underpinnings. This assertion of his morality as his greatest guiding impetus is important, especially considering the morally fraught context of his advocacy of violence. On a practical level, too, Mandela understands his position as a martyr of the movement; for him to escape in 1962 would have been self-defeating: the charges against him were, at this point, “hardly severe”, and his escape would have robbed him of the opportunity to deliver his political testimony in court (Lodge 103).



The text, therefore, succeeds in accommodating two seemingly conflicting tendencies on Mandela's part, while inferring that, despite his adoption of violence as a strategy, his morality was still his greatest guiding principle. Instances like these are critical in qualifying and contextualising Mandela's militancy, as discussed earlier in this thesis.

## 2.6 Court Appearances

As with the Defiance Campaign, Mandela appropriated his court appearances as opportunities for performative displays which would strengthen the movement and heighten his personal symbolic currency. Although he was certainly not alone in this, his personal prestige and popularity meant that there was a vast amount of public and media interest around his appearances in court, which could be taken advantage of.

### 2.6.1 1962

Mandela, during his trial in 1962, following his return from PAFMECSA and his military training in Algeria, noticed that his presence made the magistrate and other attorneys uneasy. This was not, as he had initially suspected, because he was a "colleague brought low"; rather, he had a "revelation," realising that they were uncomfortable because he was "an ordinary man being punished for his beliefs. In a way that [he] had never quite comprehended before, [he] realized the role [he] could play in court..." (Mandela 304). He realises that he is

...the symbol of justice in the court of the oppressor, the representative of the great ideals of freedom, fairness, and democracy in a society that dishonored those virtues. [He] realized then and there that [he] could carry on the fight even within the fortress of the enemy. (Mandela 304)

Mandela chooses to represent himself, "enhanc[ing] the symbolism of [his] role" (Mandela 304). The trial, with the massive attention focussed on it, would be used to "showcase... the ANC's moral opposition to racism" and Mandela would "put the state itself on trial" (Mandela 304). Outside the courthouse, he finds a "crowd of hundreds of people cheering and shouting... yell[ing] and [singing] and pound[ing] their fists on the sides of the van" (Mandela 305). His arrest and trial "made

headlines in every paper,” and his hearing was set for Monday, 15 October, 1962 (Mandela 305; 311). The ANC had

...set up a Free Mandela Committee and launched a lively campaign with the slogan ‘Free Mandela.’ Protests were held throughout the country and the slogan began to appear scrawled on the sides of buildings. The government retaliated by banning all gatherings relating to [his] imprisonment, but this restriction was ignored by the liberation movement. (Mandela 311)

The government’s treatment of Mandela helped to cement his status as a leading liberation fighter.

By imposing a restriction based on Mandela as an individual, the government was acknowledging his personal influence; this was exacerbated by their relocation of the proceedings to a court in Pretoria at the last minute as a means of avoiding the “large and vociferous turnout [which] was expected” (Mandela 311). Mandela managed to inform his supporters, and on the Monday of the trial’s commencement the Old Synagogue was “packed with supporters.” He appeared before them wearing “a traditional Xhosa leopard-skin kaross instead of a suit and tie.” In response, the

crowd of supporters rose as one and with raised, clenched fists shouted “Amandla!” and “Ngawethu!” The kaross electrified the spectators, many of whom were friends and family, some of whom had come all the way from the Transkei. Winnie also wore a traditional beaded headdress and an ankle-length Xhosa skirt. (Mandela 311)

By wearing the kaross, Mandela was visually embodying that which the law would define Africans as, using the imagery it used to treat Africans as *other*, as backwards, and appropriating that imagery in the courtroom space, in the space of law and human rights. As an educated man embodying this visual stereotype, he was reclaiming it as his own, performatively illustrating the absurdity of Apartheid’s racial distinctions. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela engages in self-narrativisation, taking the opportunity to write himself and construct his own self-image:

I had chosen traditional dress to emphasize the symbolism that I was a black African walking into a white man’s court. I was literally carrying on my back

the history, culture, and heritage of my people. That day, I felt myself to be the embodiment of African nationalism, the inheritor of Africa's difficult but noble past and her uncertain future. The kaross was also a sign of contempt for the niceties of white justice. I well knew the authorities would feel threatened by my kaross as so many whites feel threatened by the true culture of Africa. (311-312)

For Mandela, culture becomes a performative act, a visual representation; he wore the leopard-skin *kaross* – the traditional costume of Xhosa royalty – as outside, a praise-singer recounted his lineage (Lodge 103). The authorities, having failed to confiscate the *kaross*, permitted him to wear it in court, but not on his way there or back, “for fear it would ‘incite’ other prisoners” (Mandela 312).

His plea in mitigation was “not a judicial appeal at all but a political testament” (Mandela 316). He stated that “...already there [were] indications in [the] country that people, [his] people, Africans, [were] turning to deliberate acts of violence,” de-emphasising his role as an advocate of this violence, constructing himself as moving along with an inevitability, rather than actively encouraging (Lodge 105). Mandela “wanted to explain to the court how and why [he] had become the man [he] was, why [he] had done what [he] had done, and why, if given the chance, [he] would do it again (Mandela 316). Mandela was well aware that his political testament could serve no practical purpose; what is evident here, then, is that Mandela is already “writing” himself, claiming agency over the narrativisation of himself. He knows that a prison term is almost assured and, as such, he takes the opportunity to construct the Mandela that will be left behind. Since his physical body will be absent for an uncertain period, he constructs the symbol that will be left behind. He is framing his actions, not so much to justify them as to construct himself as a martyr, in a time when sacrificial leadership was an ideological focus within the ANC.

He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and, his sentence having been read, he “turned to the gallery and again made a clenched fist, shouting “Amandla!” three times”; this would become “the standard courtroom *performance* for ANC comrades over the following three decades” (Lodge 105; emphasis added). This also marked the start of his international reputation.

## 2.6.2 The Rivonia Trial

Mandela, as the focal-point of the Rivonia trial – the most important political trial in the liberation struggle’s history – consciously prepared himself for martyrdom. The trial was being called “the trial to end all trials” (Mandela 340). Mandela’s political prominence, as the Black Pimpernel, head of MK and volunteer-in-chief of the Defiance Campaign, had culminated in the “trial to end all trials” coming to be commonly referred to as “The State against Mandela and others,” with Mandela standing as “accused number one,” in contrast to the Treason Trial, where the accused had been arranged in alphabetical order (Mandela 361; 338; 235). His assumption of the role of spokesman accorded with the public projection of his heroic role by the SACP as an “African leader of a new type” (Lodge 111).

The Rivonia Trial was, for the ANC, a performative display, a successor to the Defiance Campaign as a platform for the bolstering of support for the liberation movement, as well as the dissemination of the grievances of Africans. The Rivonia Trialists agreed that the case would not be a “test of the law” but “a platform for [their] beliefs” (Mandela 346). Mandela states that they

...were not concerned with getting off or lessening [their] punishment, but with having the trial strengthen the cause for which [they] were all struggling — at whatever cost to [themselves]... [defending themselves less] in a legal sense [than] in a moral sense. (346)

In short, they considered the trial as “a continuation of the struggle by other means” (Mandela 346). Mandela delivered a four hour statement on 20 April, in which he admitted to helping form MK, evoking his “proudly felt African background” and the childhood stories of “wars fought in the defense of the fatherland” as justification (Lodge 112). He asserted that MK, in its sabotage activities, insisted on no loss of life, which they felt was important to “future race relations” in the South African setting (Mandela 350).

Sisulu, Mbeki and Mandela informed their counsel that, regardless of sentence, they would not appeal, showing a consciousness of their symbolic value as leaders unafraid to die for their cause. According to Mandela, this decision “stunned [their]

lawyers” (359). Appealing would, according to them, undermine their moral stance; what they did, according to Mandela, they “had done proudly, and for moral reasons” (359). Although “counsel were unhappy,” the accused did not want to “hamper the mass campaign that would surely spring up” in case of the death sentence (Mandela 359). They felt that “an appeal would seem anticlimactic and even disillusioning... [since their] message was that no sacrifice was too great in the struggle for freedom” (Mandela 359). The accused were more concerned with their actions in the case of a death sentence than with appealing. Mandela said that he would tell Justice de Wet that

[he] was prepared to die secure in the knowledge that [his] death would be an inspiration to the cause for which [he] was giving [his] life. [His] death — [their] deaths — would not be in vain; if anything [they] might serve the cause greater in death as martyrs than [they] ever could in life. (359)

Therefore, when the majority of the Rivonia trialists were awarded life sentences, they had, in the eyes of their followers, established themselves as fearless martyrs willing to die for their beliefs. As such, Mandela would be removed from the public sphere at the moment of his greatest show of defiance, catalysing the process of mythologisation which would occur around him during his incarceration on Robben Island.

## Chapter Three

### 3.1 Mandela's Imprisonment

The period of Mandela's imprisonment would see the consolidation and development of the Mandela of the dominant myth. The government could not do away with him physically due to his international standing and, as such, decided to hide and isolate him instead, as their colonial forebears had done to Xhosa leaders and political dissidents before them. By the time of his release in 1990, Mandela had not been seen by the general population in more than 26 years. The communications he had had with the outside world had been mostly sporadic and, for the vast majority of the time, heavily dependent on inference and code. The publication of his words and likeness had been outlawed. In short, the man who emerged from Victor Verster "had no face" (Guiloinéau 1). It would, therefore, seem remarkable that this faceless man should be welcomed with an almost religious zeal, not only by his countrymen, but by millions of people from around the world, for whom his release signalled the imminent emancipation of South Africa. This section will follow the development of the myth of Mandela as a 'black messiah' during the period of his incarceration.

#### 3.1.1 The Development of the Dominant Myth on the Mainland

##### 3.1.1.1 Context

By the mid-1960s, many influential and experienced leaders had been removed from the struggle, resulting in a state of near-dormancy; it seemed, at this time, that the government had managed to all-but crush the liberation movement (Lodge 88). The PAC had enjoyed a surge of prominence at the beginning of the decade, and the initial batch of Robben Island prisoners consisted largely of PAC members; it would, however, only be with the student uprisings of 1976 that the resistance movement would gain any real momentum again (Mandela 471). It was, therefore, natural to look on the period of initial mass-resistance – the 1950s and early 1960s – with a sort of nostalgia. Each of the key historical landmarks came to gain a mythical quality which has persisted well into the post-Apartheid period. Mandela came to represent the embodiment of this 'golden' period. As co-founder of the CYL, volunteer-in-chief, the Black Pimpernel, consummate courtroom performer, founder of MK and

international political celebrity, he embodied an idealised figure of the struggle; his name, words and image were so powerful, it seemed, that simply publishing them was in some way a threat to the government. Mandela says that "[t]here are times when absence can be more powerful than presence" (qtd. in Guiloineau 4), and this was certainly true of this period: he carried connotations of a fresh, vibrant and growing resistance movement and, as such, South Africa's oppressed people could project their desire for an active resistance onto the island. Robben Island came to be known as "Mandela's University" not only because of his promotion of tertiary study there, but also because it was felt that "the heartbeat of the revolution was there" (Guiloineau 5).

By attempting to perpetuate the myth that the African population in the country was 'docile and content,' and positing liberation fighters as the enemy, the government inadvertently singled them out as heroes of the liberation struggle. According to Bizos, the state could not deal with the methods of resistance adopted against it, including the Defiance Campaign, the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 and MK's symbolic attacks against the symbols of apartheid at the end of 1961. In order to account for these actions in light of the aforementioned myth, they argued that, had it not been for agitators, "all would be well in South Africa" (Bizos n. pag.) Their fear was elevated by the controlled manner in which they exacted their acts of violence and sabotage. The was also in the habit of blaming virtually any unrest or disaster in the country on "ANC and SACP conspiracies" (Esterhuyse and Nel 34). By 'blaming' these men for anti-apartheid initiatives, as well as general unrest in the country, they were singling them out, in the eyes of the liberation struggle and, importantly, the world, as leaders in a fight against oppression. According to Bizos, "they could not understand that the world saw them as freedom fighters, fighting a just cause" (n. pag.).

### 3.1.1.2 Visual Removal

Mandela posed not only the theoretical, rhetorical threat which resulted in the banning of his words; as a visual signifier of African resistance and defiance, his image, too, was seen as a threat and banned. During his time on Robben Island, Mandela only consented to being photographed on one occasion (Guiloineau 1); aside from this, he took a strong stance – though not always successfully – against



any attempt to take his picture. Mandela considered it humiliating to be photographed as a prisoner. His sole exception to this rule came in 1966, for a photographer from the *London Daily Telegraph*, and then his condition was that he be joined by Sisulu; the resultant photograph, it was hoped, would show the world the continued solidarity and, crucially, survival of the ANC leadership.

At the same time, the government was seeking to remove Mandela from the popular consciousness by banning the publication of his words and the reproduction of his image. This attempt would prove, however, to have the converse effect, allowing the store of imagery that had collected around Mandela to be consolidated, free of the contamination of an ageing, imprisoned body. Both locally and internationally, only dated images of him were available (Guiloinneau 3). The government had succeeded in rendering Mandela's current incarnation "faceless," a metaphor best represented by the picture of him on the day of his wedding to Winnie, where he appears only as a dark silhouette; however, rather than stripping him of his representational power, the government had only succeeded in creating a space, a cipher, which could be filled with whatever the oppressed masses wanted or needed. Having painted Mandela as a terrorist, the government hoped to preserve this young, frightening incarnation in the mind of the public; the ageing, mellowed Mandela would, it seemed, evoke sympathy and even greater public outcry. What happened, however, was that this heroic character was not allowed to age or relent. The Mandela whose words and images were reprinted around the world would remain young, defiant and inspirational until his release. The more the government sought to remove Mandela's presence from the South African consciousness, the more his mystic nature grew in response. His name became "synonymous with the cry of freedom" (Guiloinneau 4). Therefore, when "Free Mandela!" became a slogan, it was synonymous with "Free South Africa!" making his political import and influence irreversible. The government's banning of his words and image only served to increase his legitimacy as a potent freedom fighter (Guiloinneau 4). Mandela symbolised freedom not only in his embodiment of the promise of "personal liberty" through "[e]xemption or release from slavery or imprisonment [and] arbitrary, despotic or autocratic control," but also in his embodiment of "[t]he state of being able to act without hindrance or restraint, [of having] liberty of action" during his time as the Black Pimpernel and, ultimately,

his fight for “[t]he right of participating in the privileges attached to... citizenship” (“Freedom” n. pag.).

The shielding of Mandela and the rest of the Rivonia trialists from public scrutiny would also, in time, serve their interests in another way. Their removal from the heat of the struggle and the strategies they adopted on Robben Island meant that, in time, they would come to look disproportionately conciliatory compared to their younger counterparts. Whereas the older generation’s strategy was more considered and diplomatic, the younger men were confrontational, arrogant and impatient. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela is shocked at the 1976 generation’s refusal to follow “the most basic prison rules,” and he “[cannot] believe [his] ears” when he hears the way in which they address the wardens (Guiloinneau 5). As such, they could retain connotations of youthful militancy on the mainland, serving as an inspiration for the increasingly militant resistance there, while presenting themselves as considered, diplomatic and politically mature to the prison authorities, a strategy which allowed them to be both symbolically relevant and politically approachable. These two elements would ultimately result in the removal of the core Rivonia trialists from the island, serving – it was hoped – to lessen its symbolic currency, while singling them out as potential partners in negotiations.

### 3.1.1.3 The Island as a Symbolic Space

The mythologizing of Mandela’s imprisonment on the island meant that it would not be long before serving time there came to be considered “both an honour and a sort of status symbol of initiation” (Guiloinneau 5). Although the separation of the Rivonia trialists from the main body of prisoners meant that it was very rare for prisoners to even catch a glimpse of Mandela, “the symbolic power of having been in the same prison was undiminished” (Guiloinneau 5).

Mandela’s supplanting or succeeding Makana as the figure with whom the island is associated in the popular consciousness – especially within the liberation struggle – is first reflected in Mtutuzeli Matshoba’s story, *A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana*, published in 1979 (Guiloinneau 6). A young black man goes on a pilgrimage to see his imprisoned brother on Robben Island. He is asked whether he will also “see *him*”, indicating both an established acceptance of who “he” is, and a sacredness to his name which seems to resist its utterance (Matshoba qtd. in Guiloinneau 6). This idea

of near-religious reverence is carried over to his landing on the island: "... my first step onto the Isle of Makana came as a shock to my entire being. For me, this ground was as sacred as my ancestors' kraal, where no-one had the right to set foot, except for the holy ones" (Matshoba qtd. in Guiloineau 7) After talking to his brother, and pulling away, he wonders "[w]here [one might] find Nelson Mandela on the Isle", concluding that it will "[c]ertainly not [be] among the other sons of Africa" (Matshoba qtd. in Guiloineau 7). He goes on to say:

Blessed Mandela... [h]ave they any inkling of his place in the inner sanctum of the hearts of many a black South African? Did they imagine we might forget him and his companions if they banished him to the island? And did they think we could forget the misery of our lives? (Matshoba qtd. in Guiloineau 7)

The story is, therefore, both an ode and an act of resistance against the government's propagation of the myth that Africans were satisfied, and that their leaders were rabble-rousing dissidents who agitated an otherwise complacent population. An implicit link is drawn here between "[Mandela] and his companions" and the "misery of [Africans'] lives," a negation of the suggestion that their leaders were responsible for the fabrication of their dissatisfaction (Matshoba qtd. in Guiloineau 7). As such, works such as these were a public means of resistance to the propagation of this myth (Guiloineau 7).

This is similarly reflected in Indres Naidoo's autobiographical work, *Island in Chains*, where, despite giving no mention of any physical contact with Mandela, he states that Mandela was an inspiration to the other political prisoner, "[a]pproaching problems in a correct way and guiding [them] in solving [their] day-to-day difficulties," saying that "[they] sensed his leadership even when he was not with [them]" (259). Naidoo is, therefore, buying into a romanticized view of their leaders, the modes of speaking about them, the stock phrases of praise, characteristics attributed, though learnt of second-hand. During soccer matches, he claims that, with around 1000 prisoners watching and cheering, he could still discern the individual voices, and make out the faces, of their leaders at their windows, watching the game from a distance (Naidoo 231). The cover of the initial pressing of his account sees a stock image of Mandela, larger than the picture of Naidoo himself, gracing the cover. Such was Mandela's symbolic power that the work seems more a testament to Naidoo's

proximity to Mandela and the other ANC leaders than a tale about being on the island itself.

#### 3.1.1.4 The 'Explosion' of the Mandela Myth on the Mainland

Despite appeals from the ANC, Amnesty International refused to campaign for Mandela and the other Rivonia trialists' release on the grounds that they had advocated a violent struggle; consequently, the ANC decided to campaign themselves (Matthews n. pag.). During Mandela's imprisonment on Robben Island, the ANC adopted a strategy which they had observed in other liberation struggles, whereby an imprisoned leader was appropriated as a symbol of the liberation struggle as a whole (Matthews n. pag.). Although Mandela was not the president of the ANC at the time of the policy's adoption – Tambo had been acting president since Luthuli's death in 1967 – the reputation he had gained, both locally and internationally, made him a natural choice for the position. Their appropriation of Mandela as the focus of this strategy resulted in what Carlin calls the "explosion of the Mandela myth" (Matthews n. pag.). The conscious fostering of his mythical persona served to highlight the already considerable symbolic currency he already possessed. Ahmed Kathrada, secretary of the Free Mandela campaign, acknowledges that they knew the "would [not] have got him released" (n. pag.); as such, this campaign was, like the Defiance Campaign and the Sophiatown removals, a performative campaign, serving to bolster support for the liberation struggle through the evocation of Mandela's personal suffering and martyrdom.

Mandela has come to be seen as the face of Robben Island, and he has subsequently become the popular focus of the majority of stories told about it. In order to imbue Robben Island with the maximum symbolic significance in the popular consciousness, as a locus of struggle, perseverance and reconciliation, it has been expedient to simplify the narrative of the island to feature Mandela as its central point of reference. Although Mandela initially formed part of the longer narrative of Robben Island, the sheer scope of Mandela's narrative has since come to incorporate Robben Island into it; in other words, rather than Mandela being simply a prisoner on Robben Island, Robben Island has become a central chapter in *his* life.

### 3.1.2 The Development of Mandela's Leadership Status on the Island

Mandela's personal image was of considerable importance to the liberation struggle as a whole. On Robben Island, he came to be seen, in many ways, as a leader amongst leaders (Alexander n. pag.), a position which served to emphasise, and expand on, the already-rich collection of associations around his incarceration there. Mandela successfully fulfilled the performative expectations created by Robben Island's potent symbolism, contributing to the elevation of his status from respected leader to myth. His prison term, though by no means easy, was – like his upbringing – unusually privileged, reflecting the importance of his image. Numerous factors contributed to Mandela enjoying an increasingly privileged position for a political prisoner in South Africa. This complex confluence of circumstances helped create an environment for Mandela to assert his much-touted personal dignity. This is not to suggest that this aspect of his personality was consciously cultivated by the authorities; rather, he was afforded opportunities unique to him, which allowed for him to exercise self-assertion to a degree impossible for other prisoners. As De Klerk stated around the time of Mandela's release, "[Mandela] has not been an ordinary prisoner for quite some time" (Van Dijk 33). Mandela's awareness of his position as a leader and his knowledge of, and control over, the image he portrayed, served to create a strong impression in his fellow prisoners, many of whom would, over time, be released, and feed their impressions into the melting pot of the Mandela myth.

#### 3.1.2.1 Mandela as a Leader-Among-Leaders on Robben Island

On the island, Mandela was, from the outset, part of a comparatively privileged group, the Rivonia Trialists. Within this group, Mandela, Sisulu and Mbeki "were always projected as a trio" (Alexander n. pag.), representing the leadership within a group of leaders, largely on account of the importance of their "track records [as part] of the struggle" (Bam n. pag.). Because of their international standing and personal significance, the political prisoners – and the Rivonia trialists in particular – could make and enforce decision amongst themselves, asserting their personal dignity and winning concessions in a way which ordinary prisoners could not. Their refusal to do the *tausa*, for instance, would immediately set them apart from the common prisoners:

The [*tausa*] was a dance... [a] naked strip search [in which prisoners] would have to expose [their] buttocks [and their] mouth... to see whether they hadn't hidden any object... all of [the political prisoners] took a strong exception to this, and decided not to do it. When the prison authorities tried to impose [it on their] group, [they] supported one another, refused to do it... [The political prisoners] were setting the pattern... saying there [were] certain violations of [their] human rights which [they were] not going to allow... generally speaking, the prisoners won [these] battles. (Alexander n. pag.)

Mandela was, however, from fairly early on, the practical leader within this group. Although, as Bam asserts, the political prisoners “didn't necessarily believe that he and he only was going to become [the leader of the party],” Mandela took a dominant role on the island for a variety of reasons. According to Bam, he “behaved as expected, and was... very suited... well disciplined... [and] had connections outside at all levels, [in addition to numerous other things which] made him an important person.” Furthermore, his “prestige and stature” lead to him being considered the obvious choice when it came to negotiation with, or talking to, the authorities, as well as communication with visitors (Alexander n. pag.). “The prison authorities,” says Alexander,

generally expected that [Mandela] would be [the] one nominated to represent the other prisoners [and] there was never any question about it. It was automatic that he would speak... in general prison affairs, as it were, he would always speak on [all the prisoners'] behalf. (n. pag.)

Of the three dominant leaders, Mandela emerged as the “more assertive” personality, with a presence which was “immediately noticeable” (Kathrada n. pag.). Kathrada attributes this to the aura afforded him by his aristocratic background. He also cites the leadership credentials Mandela had accumulated by that time, including his position as national volunteer-in-chief during the Defiance Campaign, and the fact that “he was looked upon by all the accused [during the Treason Trial for] guidance” (Kathrada n. pag.) As such, Mandela's leadership credentials fostered opportunities for further leadership. Furthermore, Mandela fulfilled the performative requirements of a leader on the island. Mandela encouraged the others to move at a slow, deliberate pace when the warders tried to hurry them on the way to the quarry.

When the warders found that they could not get the prisoners to move at the pace they wanted, they found themselves “completely helpless” (Sisulu n. pag.) Faced with the “question of what to do,” they “decided to recognize the leadership” (Sisulu n. pag.). Sisulu singles this out as a critical moment, when Mandela “established the pattern of interaction with the warders” (n. pag.). The warders could not resort to violence with these prisoners and, as such, Mandela used his personal status to win concessions and establish himself as a leader-among-leaders on the island. Mandela, aware of the role he had to “play” as a leader, cultivated a fearless demeanour on the island. Although Mandela confesses that he was afraid when a warder moved to hit him on his second arrival at Robben Island, he said: “[i]f you so much as lay a hand on me, I will take you to the highest court in the land and when I finish with you, you will be as poor as a church mouse” (Mandela 329). Mandela was, therefore, already aware of the necessity of establishing a mode of behaving which would set the tone for the rest of his sentence. Stengel says that Mandela consciously fostered his displays of fearlessness, saying that Mandela was “inhabit[ing] that role” on Robben Island, projecting the requisite performative characteristics of leader (n. pag.).

Both amongst warders and prisoners, Mandela was afforded a special status, exempted from the harshest aspects of life on Robben Island. Mandela, as a prominent enemy of the state, was, ironically, one of its best-treated African prisoners (Bam n. pag.; Bizos n. pag.). The status and prestige he enjoyed as an individual would facilitate his assertion of his personal dignity, allowing him to accrue a collection of incidents which served to fuel the Mandela myth on the mainland. Mandela’s displays of personal agency and dignity, which conformed to the leadership ideal of the ANC, did not simply serve to earn him the respect of the warders and prison officials, but were largely facilitated by the status he already enjoyed, both locally and internationally (Bizos n. pag.). As such, Mandela was uniquely positioned to fight for concessions from the prison authorities, and his taking advantage of the opportunities afforded him by his position further served to emphasise those same associations, helped to establish him as a leader among leaders on the island. His actions at this time, and the effects of his actions, have retrospectively contributed to the Mandela myth; the dominant narrative has come to



incorporate these occurrences into its running thread of destiny and almost prophetic foresight.

### 3.1.2.2 Mandela's Personal Preferment on the Island

In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela omits any mention of the forms of preferment he received in prison, partly as a means of asserting his personal agency during this time, and partly because much of his moral authority and status as a martyr is dependent on accounts of his suffering. Several menial tasks, such as manual work and cleaning, as well as higher-risk and morally ambiguous activities, such as bribing warders for newspapers, were denied him by his comrades (Bam n. pag.). The former was out of respect for him as an inspirational leader on the island; the latter, however, the result of his comrades' consciousness of the importance of Mandela's personal image for the struggle. He was also given special favours, many of which he resisted; regardless of his motives for resisting this special treatment, even on such a small, banal point, it served to foster an image of a fair, disciplined leader (Bam n. pag.). His preferment, therefore, as with his later denial of his "sainthood", would have had the effect of emphasising some of the very characteristics which won him favour in the first place.

Mandela's reputation for resisting personal preferment could not have developed if he were not already singled out for said preferment. He gained, for instance, a reputation for wanting to "share his own food with other people, and... never want[ing] to be given favours, which other people couldn't have" (Bam n. pag.) At breakfast, for instance, African political prisoners would

get porridge, with a little bit of sugar on top... [and s]ometimes when [the younger prisoners] were dishing, [they would think that] it was a good thing to do, to put two or three spoons of sugar and cover them up with the porridge ... for Nelson and then put a little bit on top. Once he discovered that [they] were doing that, he stopped [them] at once, and [said that] it shouldn't happen again, [b]ecause we would not be able to do that for everyone and the sugar would run short. (Bam n. pag.)

Mandela, when he had hypertension, also shared his special food and milk with anyone who happened to be with him. This is not to say that these displays were

necessarily *conscious* projections of his preferred self-image as ‘one of the people’; rather, it is to say that these incidents contributed to the associations around Mandela as a selfless, benevolent leader.

### 3.1.2.3 Exemption from Illegal Activities

A factor rarely engaged with in the dominant or emergent ideologies, which seek to emphasise Mandela’s personal agency and leadership within prison, is the exemption of him from certain illegal activities. Although it was politically expedient at the time for Mandela to be exempted from illegal activities, the image of a leader leaving the “dirty work” to his younger comrades does not fit with the image of him as ‘leading from the front’. In his autobiography, Mandela discusses the acquisition of newspapers, while never actually disclosing his role in these activities, beyond a single anecdote where he found a fortuitously neglected one and was caught reading it. According to Bam, Mandela was exempted from the processes by which political prisoners acquired newspaper, as well as being exempt from the “most obviously illicit” activities which, if discovered, could be used by the authorities to the detriment of the political prisoners as a group, and their image (n. pag.). The younger prisoners understood that Mandela was, by this time, largely synonymous with the movement, and they feared that

...if [he was] caught [doing something illegal]... the system... would blow it up out of all proportion, to try and discredit the entire movement. Whereas, if they got hold of someone else [who was not a known politician] doing exactly the same thing... they couldn't make any capital out of [it]. (Bam n. pag.)

As such, Mandela’s image was understood to be an integral part of the struggle, a symbol which, if corrupted, could easily have negative consequences for the movement as a whole. As a figure-head, then, we see that, during his prison term, his value as a symbolic figure was as important as his value as a practical leader. The closest Mandela would get to involvement, aside from looking the other way while these acts were committed, would be to send out messages with, and to receive from, his visitors. Once news had been acquired, however,

...he had no qualms about reading [it; however, most of the time, the other prisoners] selected certain people to be doing the reading, so that if anyone

were caught with the newspaper cuttings, it wouldn't be Nelson [because] some of [the political prisoners]... were younger and [had] no big reputations to salvage. (Bam n. pag.)

The conscious cultivation of Mandela's image was therefore exercised within the prison, too; it was understood that he and the rest of the senior leadership's symbolic value was of integral importance to the struggle. According to Bam, this "[Mandela], Walter Sisulu [and] Govan Mbeki... who were in many ways [their] fathers, [were also their] leaders in the sense that their images were important and had to be protected" (n. pag). The assertion that their leaders were not "allowed" to be involved is interesting, showing that the authority they exercised was granted and exercised within the confines of their party, and that they were, as it were, subject to the broader currents and greater requirements of the struggle. The younger political prisoners, though the prison commission ensured that they did their own manual work and cleaning – so that they could minimize the intrusion of warders into their private functions – would also try to exempt their older leaders from doing the more humiliating menial duties. Neither Mandela nor Sisulu agreed to this, but the younger prisoners simply "didn't put them on the roster" (Bam n. pag.) Their subordinates could, therefore, if necessary, exercise a measure of authority over their seniors, illustrating the extent to which they were, as individuals, still subordinate to their organisation.

#### 3.1.2.4 Extraordinary Feats

Mandela's personal status allowed him to gain a reputation for performing feats which would have been impossible for a 'normal' prisoner. This is reflected in an oft-recounted anecdote involving the brutal head of the prison, Colonel Badenhorst. When the island was visited by three judges, Mandela outlined the prisoners' complaints in the presence of Badenhorst, focussing on the recent assault of another prisoner. Badenhorst warned him: "[b]e careful, Mandela... [i]f you talk about things you haven't seen, you will get yourself in trouble. You know what I mean" (Mandela 447 – 448). Mandela addressed the judges, pointing out that, if Badenhorst could act this way in front of them, then his behaviour in their absence would be far worse, and Badenhorst was soon transferred. (Mandela 448). Thus Mandela took advantage of

his own importance as an individual, as well as his security in the protection of the law and professional connections.

What is important is to consider the context in which this incident occurred: Mandela was, possibly, the only prisoner in South Africa who was in a position to do what he did, essentially without consequence. This context is, however, rarely reflected on or factored in: what remains is a story of a black prisoner in a violent and brutal prison system, challenging the head of a prison in front of judges. Alexander, as a younger political prisoner without the international standing of Mandela, was not immune to rage of the warders, and had his eardrum burst (Alexander n. pag.). It is ironic, then, that the 'worst' of the political prisoners – the Rivonia group – would receive the easiest treatment on the island. The authorities hand-picked criminal convicts to corrupt and torment the political prisoners, but the Rivonia trialists were isolated from the worst of this (Mandela 393). The government's attempts to isolate them from their followers to lessen their power, and to prevent them from 'corrupting' the others, or conscientising them, succeeded only in increasing their prestige. The lore which gradually built up around Mandela during his years in prison consisted, in part, of similar anecdotes, many of which would have seemed impossibly dangerous to others who had been to prison, especially considering that Mandela was, as an individual, an enemy of the state at whose mercy he seemed to be. His bravery in the face of the prison authorities has contributed immensely to his myth, often recounted by released prisoners, as in the case of Indres Naidoo. For an average prisoner, or anyone who had heard the stories of Africans who had been incarcerated by the Apartheid government, this must have seemed incredible; they were fed propaganda which would imply that the state would use any and all methods to punish them. As such, Mandela's acts of defiance seemed almost incredible to those who heard of them.

### 3.2 Release and Beyond: Performativity

From the time of his release from Victor Verster, until the end of his presidency, Nelson Mandela took advantage of his new-found visibility, engaging in a process of visual signification in his pursuit of political stability within South Africa. This was the period of the construction of the official narrative. Mandela's symbolic actions from this point became predominantly visual, establishing himself as a highly visible

signifier of peace and reconciliation. Taking advantage of the global mass-media which had developed in his absence, he became an international spectacle, with large, assertive shows of forgiveness and reconciliation. Mandela's personal contribution to this period was not that of a hands-on president dealing with the mundane day-to-day issues of running the country; rather, his role was clearly defined from the outset as that of being a conciliator, showing charismatic displays of empathy and understanding towards his former enemies, helping to convince white South Africans to be unafraid of the changes the country was undergoing (De Klerk n. pag.), while assuring the more militant strains of the liberation movement that he was still loyal to their cause. *Long Walk to Freedom* would see the literary embodiment of this process of rewriting Mandela, from fiery militant to man of peace and reconciliation.

### 3.2.1 Release

Mandela's release from Victor Verster in 1990 marks a crucial moment in the construction of the transition from the dominant to the official narrative (See figure 8). It was the moment in which the general population is exposed to him for the first time since 1964, where the myth which had been developing in his absence would be given physical form. For many, including the rural, traditional communities of Mandela's youth, Mandela's release "mean[t] nothing less than that [they were] just on the verge of attaining [their] long fought for freedom...[t]he Thembu chiefs celebrated Mandela's release by slaughtering some beasts and [drinking] some home-brew beer" (Mtirara n. pag.). However, as the founder and first commander-in-chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, regarded by the generality of white South Africans as a terrorist organisation hell-bent on destroying their supremely privileged way of life (Carlin n. pag.), he was the "embodiment of white South Africa's worst fears," a feeling which "endured during the 27 years he spent in jail" (Carlin n. pag.). Within his own party, too, there was considerable antagonism towards him. The government had thought they could bribe him, and many, including Govan Mbeki, felt that he was "finished" (Stengel n. pag.). His special facilities at Pollsmoor and Victor Verster had been, in the eyes of many, a means of encouraging Mandela to accept "an existence independent of [the] organisation," a means of bribing him as the

government had bribed the Bantustan leaders<sup>50</sup> (Bizos n. pag.). As such, despite the near-religious zeal which accompanied his release, Mandela had to concurrently assert his loyalty to his organisation, while ameliorating the fears of South African whites, which was why Mandela set it as his number one strategic priority during his five-year presidency to cement, as he put it, the foundations of the new South Africa; to reconcile whites with the black majority to whom they had done so much harm<sup>51</sup> (Carlin n. pag.). This period would then, performatively, see the realisation of the project of consolidating the various strands of the dominant ideology with the emergent ideology of Mandela as a reconciler and man of peace.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1990, F.W. De Klerk announced that Mandela would be released, and international anticipation of this event subsequently reached a critical point. Mandela, as the embodiment of the liberation struggle at that time, and as the most famous political prisoner in the world, along with the ANC, understood the importance of his release fulfilling its symbolic potential. Mandela delayed his release by a week, wanting to be released “on his own terms” allowing “the organization and its affiliates... to be ready... to make it a media event” (Bizos n. pag.). The initial release date suggested by De Klerk did not allow time for the arrival of foreign correspondents, the media, representatives from the Lusaka and London ANC branches and the countless others who wished to be present. The importance of this moment of ‘revelation’ is reflected in the fact that, even when his close friend Amina Cachalia was alone in the room with him at Victor Verster, at a time when the entire world was waiting to see what he looked like, he would not allow his photograph to be taken (Cachalia n. pag.), not wishing to ruin the intense anticipation and

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<sup>50</sup> Hence the importance of his speech on the balcony in Cape Town on the day of his release, which aimed to lay to rest the fears of those who doubted his motivation and resolve. He sent out the message to the masses in no uncertain terms that he was a “loyal and disciplined member” of the ANC (Mandela 556). The speech, which has been widely criticized as anti-climactic, was a sober assertion of his continued commitment to the struggle.

<sup>51</sup> He also sought to allay fears around his rule, asserting in his opening address as president that he would only serve one term. Stengel credits this with having “changed the whole dispensation [as] [t]here was [then] no danger... of [what had happened] in the rest of Africa... happen[ing in South Africa]” (n. pag.).

speculation around his release. Mandela was finally released from Victor Verster occurred on 11 February 1990 (see figure 9).



Figure 9

Mandela walks free, 1990

During his first year of freedom, he travelled to around 22 countries, and spent more than 90 days away from South Africa and the issues which required his urgent attention, getting donations for the ANC pleading for the continuation of international sanctions (Van Dijk 116). During his presidency itself, he was never a “hands-on president,” never chairing the cabinet and devoting his attention to a select few issues (De Klerk n. pag.). He was, in short, a “nation builder... a ceremonial president [and] a unifying factor,” spreading his message of reconciliation internationally. Mandela’s embrace of reconciliation rather than vengeance came to be seen by the international community as, in the words of the mayor of New York, “man of mythical proportions,” “a messiah”, “Simón Bolívar”, “modern man” and a “transcendent figure of freedom” (Van Dijk 120).

The Mandela who emerged from Victor Verster was, in terms of projected personality, almost an inverse of the Mandela who had been sent to Robben Island in 1964. Accounts of Mandela before his captivity emphasize his arrogance and combativeness; in the 1950s, Oliver Tambo said that “[w]hen [he] want[ed] a confrontation, [he] ask[ed] for Nelson” (Gevisser 1). Matthews emphasises that the Mandela of the 1990s was “different” to the “heroic individual” of the 1950s and 60s, who was “afraid of nothing [and] almost... reckless.” Oliver Tambo and, to lesser extent, Walter Sisulu, had by contrast, had always been seen as the “conciliator[s]



and diplomat[s]" of the movement; Mandela's development of these characteristics was "something new to many of [his comrades]" (Matthews n. pag.). His various gestures of reconciliation could easily have been construed as either absurd spectacles or political connivances; however, his age – often painted by him and others as a disadvantage – would provide a sublimation of both of these. Matthews argues that Mandela's age allowed him to be perceived as "more sincere" than a younger man (n. pag.) Though he had once embodied a youthful, virile ideal, the Mandela of the 1990s was older, and ostensibly 'safer'. For instance, in a televised debate, Mandela – who, De Klerk insists, was losing on points – "pulled up level again by suddenly reaching out and saying 'but not withstanding all this'", taking De Klerk's hand and praising him with the television cameras focused on them (De Klerk n. pag.). Carlin asserts that "most of the world's not cynical about Mandela, which gives him a slight advantage in any political confrontation" (n. pag.), allowing him to pursue political strategies which another politician may not have been able to pull off.

Mandela would assert a cultural solidarity and similarity between the Afrikaner and the African, both within *Long Walk to Freedom*, and publically through performative displays. Part of his political strategy meant that, although he was acting in his capacity as a politician, he was seen to be acting as an individual, wielding a personal authority and agency, creating the impression of a man taking it on himself to take the first step in healing the rift between the racial groups. In prison, he studied Afrikaans and Afrikaner history. On his release, he took tea with the widows of Apartheid presidents, going as far as to travel to Orania to have tea with Mrs Verwoerd, the widow of H.F. Verwoerd, the man commonly credited as the architect of Apartheid (Gevisser 1). He invited Percy Yutar, the prosecutor who had called for him to be hanged in 1964, to lunch (Gevisser 1). He invited former warders, such as Christo Brand, to his birthday party (Brand n. pag.). It was, however, in sport – and rugby in particular – that Mandela made "the breakthrough towards the emotions of the people," and was "accepted by... his adversaries" (Coetsee n. pag.).

Although Mandela undertook numerous symbolic acts of reconciliation, the day of the World Cup Final, in 1995 (see figure 10), is commonly considered the day "that he captured the hearts of white South Africa... [in the] orgiastic conclusion of the most unlikely exercise in political seduction ever undertaken" (Carlin n. pag.). In his opening speech on 1 February 1991, De Klerk had said that "[South Africans] lack

the natural cohesion of a single culture and language that frequently forms the cornerstone of nationhood. Consequently, [South Africans] shall have to rely heavily on the other cornerstone – that of common values and ideals" (qtd. in Van Dijk 69). The World Cup final was the ultimate expression of Mandela's performative project to foster this ideal for the South African nation, by centring a new conception of nationhood on a traditional site of division and cultural specificity, and by appropriating a sport which had been the subject of ANC-lobbied sanctions during Apartheid, as a means emphasising his mission of reconciliation through "common values and ideals" (De Klerk qtd. in Van Dijk 69). Mandela sought to "use the Springbok team to unite [South Africa] around a common goal... set[ting] himself the mission of converting black South Africans to the perplexing notion that 'the Boks belonged to all [South Africans]'" (Carlin n. pag.). In supporting the Springbok rugby team, Mandela was performing his "ideal of... one nation" (Coetsee n. pag.). Blacks had "been brought up to detest rugby. Next to the old anthem and the old flag, there existed no more repellent symbol of apartheid than the green Springbok shirt" and Mandela's "own people... booed [him] when [he] stood before them, urging them to support the Springboks" (Carlin n. pag.). Mandela's enthusiastic pursuit of this project was taken up by the *Sowetan* newspaper, which dubbed the national team the *Amabokoboko*, and the South African Rugby Union, which coined the slogan "One Team, One Country," and encouraged the team to learn the words to *Nkosi Sikelele Afrika* (God Bless Africa), a song Mandela evokes numerous times throughout *Long Walk to Freedom* to symbolise solidarity. Carlin asserts that

Mandela's coup de grâce, the final submission of white South Africa to his charms, came minutes before the final itself [on 24 June, 1995] when the old terrorist-in-chief went on to the pitch to shake hands with the players dressed in the colours of the ancient enemy, the green Springbok shirt. (n. pag.)

With the game won, Mandela walked onto the pitch to shake hands with Pienaar again to mass adulation. "White South Africa," says Carlin, "had crowned Mandela king with the fervour black South Africa had done five years earlier at a stadium in Soweto, in the week after his release." The Afrikaner Right was all-but neutralised as a realistic threat, their "white counter-revolution" never materialising (Carlin n. pag.).



Figure 10

Mandela with Francois Pienaar after the Rugby World Cup Final, 1995

For the last six months of Mandela's presidency, Thabo Mbeki was the *de facto* president, with Mandela acting as "nation builder... a ceremonial president... a unifying factor," though he had never, according to De Klerk, been "a hands-on president at any time" (n. pag.). He never chaired the cabinet, deferring instead to De Klerk and Mbeki on a rotational basis, devoting his attention instead to a select few issues. Mandela's embrace of reconciliation rather than vengeance came to be seen by the international community as, in the words of the mayor of New York, "man of mythical proportions," "a messiah", a "modern man" and a "transcendent figure of freedom" (Van Dijk 120). His preciousness as a symbol in this foreign land was reflected in the 12,000 armed policemen and rooftop snipers present to protect him.

## Conclusion

South Africa's transition to democracy was seen as both a political and moral liberation, an international example of peacemaking and reconciliation. The practical realities of governance have, however, eroded some of the ANC's initial redemptive force. Already, by the late 1990s, South Africa "ha[d] again become a real place, gritty and grubby, its unemployment and crime wave no longer cloaked in the robes of international adulation that Mandela had draped over them" (Gevisser n. pag.). Today there is a widespread feeling that they have failed to deliver on their promises of transformation and equality, with internal conflicts increasingly playing out on the public stage, creating the impression of a party struggling to contain its internal divisions. An inadequate engagement with issues of race and racism since the ANC took power (Forde 244) has opened the space for the distinctly racialised politics which have emerged in certain quarters within the ANC, presenting a threat to the ANC's non-racialism, traditionally one of its core values. There has been widespread outcry at what has been perceived as the ANC's continued support of violators of human rights - including Burma, Sudan and China - as well as their hesitancy in intervening in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. South Africa, once an international symbol of democracy, is seen by many as being in danger of becoming a "managed democracy" (Forde 244). The ANC has shown troubling signs of a move towards press regulation and qualified access to certain forms of information, most notably in the form of their proposed Protection of Information Bill. This has elicited strong opposition from civic bodies, most notably COSATU, which originally supported the ANC in their bid for power. In short, according to Fiona Forde, "the old ANC" – the subject of international adulation, inextricably linked with the humanitarian and conciliatory mission of Nelson Mandela – "is long gone" (244).

Mandela has, by contrast, succeeded in exercising a surprising degree of agency over his image. Even as the liberation he symbolised was being realised he was being uncoupled from its practical administration, with his role as conciliator and champion of human rights having been clearly defined with the constitution of the official narrative. As a primarily symbolic leader, he managed to remain largely untouched by the disruptions within the ANC, and he subsequently pursued a variety of humanitarian causes, including AIDS awareness, children's charities and the resolution of international disputes. Today, Mandela has become a figure of

nostalgia, seen as symbolising both an idealised future, and a fast-receding idealised past. The portrayal of the democratisation of South Africa as a ‘miracle’ served an important socio-political purpose in 1994, deemphasising the politically calculated nature of the transition and fostering the rhetoric around Mandela as a sacred saviour of the nation. His ageing has, however, subsequently paralleled the decline of South Africa’s brief “golden age”; as such, there are increasing fears linked to his mortality. There is an increasing feeling that, when Mandela dies, the promise of a better future he embodied may be lost. Mandela is, ultimately, two things: a physical, biological man and a myth or symbol. The former is growing older and will eventually die; the latter will remain. However, so inextricably have these two become linked, that there exists an irrational fear that they are inseparable, that, should the man die, his symbolic promise of a truly unified South Africa will die, too. The ANC, with their gradual erosion of public trust, may find that, with Mandela, their talisman against criticism, gone, there is little separating them from a loss of power. Moral ambiguity has crept into the power equation, for is it no longer a question of the ANC versus the Nationalists. Without Mandela, the ANC will have lost the last vestiges of the moral superiority which still ameliorates the worst consequences of their actions. As such, Mandela’s symbolic potency, as representing a perpetual promise of emancipation and equality, has remained essentially undiminished, even as the ANC’s projected image has become troublingly ambiguous.

Many of the issues which served to mobilise the masses in the struggle against apartheid – the redistribution of wealth and land central among them – have been inadequately addressed by the ANC. The discontent and revolutionary impulse which these issues fostered have, therefore, never truly dissipated; the myth of the nation’s rebirth seems to have been mostly palliative, failing to address many of the core issues which necessitated it. The ANCYL, led by Julius Malema, have been successfully rallying the nation’s youth and poor, capitalising on, and reacting to, the senior ANC’s failure to fulfil these promises. Their rhetoric has been primarily ideological and emotional, rather than practical – as in their call for the nationalisation of the mining industry – and contains echoes of the rebellious, militant spirit of the Youth League of the late 1940s. In fact, Malema has evoked the “events of 1949, when his forebears did what he wants to do today” (Forde 244), when the Youth League “threw down the gauntlet to the old guard leadership of the ANC” and

became “the tail that wagged the ANC dog” (Welsh 43; 47). They pushed through their Programme of Action and deposed the ANC president A.B. Xuma who, for them, represented “the privileged few,” the “conservati[ve],” “out of... touch” leadership who failed to embody the urgent spirit of “African National[ism]” implied by their party’s name (Welsh 43). The currency which this idea, as promoted by Malema, is gaining in the popular imagination - particularly among those who continue to labour under the senior ANC’s failure to deliver on its promises - suggests that the militant, youth-identified Africanist ideology that the younger Mandela served was, in fact, never entirely successfully supplanted by the figure of Mandela the reconciler. Just as the Mandela of the dominant narrative appropriated historical African figures of militant resistance to legitimize and supplement his identity as a liberation fighter, so too has Malema picked up on residual narrative elements of Mandela as a liberation warrior, reinvigorating them to speak to current anxieties and grievances. In other words, although the official narrative largely succeeded in engaging in a Levi-Straussian process of myth-making, consolidating the polarised figure of Mandela – the freedom fighter with the terrorist, the African traditionalist with the modern, Western subject – the same historical narrative forms which granted him his extensive symbolic currency within the pre-1990 dominant narrative still exist today, for they are rooted in, and respond to, a visceral, practical reality which remains largely unchanged.

Apartheid may be gone, but many of its symptoms remain largely unchanged. It is becoming apparent that the ANC may have over-invested symbolically in Mandela as an individual. When he was removed from the public sphere in the 1960s, the promise of his ‘second coming’ was the promise of an ever-imminent emancipation; today, his removal heralds the promise of his inevitable, ever-imminent death. The promise he embodied is, for many, fading, opening the space for new promises of liberation. This time, however, this liberation is not from the nationalists, but from the core, practical issues which first drove so many to invest their hopes in the Youth League-dominated ANC six decades ago.

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