Nelson Mandela's "Show Trials": An Analysis of Press Coverage of Mandela's Court Appearances

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Abstract

The figure of Nelson Mandela looms large in twentieth-century history. Beloved by celebrities around the globe, critics have noted his unique charisma – referred to as “Madiba magic” – and his ability to enchant audiences. Despite this, there have been few analyses of his construction as a celebrity politician, most likely because of celebrity’s association with frivolity and lack of substance – which sits poorly with our sense of Mandela. There have been particularly few examinations of his portrayal prior to imprisonment, when the seeds of the Mandela myth were sowed. This paper examines some of the early press coverage, focusing on Mandela’s “performances” in court. The paper argues that Mandela, helped by others, had a canny ability to preempt reactions to his appearance, and worked hard to direct his own image for political purposes. In addition, while Winnie Mandela’s role in raising awareness of her husband’s fate is well known, the paper shows how, even at this early stage, Mandela’s prominence and machismo depended on her feminine visibility. Mandela’s famed speech from the dock also founded a new moral tradition of protest and set the stage for his resurrection as the symbol of the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Keywords: Nelson Mandela, South African media, celebrity, Rivonia Trial, Anti-Apartheid Movement, show trial, Winnie Mandela

“Let us not mislead ourselves – the aim of ‘selling’ the accused to a rather broad overseas public as freedom fighters against an unbearable tyranny succeeded admirably. Our own viewpoint that the Rivonia conspiracy was a diabolical plan to initiate a Black revolution ... gets practically no recognition in overseas ways of thought.”

– editorial from *Die Burger*, June 1964

“To most of the world, [the Rivonia trialists] are heroes and freedom fighters, the new George Washingtons and Ben Franklins of South Africa”

– *New York Times*, June 1964

By 1990, Mandela’s re-appearance on the world stage was so widely anticipated that *Time* magazine featured an imagined portrait on its cover in the days before his release. Popularised *in absentia* (Louw 2009: 299) via events such as the 1988 Freedomfest birthday tribute concert (see Tomaselli and Boster, 1993; Tomaselli and Shepperson 2009), he emerged from prison having accumulated such immense iconic power that celebrities, politicians and royals clamoured to be photographed alongside him. His inauguration was attended by more heads of state than any event since John F. Kennedy’s funeral (Posel 2014: 81), and Nobel writer J.M. Coetzee mused in his obituary that Mandela might be the last of the world’s “great men” (2013).

Mandela’s 26 years of invisibility fueled such intense media fascination that the event of his release had a euphoric quality to it (Nixon 1991). Despite this, there is some discomfort in speaking about Mandela’s construction as a “celebrity”. As Boehmer (2013) points out, this may be because celebrity is frequently accused of fickle “change-ability”; certainly this is the case with theories that reduce the role of celebrity in modern life to substanceless spectacle (Debord 1967) and pseudo-reality (Boorstin 1971). As a result, Mandela’s mastery of his image, his “theatricality” and his “shrewd ability to manipulate his own myth”, have rarely been analysed in depth (Boehmer 2013).

In addition, the few studies on Mandela’s appeal focus on his use as a symbol of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in the 1980s (see Lahusen 1996, Louw 2009, Klein 2009) or his later manifestation as a global icon in the post-apartheid era (see Stadler 2009; Tomaselli and Boster 1993; Tomaselli and Shepperson 2009). But the celebration of Mandela had much earlier roots.

This paper provides an overview of press coverage around the time of the Rivonia Trial, considered a founding event in Mandela’s mythification. The trial formed part of the propaganda battle between the state and its opponents, and it gave Mandela and

his defendants access to a platform that extended to hard-to-reach international audiences, setting the stage for the Anti-Apartheid Movement's Release Mandela campaign in the 1970s and 80s. In many ways, Rivonia played out as a kind of "show trial" – a trial whose main intention is to make a political point, instead of determining guilt or innocence, which are already pre-determined¹ – and both the defendants and the press used aspects of celebrity in the battle for public approval. Yet, Rivonia was also the opposite of a pseudo-event; from the outset, there was a real possibility that the trialists would hang.

While the trial and Mandela's speech from the dock have been recounted in several books (Broun 2012; Joffe 1995; Frankel 2011; Clarkson 2013), memoirs (Bernstein 1989; Mandela 1999; Kathrada 2004; Bizos 2007; Goldberg 2010; Hepple 2013) and documentaries (Stadlen 2018; Champeaux & Porte 2018), there have been few in-depth analyses of this early portrayal – and performance – of Mandela. The trial sowed the seeds for his extraordinary transformation from a little-known African nationalist into the world's most famous political prisoner, and later a global humanitarian icon.

Tom Lodge identifies Mandela as one of the twentieth century's first media politicians, a "showboy" as one of his contemporaries nicknamed him, embodying a glamour and a style that projected *visually* a brave new African world of modernity and freedom (2006, ix (emphasis in original)), and Boehmer describes the ANC leader as having a "shrewd ability to manipulate his own myth" (2013). But Mandela's celebrity also owed a great deal to the efforts of others – a point he actively emphasized and which the media consistently overlooked.² This paper illustrates how, around the time of the trial, press coverage of Mandela was directed not only by his own choices but also by the actions of others. Firstly, the decisions taken by the state were ill fated, and, as the epigraphs suggest, served to elevate Mandela and the trialists internationally. Secondly, even prior to Rivonia, individuals such as Ruth First and Ahmed Kathrada helped to craft Mandela's public persona.

¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term was first used in the 1930s. Ironically, given apartheid South Africa's supposed opposition to Communism, it has mainly been associated with legal hearings in the Soviet Union.

² Two recent documentaries on the events of Rivonia (Stadlen 2018; Champeaux & Porte 2018) make an effort to rectify this imbalance.

This process was greatly enhanced by the Rivonia defendants' group decision for Mandela to make a speech from the dock at the defence's opening. The speech was a pivotal point in the narrative of what was thereafter often referred to as "Mandela's trial", and it influenced the Anti-Apartheid Movement's (AAM) choice of Mandela as the symbol of their struggle. Finally, the involvement of Mandela's family, especially Winnie Mandela, intensified media interest in events, particularly from a visual perspective. Because of a prohibition on recording court proceedings, it is the images of the elegant Winnie Mandela ascending the steps of the Pretoria Supreme Court that supplemented reports on the trial and have become synonymous with the event. For the most part, Mandela remained visually absent from news coverage.

Mandela's Pre-Rivonia media image

Mandela had emerged as a notable leader during the 1952 Defiance Campaign, after which local reports mention the Law Society's (failed) attempt to have him disbarred as a practising attorney. He then appears as one of 156 defendants in the Treason Trial (1956–1961), which, as the longest trial in South African history, also attracted ongoing media interest. The UK media first noticed him for his involvement in the anti-republic stay-at-home in May 1961 – an event of interest to it because it protested the apartheid government's decision to leave the Commonwealth.

It is somewhat ironic, given celebrity's association with "recognizable visibility" (Marshall 2015, 81), that it was mainly after the ANC's banning in 1960 – when Mandela became "invisible" – that he began to attract significant media attention (Blignaut 2013). He went underground in April 1961, and acquired a reputation as a master of disguise constantly outwitting the security police. This was achieved in various ways. Many have noted Mandela's magical ability to adapt to the needs of his audience (see Posel 2014; Boehmer 2013); it was during this period that he developed a talent for disguise, posing variously as a labourer, chef and gardener.

In his biography Mandela claims to have encouraged this perception himself, saying, that he would "even feed the mythology of the 'Black Pimpernel' ... phoning individual newspaper reporters from telephone boxes and relaying to them stories of what we were planning or the ineptitude of the police" (1994, 255). The press lapped it up. A 1962 *Time* magazine article, for instance, described how "dressed as a garage

worker, he once wheeled a spare tire down the main street of Johannesburg under the nose of the cops” (17 August).

To add to his mystique, journalists were invited to meet the fugitive Mandela (Van Heerden, 2012), a risky process for both interviewer and interviewee. In order to keep his whereabouts secret, reporters were sometimes blindfolded before being taken to secret hideouts. Brian Widlake, a British reporter for Independent Television News and the first person to conduct a television interview with Mandela, recounts how he was driven on a roundabout route to an anonymous location in the dead of night (2010, no page number).³ Sometimes, to protect themselves from subsequent police interrogations, journalists invented a narrative of secrecy. Peter Hazelhurst, who held the last interview with Mandela before he was arrested, opened his *Sunday Express* article with the dramatic lead: “They took the blind fold off” (1961). Hazelhurst later confessed that this was a ruse, fabricated to protect himself and his sources (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2012). (He was indeed questioned by security police after the article’s publication.) In these and other instances, Mandela actively constructed his reputation as a

While Sisulu’s mentorship of Mandela is well known (see Sampson 1999, 143), other colleagues also assisted in the creation of “the Black Pimpernel”, as Mandela was dubbed. Ruth First, co-founder of the leftist *New Age* newspaper, often arranged the assignments (see accounts in Nelson Mandela Foundation 2012; Widlake 2010), while Ahmed Kathrada served as a mediator (see Nelson Mandela Foundation 2012; Kathrada 2004, 148; Widlake 2010).

Numerous photo shoots were also organised. Van Heerden has shown how Mandela’s rising fame corresponded with the growth of photojournalism (2012, 73), especially in African publications such as *Drum*, then edited by Anthony Sampson. Celebrity, of course, thrives on visual culture; photographs form part of its “currency” (Hargreaves and Hamilton 2001, 1). This was a point that Mandela, Winnie Mandela and the ANC well understood. “All his life,” Richard Stengel notes, ‘Mandela cultivated and curated images of himself,’ adding that “he understood that images endure long

³ Kathrada, who drove Widlake to the meeting, clarified that he was in fact truly lost (2004, 148)!

before the existence of social networking sites” (2012, 96). Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites (2007; 2016) have also shown how photographs become part of society’s civic discourse; they are the means via which the celebrity – or, in their terms, the “widely recognized stranger” (2016, 204) – becomes known. The photographs produced at this point in Mandela’s life would go on to be globally disseminated, contributing to his “exceptional form of individual presence” (ibid.).

According to Wolfie Kodesh (no date), in 1961, after Mandela had been in hiding for some time, rumours began to circulate that he had died, been captured or left the country. Kodesh (in whose apartment Mandela was staying) recalls that, to counter these whisperings, the ANC top brass decided to photograph Mandela with a newly acquired beard. Photographer Eli Weinberg produced an image that emphasised Mandela’s facial hair and side parting. The photograph was widely circulated – and in a demonstration of the way in which iconic images often become “afterimages”, acquiring a “cultural currency” beyond their production context (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 50) – it later formed the blueprint for the radical posterisation of Mandela’s image (see Evans, 2014: 85). While few viewers are familiar with the original photograph, many recognise it from its use on AAM materials (buttons, posters, pamphlets, etc.) associated with the campaign for Mandela’s release (Blignaut 2013).

The image, however, also found its way into the hands of the security police and Mandela’s luck ran out when he was arrested in August 1962. Disguised as a chauffeur, he was apprehended by police en route to Howick after seventy days on the run. To this day, the circumstances of the arrest remain mysterious. Some, including Mandela himself, claim that he was reckless. He, refused, for instance, to shave his beard, despite warnings from colleagues (Mandela 1994, 161). Although his whereabouts were likely known to the police, there are also claims that they were tipped off by the CIA, who perceived Mandela as a potentially dangerous communist (Taylor 2016). Whatever the case, the trial that followed gave Mandela a new layer of moral capital.

Charged with incitement and leaving the country illegally, Mandela attracted the attention of the media by choosing to represent himself in court. At the hearing,

instead of attempting to prove his innocence, at every turn he sought to emphasise the illegitimacy of, as he put it, “a judiciary controlled entirely by whites and enforcing laws enacted by a white parliament”. He demanded that the judge recuse himself, telling the court in words that would later become famous: “It makes me feel that I am a Black man in a White man’s Court” (October 1962).

Mandela’s stance in this trial mirrored the position taken by the Treason Trialists some years earlier; they, too, used the courtroom to air their grievances about the political situation. Albert Luthuli had even extended an offer to negotiate, saying, “My Lord, even at this moment, we would be very, very happy if the government would take up the attitude of saying, come let us discuss” (5 March 1960).

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Mandela’s testimony particularly echoed that of Robert Sobukwe, who had similarly dismissed the legitimacy of the Johannesburg Regional Court in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre, when he was tried for incitement. Like Mandela, Sobukwe refused the aid of a lawyer (see Pogrand 2006), stating, “an unjust law cannot be applied justly” (4 May 1960). At the time, the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a rival breakaway organisation founded by Sobukwe, were engaged in a battle for political support, and Mandela may well have felt pressure to outperform his competitor in court. That it is Mandela who is generally remembered for dismissing the legitimacy of the court remains a sore point among PAC supporters (see, for instance, Pheko 2016).

Because of ever-more-repressive censorship laws, the courtroom, beginning with the Treason Trial, became the chief platform for banned organisations to set out their vision. As Cole points out, “the Treason Trial set the tone for what followed: the State’s use of a judicial space to stage a direct encounter with the anti-apartheid movement, its use of a political trial to vanquish the political rally” (2010, 44; see also Lobban 1996).

Mandela’s attire in court was a key part of his “show trial” strategy. It was preceded by the release of a photograph of him sporting a Tembu necklace and robe, taken just a few months before his trial. The photo (again taken by Weinberg in Kodesh’s flat) was an attempt to exude a more Africanist identity (Simonson 2014, 63), perhaps also

to counter the more radical PAC's growing popularity. In court, Mandela decided to wear the Tembu royal costume of leopardskin and beads, to emphasise his status as the son of a councilor to a Tembu chief. It was, he later explained, deliberately chosen as a "sign of contempt for the niceties of white justice" (1999, 311–312).

Although Mandela's sartorial choices at the trial have become the stuff of legend, at the time, the press devoted more attention to the attire of the elegant and media-savvy Winnie Mandela, Mandela's wife of four years, who, because her husband could not be photographed in court, provided visual content to accompany articles. The *Rand Daily Mail*, prevented from reporting on the court proceedings because of the Sabotage Act, devoted a surprising amount of attention to her interchanging of Western and traditional garb (which she did sometimes even at the same hearing, changing in the cloakroom during breaks). "At a demonstration at the Johannesburg City Hall steps, Mrs Mandela represents haute couture," the newspaper reported, gushing over her "fur toque and tailored costume" and "Tembu bead tie" (17 August 1962). The press's gendered interest in Winnie Mandela's fashion choices mirrored media reactions to political icons such as Jackie Kennedy, and it served a twofold function. Firstly, it elevated her status to that of a first lady in waiting. Secondly, focusing on her grace and femininity emphasised her husband's strength and masculinity. Incapable of commenting on the couple's politics, fashion became a symbolic discourse via which journalists could signal their approval and allegiance. Liberal newspaper reports did not frame the trialists or their wives as criminals or terrorists; at the same time, by focusing on the visual, their advocacy could only go so far.

The deeper implications of some of the couple's fashion choices was also lost on some publications. Donning traditional clothing to communicate political points was also not a new phenomenon, and the Mandelas were likely influenced by Luthuli's dress code at his Nobel Prize lecture a few months earlier. The global media had paid special attention to Luthuli's royal leopard-skin headpiece and lion's teeth necklace. Like Mandela, Luthuli's dress exposed the illegitimacy of a regime that had stripped him of his chieftdom in 1952, claiming that, as a member of the ANC, he couldn't hold the office. Even if some newspapers did not fully grasp the implications of their choices, through making their politics visual, the Mandelas and trial supporters

bypassed stringent press prohibitions and attracted the attention of photographers, which in turn enhanced the salience of the event in newspapers. Because, as Susan Sontag has pointed out, images “enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at” (1977, 3), they play an important role in agenda-setting and framing, increasing the salience of the news reports they accompany.

This first trial was an important event in the construction of Mandela’s personal celebrity. For perhaps the first time, we see an attempt to disseminate his image and words beyond their historical moment, which may be why Mandela is associated with rejecting the court ahead of Sobukwe. Soon after the trial’s conclusion, Mandela’s defiant remarks were distributed in Johannesburg townships in an illegally printed booklet (*Rand Daily Mail*, 12 March 1963) with the title “I Accuse!” above the 1961 photograph of the fugitive Mandela taken in Kodesh’s flat. Purportedly published to overcome press censorship of Mandela’s words, the pamphlet gave readers the instruction to “pass it on”. In doing so, the pamphlet not only brought the visage of Mandela into households across Johannesburg, it also “conjure[d] up an imagined addressee whom it position[ed] a mere arm’s length away from further prospective addressees in a horizontal lattice of solidarity” (Bethlehem 2019, 194).

The “I Accuse!” publication was most likely the work of Kathrada, who in his capacity as head of the newly established Free Mandela committee launched the first campaign calling for his colleague’s release (Kathrada, 2004), after the court sentenced Mandela to five years’ imprisonment. Mandela had already served a year of this term when he was implicated in the much more serious Rivonia trial. The work of the AAM drew on this earlier campaign.

Rivonia: “The trial that changed South Africa”

This next trial was triggered by a raid on Arthur Goldreich’s farm, Liliesleaf, in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia on 11 July 1963. The property’s outhouses had been used for secret meetings between ANC and SACP members. Early in the investigation, newspapers reported that the fugitive Mandela had used the premises as a hideout.

Acting on information from an unknown person,⁴ the police apprehended a meeting of top leaders, including Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mahlaba, Ahmed Kathrada, Arthur Goldreich, Denis Goldberg and Lionel (“Rusty”) Bernstein. The arrests – particularly that of Sisulu – were considered a coup by the state, and the arresting officer Lieutenant Colonel van den Bergh’s triumphant statements were quoted liberally in local newspapers, with claims that it would put an end to “subversive activity in the country”.

At the time of the raid, Sisulu had a similar reputation to Mandela. In March 1963, he’d been convicted for furthering the aims of a banned organisation and had gone underground when he was given bail upon appeal. Hereafter, he too was cast as a mysterious outlaw, evading the slow-witted authorities, most notably when he addressed an undetermined number of listeners in Radio Freedom’s first broadcast, transmitted from a clandestine location (see Evans 2017, 61–64). Since Mandela’s involvement in Rivonia wasn’t yet known, the press – locally and abroad – focused on the capture of Sisulu, whose name dominated headlines.

During the raid, hundreds of incriminating documents were found, including instructions on how to manufacture explosives, Mandela’s Africa tour diary, and, what the prosecutor described as the “cornerstone” of the case, a draft plan titled “Operation Mayibuye”,¹ which contained a proposal for guerrilla warfare against the state. Mandela’s name was added as a defendant (with surprisingly little press reaction) and a total of nineteen individuals were arrested, including Harold Wolpe, a lawyer who’d used SACP funds to buy the farm; James Kantor, Wolpe’s legal partner and brother-in-law; and Andrew Mlangeni and Elias Motsoaledi, MK cadres linked to the farm through fingerprints. The arrestees were held in detention under the recently promulgated General Law Amendment Act of 1962 (or “no trial act”), which allowed for 90-day detention without access to legal counsel.

⁴ In an official account of the arrest, *Rivonia Unmasked!* (1965), the police allege that they received a lucky tip-off from a willing informant whose motivation is never clarified. It is more likely, however, that they procured information through interrogation and possibly torture, from one of the 23 people detained after a pre-dawn swoop two weeks before the Rivonia raid. The arrests targeted people close to Sisulu (*Rand Daily Mail*, 26 June 1963), including Lilian Ngoyi and Alfred Nzo, who were held in solitary confinement for long periods.

Unsure of the charges, the arrestees' wives appointed a defence team comprised of Joel Joffe, Bram Fischer, Vernon Berrangé, Arthur Chaskalson and George Bizos. As events unfolded, the women played an important role in the media coverage of the trial, again by providing visual material to accompany articles, thereby increasing the reports' salience.

Initially, Kantor's arrest, especially, caught the attention of the white English-speaking press. A successful divorce lawyer with a playboy reputation (Stadlen, 2018), Kantor had previously appeared in the society pages because of his six-day marriage to UK actress Marilyn Patterson. Reporters were intrigued by the story of this seemingly apolitical socialite, caught in the Rivonia web, and photographers focused on his current wife, a former model, on the steps of the court building.

Further drama ensured the trial's prominence, even before it opened. On 11 August, Goldreich and Wolpe bribed a young prison official, and escaped from Johannesburg's Marshall Square Police Station. Radio broadcasts detailing their descriptions were broadcast throughout the day of their escape, to no avail. Disguised as priests, the men made their way via Swaziland and Botswana to Tanzania, from where they flew to the United Kingdom, where they helped to raise awareness of the trial.

The stage was set for a battle of epic proportions, and the South African Broadcasting Corporation installed microphones in the courtroom for the first ever recording of a legal trial (*Star*, 29 October 1963). Sections of the local press treated the trial as a form of entertainment, establishing a "cast of characters" and updating events daily. When the accused appeared in the Pretoria Supreme Court before Judge Quartus de Wet on 30 October, the *Rand Daily Mail*, featured tabloid-style photographs of wives, observers and legal representatives entering the court under the headline "Personalities at Rivonia Sabotage Trial" (30 October 1963). It was Mandela's first appearance since his trial a year earlier and reports noted his changed demeanour. "[H]e was a big powerfully built man once," the *Sunday Times* noted, "but now he is thin" (Hannon, 1963) and, according to the *Star*, "dispirited" ("Drawn men in dock 'not fit to appear'", 9 October 1963, 1). The focus on Mandela's once-powerful build derived perhaps from earlier media portrayals, such as the famous 1957 *Drum* photo

shoot in which Mandela staged a sparring match with Jerry Moloi atop a Johannesburg building, thus “garnering connotations of African masculinity, virility and triumph” (Van Heerden 2012, 76).

Mandela’s family had come out in force, and photographers again focused on Winnie Mandela as she entered and exited the courtroom. This time she also brought their children, and the court’s expulsion of Mandela’s two young daughters, Zindzi and Zenani provided further dramatic visual content. The children, both wearing white Tembu hats for easy identification, were frequently held aloft upon the shoulders of family members. These kinds of representations elicited sympathy and later evolved into one of the key strategies of the Release Mandela campaign. Part of the campaign’s success depended on its representation of Mandela’s humanity (Klein 2006), which was emphasised by his thwarted ability to serve as a husband, father and son. As a banned person, Winnie Mandela’s permission to attend the trial had been granted on condition that she did not attract any undue attention – through the manner of her dress or in any other way (*Rand Daily Mail*, 21 April 1964). Thus, throughout the trial, she wore Western attire, but stationed herself alongside supporters in traditional garb. Other female supporters – including Albertina Sisulu – proceeded to wear “tribal” dress. Later in the trial, Mandela’s mother travelled from the Transkei to attend, and the many photographs of the long-suffering elderly woman, alongside her daughter-in-law, were particularly poignant.

At the first appearance, the defence successfully quashed the indictment, on account of its lack of specificity – which the press interpreted as a “humiliating defeat” for Minister of Justice B. J. Vorster. Shortly after this, the prosecutor Percy Yutar announced that one of the accused, Bob Hepple, would serve as the state’s first witness, leaving ten defendants. The trialists were immediately re-arrested under the no-trial act, and Yutar was more successful at the next hearing a fortnight later. The gist of the prosecution’s case was that the accused had mounted campaigns of sabotage, guerrilla warfare and, ultimately, armed invasion. Yutar set out to establish that this was the role for which the ANC had established MK, identifying the law firm James Kantor & Partners as the laundering outfit for the campaign and Liliesleaf as an operations base. The accused, Yutar argued, frequently visited the farm, from where

they planned sabotage. They were further accused of exploiting young men to commit acts of sabotage, even if they never committed such acts themselves.

A total of 174 witnesses appeared in support of these claims – workers from Liliesleaf, former MK operatives and employees from James Kantor & Partners. While Hepple would most certainly have served as the state's star witness, to Yutar's frustration, he fled the country on 25 November, and so the most damning testimony came from Bruno Mtolo, referred to as "Mr X" in court. A member of the Natal branch of MK, Mtolo had a good memory and implicated Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, and Mlangeni in plans to overthrow the state. He testified that he had committed various acts of sabotage under instruction from the MK High Command, whom he accused of enjoying a lavish lifestyle.

Mandela Addresses the World: The Speech from the Dock

In stark contrast to the prosecution, the defence called a mere 11 witnesses (the defendants and two others), ostensibly in order to avoid incriminating others. Their case was launched with a dramatic and carefully orchestrated opener – much to Yutar's surprise – which became a turning point in the trial. It was decided that Mandela, Mhlaba and Motsoaledi would give up their right to cross-examination, and deliver statements from the dock instead. This was risky, as it meant that their testimony, not subject to questioning, would be given little weight by the judge. At the same time, it enhanced the idea of their bravery and gave them a chance to speak without interruption. While Motsoaledi and Mhlaba gave short addresses, Mandela's longer opening speech captured the imagination of the world.

The "speech from the dock" phenomenon was not new, and Mandela's words echoed the rhetoric of another martyr, Irish nationalist Robert Emmet, who famously addressed the court in his own "show trial" in 1803 on the eve of his execution after being found guilty of high treason. Thabo Mbeki, Govan Mbeki's son, discovered the speech around the time of his father's trial (Gevisser 2001, 152–3), and it's possible that Mandela knew of the address – banned in South Africa – which similarly put the court on trial. "I have no hope that I can anchor my character in the breast of a court constituted and trammelled as this is," Emmet declared the day before his death, ensuring his legacy as a martyr.

Mandela's speech, nearly four hours long, took time to set out the history, aims and policies of MK. He began with the famous words "I am the first accused" and went on to explain his own "proudly felt African background". He admits to planning sabotage, but explains the reasoning behind the turn to armed struggle, claiming that he wanted "to serve my people and make my own humble contribution to their freedom struggle." The merger of his destiny with that of "his people" had a twofold effect. First, as the *New York Times* epigraph suggests, it instantly suggested his status as their leader, albeit at this stage self-elected. Second, it secured his portrayal as the embodiment of their destiny, a phenomenon of his mythification that many have noted (Guiloinéau 2002, 10; Boehmer 2013). Interestingly, as Marshall has pointed out, the relationship between the politician and his audience is a key site of overlap between celebrity and politics. "A leader must somehow embody the sentiments of the party, the people", just as "a celebrity must somehow embody the sentiments of an audience" (1997, 203). The success of Mandela's appeal to "his people" can be seen in what went on to become one of the central slogans of the trial supporters: "You will not serve these years as long as we live."

Importantly, Mandela goes on to disentangle the relationship between the ANC and the SACP (distinguishing between their different political visions) and detail the reality of life for black citizens in South Africa, concluding with the words: "It [democracy] is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

In formulating the speech, Mandela and his fellow defendants sought the input of several advisors, including his lawyers (who requested that he tone down the final line, by adding the words "if needs be" (Frankel 2013)), British journalist Anthony Sampson, whom Mandela consulted over the possible reception overseas (Sampson, no date) as well as Nobel writer Nadine Gordimer, who edited and proofread the final copy (Frankel 2013). Mandela is careful to dispel international perceptions of him as a terrorist and communist, citing his admiration for British and American democratic conventions. "I have great respect for British and American political institutions," he explained, "and for the country's system of justice. I regard the British Parliament as

the most democratic institution in the world, and the independence and impartiality of its judiciary never fail to arouse my admiration.”

Much to the state’s annoyance, the speech was deliberately leaked – “via the usual leftist channels” (Strydom 1965, 77) – to some sectors of the press, allowing for timeous publication on the day of its delivery. It also gave reporters sufficient time to grasp its complex content, and the coverage was pleasingly sympathetic. Foreign headlines, instead of focusing on Mandela’s confession of guilt (as some South African papers did), cast his testimony as heroic. “Mandela planned sabotage in struggle for emancipation”, the *Guardian* reported (21 April 1964, 12), quoting liberally from the address. Other reports focused on the bravery of his conclusion; the *Observer*, for instance, carried an unedited excerpt of the speech beneath the headline “Why I am prepared to die” (21 April 1964).

International coverage of the trial shifted in the wake of the address. Although the British press had been critical of what it called the no-trial Act, reporting had otherwise been fairly neutral during the presentation of the state’s case. In the wake of the There had been much focus on the possibility that the event was in fact a “show trial” staged by the apartheid government, and many foreign observers were dispatched to witness proceedings. The general consensus was that the judiciary was in fact independent (Broun 2012). At some point, however, the state’s suspected show trial was hijacked for the defendants’ benefit. As Martti Koskenniemi has pointed out in order to avoid the appearance of a show trial, “the accused must be allowed to speak. But this creates the risk of turning the trial into a propaganda show” (2002, 25). In the case of Rivonia, this was indeed the case. Clarkson points out that while Mandela’s performance at Rivonia had little impact on the legal procedure, it nevertheless served to “rupture ... the very logic of apartheid law” (2014, 49), so much so that the *Guardian* even referred to it as “Mandela’s show trial” in an editorial (9 June 1964, 10).

After Mandela’s speech, the media took on more of an advocacy role. The reporting of several foreign correspondents was noteworthy in this regard, especially Anthony Sampson, Stanley Uys and Robert Conway, writing for a variety of newspapers. The UK media was also awash with calls to pressurise foreign secretary R.A. Butler to

intervene in the matter, as well as requests for monetary support from the Defence and Aid Fund.

Most importantly, the address raised Mandela's reputation over and above that of his fellow trialists. The *New York Times*, for instance, featured a detailed profile piece on him, describing him as a "formidable-looking man" who "divides his free time between physical training and extensive reading". "As a speaker," the newspaper reported, "Mr. Mandela exudes what one of his friends describes as 'an animal magnetism that attracts the masses like pollen attracts the bees'" (21 April 1964, 12). The description here is interesting. It illustrates the extent to which Mandela's reputation was built upon what Boehmer calls his "noticeably masculine iconography" (2010, 134) – evident in earlier images, such as the rebellious Defiance Campaign photographs and the *Drum* photo shoot with Moloi. The *New York Times*'s focus on his "animal magnetism" and physical appearance over and above his intellect or politics also suggests the US's slightly racist nervousness about the influential power of African nationalist leaders.

It was also at this point that the trial – previously referred to as "the sabotage trial" – began to be referred to as "Mandela's trial", as Mandela's fate was conflated with the destiny of the other trialists. "Will they hang Nelson Mandela?" asked the *Observer* (6 June 1964), for instance, and "Sentence on Mandela today", *The Times* reported (12 June 1964, 12). In addition, a few days after the speech, Mandela – in the first of the many honorary positions bestowed upon him and in what was surely his first association with global celebrities – was nominated alongside Ringo Starr and John Lennon for the position of honorary president of London University College's student union (*Rand Daily Mail*, 5 May 1964, 1). He won, and was re-elected the following year.

Despite, or perhaps because of the shift in reporting, the men (all found guilty except for Bernstein) were sentenced to life imprisonment. The reaction of the South African press was somewhat confusing. While some "white" papers noted that the sentence was correct (even, notably, the usually sympathetic *Rand Daily Mail*), this may well have been because many had expected the defendants to hang. Indeed, anti-apartheid publications such as *Post* and *Sunday Express* were celebratory. "This was history,"

the *Sunday Express* declared, while the *Sunday Times* called it “the most historic trial since the Jameson Raid” (Birkby 1964, 1), but also worried that international public opinion would be damaging for the country’s reputation.

The afterlife of Rivonia and the resurrection of Mandela

Immediately after the trial, there were various attempts to direct Rivonia’s legacy. The state tried to tamp down history with the publication of two vivid pro-government accounts glorifying the arrest and sentencing of the men. The first book, written by a retired supreme court judge, gave no account of the defendants’ comments in court and claimed that had the trialists been tried in a communist country they would have faced the firing squad (De Villiers, 1964). The second, *Rivonia Unmasked!* (Strydom 1965), purported to tear away the mask “to reveal the face of the monster with which we are confronted” and was rubber-stamped by Vorster, who in his foreword warned that “[t]he incidents connected with Rivonia and the lessons learnt by those in authority and by others must definitely not be forgotten.” The book, which repeats the details of the state’s case, reduces Mandela’s speech to less than a page.

The white South African press was also particularly excited when a German television company created a two-part documentary reconstruction of the raid and trial, *Der Rivonia Prozess*, reporting widely on the filming activities and “stars”. *Dagbreek* mused that the actors did not resemble the real Rivonia figures, and other reports claimed that the film was entirely “non political” and “pro-SA” (*Star*, 19 January 1966; *Star*, 10 March 1966), although it is perhaps a more sympathetic portrayal of the trialists’ fate than the state would have wanted. Mandela’s speech, for instance, receives nearly ten minutes’ screen time, and one of the concluding scenes is of a weeping Winnie Mandela, setting the scene for the post-Rivonia focus on her plight.

The events of Rivonia, particularly Mandela’s address, were also echoed when a member of the legal team, Afrikaner Bram Fischer, was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment for conspiracy to commit sabotage. Fischer followed Mandela’s example, delivering a speech from the dock in which he similarly denounced apartheid. Soon after this, the government changed the law, preventing dissidents from exploiting the court platform in this way.

Despite the immediate aftermath, in the latter half of the 1960s, the trialists slipped off the media's agenda, and the government appeared to have achieved its objective of snuffing out opposition voices. Sampson notes that international interest in Mandela waned: while he was mentioned 24 times in the *New York Times* in 1964, he vanished from the newspaper for the rest of the decade, except for 1967 when Winnie Mandela was mentioned (1991, 259).

For nearly two decades, Mandela and his co-accused were forgotten. Alan Brooks, the deputy executive secretary for the AAM between 1967 and 1970, cannot remember a single action in the name of Mandela from the period of his tenure (cited in Klein 2009, 460), and John Kane claims that, by the 1970s, when South African youth radicalized under the black consciousness movement, the 1950s leaders had been "moldering on far-off Robben Island for fourteen years", and the likes of Steve Biko were more relevant to the contemporary struggle (2001, 125). Tomaselli and Shepperson add that it was the "martyrdom of Biko that provided the foundation for the later emergence of Nelson Mandela as a folk hero in the US and British media" and that the "dead symbol of resistance ... was meshed with the living sign that was Mandela" (2009, 33).

Importantly, Winnie Mandela also utilised her status to remind the world of her husband's imprisonment, alerting journalists of her prison visits and keeping them abreast of her husband's condition (see Brand, 2014). Ironically, the state's constant harassment of her also helped to keep his name in the media.

In addition, Mandela's "resurrection" was also no doubt because, at some point – Mandela claims at Oliver Tambo's instruction – the AAM personalised its political prisoner campaign, using the figure of Mandela, the Rivonia trialist with the most celebrity appeal. The events of Rivonia – especially Mandela's speech – provided perfect material for his resurrection as a struggle icon. Lobban notes that in the 1970s, the speech was reprinted in *Wits Student*, along with Toivo ja Toivo's speech from the dock (1996, 97), and by the 1980s, copies of the banned text were circulating underground. In 1984, twenty years after the trial, the Release Mandela committee ran a campaign commemorating Rivonia, calling for the immediate release of political

prisoners. These campaigns focused on “celebrating” Mandela, and were careful to focus on positive appeals, through, for instance, the Mandela birthday tributes. Such events popularised the struggle, culminating in the massively successful Mandela Birthday Concert in 1988, two years before his eventual release (see Tomaselli and Boster, 1993).

Conclusion

Mandela’s increasing popularity, referred to as the M-problem in some government circles, was partly a result of the state’s own making. Rendering him invisible and silencing him worked for a period, but somewhat ironically, given that celebrity depends heavily on visibility, it ultimately heightened Mandela’s heroic aura. The government’s attempts to recast Rivonia as the defeat of a communist plot failed miserably, and the trial instead helped to construct him as a global icon. Mandela’s masculine appeal – as a heroic martyr, as a family man and father – also owed much to the feminine visibility and deliberate efforts of Winnie Mandela. Because events in court could not be covered, it was the appearance of his wife, on the courtroom steps, which attracted the attention of photographers and helped to increase the salience of news reports. These courtroom “performances” illustrate how he and others curated his image for political gain from a very early period. As Kane points out, the later Mandela could not have occurred without the earlier Mandela (2001, 126–127), and the events of Rivonia, particularly Mandela and his fellow defendants’ crafting of his mythic speech from the dock, sowed the seeds for his reconstruction as the most celebrated symbol of the struggle. By the time of his release, he had acquired such immense moral capital (Kane 2001) that there was little doubt that he would play a leading role in governing the new South Africa.

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