



'Magic Negro', Saint or Comrade: Representations of Nelson Mandela in Film

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"In the late 1980s, Nelson Mandela stood alone against the apartheid state." This comment taken from the DVD Box set cover of *Nelson Mandela: From Freedom to History* summarises the approach taken by many of the cinematic and televisual representations of Mandela. Linked with this is a statement by the CEO of Marriott which speaks of Mandela as "an individual who changed the arc of history through his or her singular contribution, not as a function of the era or the movement but because of what they did alone." Together, these descriptions attempt to appropriate Mandela for a sanitised version of western individualism which sees him variously as a liberal icon, saintly hero, or the celebrity one-off "magic negro", in Okwongo's damning phrase taken from his magisterial valedictory piece "Mandela will never, ever be your minstrel" (Okwongo 2013). In the process, Mandela's role in the anti-apartheid struggle is de-contextualised, mystified, and effectively depoliticised, a cardboard cut-out severed from his era and the 'movement', displaced from the militancy of his early revolutionary commitment and long-term embeddedness in a complex political community, which existed both in South Africa itself and in exile overseas. It is well known that there were elements of choreography, scripting and performance in the public persona of Mandela, the product of a deliberately crafted strategy developed by the ANC leadership abroad in conjunction with the man himself. How far this is



reflected in the various filmic versions of his life will be one of the issues addressed. The article will examine a small range of documentaries and feature films – some of which attempt to cover a number of years in his life, others of which focus on particular episodes – in order to trace the different modalities of representation from the hagiographic through to more critical and subtler political understandings and analyses.

One of Mandela's biographers, Tom Lodge, has claimed that "[f]or Mandela, politics has always been primarily about enacting stories, about making narratives" (Lodge 2006: ix) and my concern is with the *construction* of what I call the Mandela narrative, the specific codes of representation and performance which have constituted the cinematic processes and forms which have centred on the life of Nelson Mandela and the ways in which we perceive, and receive, the meaning/s of one of the most influential figures of the twentieth century. One of the problems we confront immediately in seeking to understand this 'construction' is that, as Xan Brooks has argued, "the prison could not hold him and the biopic can't contain him" (Brooks 2014). Given that film must necessarily "summarize, synthesize, generalize, symbolize – in images" (Rosenstone 1995: 16), what strategies must filmmakers deploy to produce images which are adequate and apposite to the complexities of a figure who, very consciously, stage-managed, scripted and performed a series of changing roles over the course of many years, not in his own self-interest but in order to project a symbolic representation of an organisation – the ANC – and a struggle against the apartheid regime of South Africa? This was, as I have said, a performative role orchestrated to a considerable degree by his comrades in the ANC, seeking a figure of continuity and visibility to advance their cause.

If, as Elleke Boehmer in her excellent study of Mandela (Boehmer 2008) suggests, we need to seek to understand the legacy and impact of Mandela in the *figural*, through a life "which courts a metaphorical reading" (Boehmer 2008: 177), how can filmmakers transform and translate the figural and metaphorical into cinematic forms, particularly in respect of a man whose life is 'always already known' and pre-scripted, and has been over-represented in so many different media, including at least twenty film and television documentary and feature films, "to the point of being rendered banal, excavated for meaning till all sense of the human being behind the public face disappears" (Boehmer 2008: 181)?

Although there are already many cinematic representations of Mandela, with a few exceptions most scholarly attention has been directed towards print or interview forms. I shall not attempt anything like coverage of the filmic representations but will concentrate upon two distinct modes: the long sweep, biographical approach and the focus upon a particular event or moment. In the first category are *Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (feature film, 2013) and *Mandela* (also known as *Mandela: Son of Africa, Father of the Nation*) the official documentary (1996); in the second category are *Invictus* (feature film, 2009) and *The 16th Man* (documentary, 2010). By way of



conclusion I shall examine *Mandela: the Myth and Me* (documentary, 2013/14), one of the few serious attempts to “trouble received knowledge” (Modisane 2013: 239) about Mandela by producing a subjective but critical evaluation of the transition from apartheid.

PEACEFUL HUMANIST; VIOLENT REVOLUTIONARY

Nelson Mandela: Son of Africa, Father of the Nation, the authorised documentary made with the co-operation of Mandela himself, directed by Jo Menell and Angus Gibson, is based mainly on his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. The film combines voice-over narration and commentary, black and white archival footage, and interviews with Mandela, his family, and associates. Like any biography it is selective but its strength is the presence of Mandela himself throughout, either on camera or in commentary, together with very effective use of archival footage from the distant past and of the present, combined with a range of interviews with crucial people in his life. It does point out the flaws in his personal life but it tends to simplify the political struggle, partly removes Mandela from the ANC commitment to ending apartheid (whereas in his autobiography, he writes, “It is from these comrades in the struggle that I learned the meaning of courage”), makes no attempt to discuss his ideas (there is no mention at all of *Ubuntu*, the central principle of his humanism) and, in the end, constructs a monument without ever really examining the ways in which the construction of the myth of Mandela was not a lone project but a collective decision to project him as the global icon of the movement. Although the film begins by very firmly embedding him in a specific social and cultural context, a product of a community deeply aware of racism and profound inequalities, towards the end, in quite rightly celebrating his extraordinary achievements, it does drift towards the Marriott CEO’s description of the *individual* who changed the arc of history. In his own writings, Mandela never takes up this position, always inscribing himself clearly in an era and a movement – a man of his time and his place – nor does the documentary entirely mythologize Mandela, except that in its latter sequences he is elevated onto a plinth of singularity.

Mandela granted the rights of the film, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, based on his autobiography, to a South African producer, Anant Singh, in 1997 but it was not until late 2013 that the film was finally released. Given the stature of Mandela, the task involved in making the film must have been intimidating. For obvious reasons, it bears many similarities to the documentary just mentioned but its primary function was to *dramatize* the life whereas the documentary was designed as a record and a tribute. Shot over 81 days at a cost of \$35 million, with a South African crew, a British director, Justin Chadwick, and 12,000 extras, the film has epic ambitions. The screenwriter, William Nicholson, produced more than forty versions of the script. Both documentary and feature work with a fairly conventional chronological format but the latter is less



reverential and far more prepared to show negative aspects of Mandela's personality and behaviour. For example, the scene where he assaults his first wife, Evelyn, has a visceral and disturbing effect. The treatment of Winnie Mandela in prison is graphic and harrowing, as is the constant harassment and climate of fear threatening the family on a daily basis, and this is contrasted with Mandela's very different humiliation and abuse. The relationship between Mandela and Winnie is the axis upon which much of the film's dramatic impact turns and is its most powerful feature, but at the same time its centrality displaces the political in many respects and relegates it to a relatively subsidiary role except at the level of the spectacular (footage and recreated scenes of protest and violence together with ceremonial speeches). As Sally Williams says, in her article on the making of the film, "Under his [Chadwick's] direction the film also takes in the central paradox: how the father of the nation sacrificed his own children and a normal family life" (Williams 2013). This 'central paradox' is at the heart of the film and of the strong performances by the lead actors, Idris Elba and Naomie Harris, but it is also a source of a major weakness which will be discussed below.

The film opens with a shot of a small boy running through grassland, followed by shadowy/hazy images of children playing, accompanied by the voice-over of Mandela/Elba saying "I dream the same dream night after night. I am coming home to the house in Orlando. Everything is the way it was. They are all there. All the ones that I have loved most in the world. They seem fine. Getting on with their lives. But they do not see me. They never see me" (unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be from this and the other films discussed). The dream frames the drama and echoes something Mandela said in his autobiography: "To be the father of a nation is a great honour, but to be the father of a family is a greater joy. But it was a joy I had far too little of" (Mandela 1994: 592). The ghostly, invisible, absent father who, in reality, did not see his family is now no longer seen by them. The honour/joy conflict helps to shape the film.

Like the documentary, this film, by combining footage with enactment, shows the circumcision scene and its cultural function in preparing the boys for manhood and duty, becoming 'sons of the nation'. Both films seek to root the later Mandela and his achievements in a traditional Xhosa community of ethical values. For all its epic sweep and cinematographic scale, it is family – lost, neglected, conflicted – which anchors the narrative. He may, as his sister said, belong to the nation but the film emphasizes the cost of this belonging.

The film moves very rapidly to Johannesburg in the 1940s and presents a now sophisticated Mandela, lawyer, man about town with his Oldsmobile, and womanizer. His politicisation begins with an attempt to seek justice when a man he knows is beaten to death by the police. The limits of law are recognised and politics take over under the influence of ANC members, Tambo and Kathrada, meeting in Walter Sisulu's house. Tellingly, Sisulu says, "you can't do it alone but together we have the power",



something which is part of a rhetoric of collectivity and solidarity which the film progressively sidelines.

At this stage in the film, however, during his marriage to Evelyn, the political activism is foregrounded. This activism took the form of the bus boycott, the Defiance campaign of 1955, the storming of 'whites only' areas of the railway station, and his first spell in prison. The domestic is accordingly muted, except that he has an affair, and is separated from his wife. Following this, the meeting with Winnie and their courtship – they are shown walking in a light saturated idyllic countryside – would seem to fit in with a classic Hollywood romance but, as we know, their relationship pursued a very different trajectory. Initially fairly passive, as child-bearer and support of her husband in court and prison, Winnie takes on the militant, revolutionary activist role that he gave up in favour of his statesmanlike, diplomatic role as the 'architect of compromise'. These opposite roles are presented as a given but are not interrogated in any way.

In the first years of their marriage, Mandela's militancy is still what drives him as, motivated by the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, he persuades the ANC leadership to resort to armed struggle, goes underground, visits African countries, attends weapons and sabotage training, and helps to form Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC. The film represents this radical change of direction in synoptic fashion through a series of rapid edits but neglects to allow any space for the intense debates which led to the decision to arm, such as the disputes within the ANC, between the PAC and the ANC, or the role of the SACP in influencing policy. The only voice really featured is that of Mandela. The autobiography spends a considerable time on the politics of this decision and does not simplify the processes or individualize it as the film does. Of course, a film is working with a very different timescale and has to synthesize and compress but it is a matter of priorities and it would need a very different kind of film to shift attention towards a historicization and politicization of the struggle against apartheid, one that attempts to overcome the limitations usually placed upon mainstream distribution.

In his autobiography, Mandela tells a story about himself and his comrades in struggle, and the making of himself and his world *in not just his but their image also*, self-consciously becoming an actor on a historical stage, someone endowed with legendary status, a performative engagement with an oppressive regime.

The Rivonia trial is staged and intercut with some archival footage but, again, the focus falls primarily on Mandela, with little attention paid to the other nine defendants, some of whom were white and a number of whom were communists. It is only Mandela's statement from the dock which we see/hear. Oddly enough, for a film which takes such care over period style and detail, Mandela is not shown in his princely, tribal *kaross*. Once sentenced, the travails, deprivations and arduous labour on Robben Island are focussed upon, as are the small victories won over the prison regime. What we are not shown is the *political* dynamic of the imprisoned comrades,



the challenges, the internal conflicts (with the PAC and Black Consciousness prisoners, except for a brief exchange with a BC inmate) or the classes on political theory or Marxism. No sense is given of the prison 'university', the communal spirit and culture, or of the ways in which "through their resistance, prisoners on Robben Island began to build a polity and even a nascent parliament" (Buntman 2003: 5), rehearsing the resistance politics that many would continue upon release and that, in some respects, would shape the first ANC government. The setting up of the ANC 'High Organ' in prison was a crucial political initiative but it receives no mention. Mandela's grief at the loss of his son and his mother – "I am losing them all – my son, my mother, my wife" – is very movingly conveyed but this, like the emphasis on censorship of letters, the visiting restrictions, and his letters to Winnie and his daughters, is all part of the prioritization of the personal at the expense of other dimensions. I do not wish to minimize the critical role the film attributes to Winnie's experience during this period as her arrests, imprisonment, torture and sexual abuse are some of the most powerful and distressing features of the film – much more prominent than in the documentary – and, as Mandela wrote to his daughters, "she has sacrificed her own happiness in the battle for truth and justice". She is shown becoming more resolute and engaged, losing her fear of the regime, and this makes sense of her commitment to continuing the armed struggle after Mandela's release.

The 1982 move to Pollsmoor prison, with its dormitory sleeping arrangements, would presumably have enhanced the opportunities for political discussion but nothing is shown and the emphasis shifts to Winnie's new militancy, with shots of her 'football team', her speech "we have stones, we have boxes of matches, we have petrol", and her urging of the boys to get informers; scenes of 'necklacing' are staged. By contrast, the film then moves on to the preliminary stages of the negotiations which led up to the release of the ANC leaders and Mandela himself, and here we do witness the tension between him and the four other leaders, and with Winnie. "They fear me, they must fear you", she says, as she is anxious about his likely compromises. The ANC leaders outvote him on the holding of private talks but, not for the last time, Mandela says "I will do what I think right" and does it alone. However, in the meetings with Kobi Coetsee and other regime officials, Mandela is shown to be intractable on the fundamental conditions required by the ANC. These talks are intercut with scenes of urban violence, police brutality, and the killing of many blacks, underlining that it was not just the 'magic' of Mandela which produced the dismantling of apartheid but a whole host of other, complex factors, internal and external. However, when, in a very short time, de Klerk concedes to Mandela's demands, the film provides no context for this – sanctions, international boycotts of goods and sport, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the presence of Cuban troops in Angola and the victory in the battle at Cuito Cuanavale – but it is all presented as the outcome of an exchange between two leaders.



Mandela's release is recreated in a halo of sunshine but Winnie is still maintaining her political position: "Don't be fooled by all that cheering Madiba. There's anger out there". In fact, the post-release phase of the film is played out against a background of escalating violence but there is no attempt to situate it with reference to Inkatha and Buthelezi, the role of the AWB, or of the security services, but represented almost as a moral fable in which Mandela, now in his business suit, stands for the voice of reason and moderation, "a little power for a little while, till the anger has passed", while Winnie in battle fatigues speaks for the struggle: "the time for talking is over, we will fight" and is conflated with the violent footage. There is a very moving sequence, with the two of them standing apart in a large room, which spatially denotes both their isolation and the distance between them. He scolds her, rather like an angry father, telling her she must abide by ANC policies, that they are negotiating and there is no war (a reference to her combat dress). He follows this with a cold and callously stated decision that he intends to live on his own as it is better for the party and for her. Winnie listens on the radio to his announcement of their 'mutual' separation but there is no indication of its mutuality. The breakdown of their relationship, one of the principal themes of the film, is further emphasized by a shot of Mandela dining alone intercut with an image of Winnie seated on her own with a glass of wine in her hand.

Philip Bonner writes of the many antinomies of Nelson Mandela, one of which was that between the familial and the political, "a core and contradictory part of the man" (Bonner 2013: 29). Another antinomy Bonner describes is that "between Mandela's submission to party discipline and his individualistic tendencies" (29). The film does deal with both of these antinomies, in fact they are part of its main structural organisation, but, although a dramatic tension between them is sustained throughout, the film's ideological emphasis is, ultimately, on the familial and the individualistic. The latter is particularly prominent in the closing scenes which focus on the CODESA negotiations, the election and the victory speech.

The camera cuts from the victory celebrations to a reprise of the opening scenes and the dream speech from the beginning of the film, a script invention, as it is not found in the autobiography, which serves to underline the film's distorted emphasis on the familial. The words are not identical in the conclusion and this version turns into a lament as, at the start, they (all the ones he has loved) are 'all there' but now 'they have gone'. The film ends with stills of Nelson Mandela himself and the U2 song, *Ordinary Love*, the lyrics of which confirm that, given his political role, he cannot feel 'ordinary love'.



THE PRINCIPAL MAGICIAN

To date, *Invictus* (2008) is the only film about Mandela which has received much scholarly attention (*Safundi*, 2012; and Modisane, 2014) so I shall confine my remarks to some comments on the binary structure of the film, its crafted symmetries, and then briefly refer to the documentary, *The 16th Man*, made a year later, which also deals with the same event, the Springboks victory in the 1995 Rugby World Cup held in South Africa. *Invictus* is directed by Clint Eastwood and stars two Hollywood actors, Morgan Freeman as Mandela, and Matt Damon, as the South African rugby captain, Francois Pienaar, respectively. In fairly conventional and simplified fashion, the sporting contest is made to stand in for the years of struggle, and the team becomes the nation by a process of elision (banners proclaiming “one team, one country” are displayed). It is the most hagiographic of the depictions of the Mandela narrative, the closest to parable and fairy tale, with Freeman impersonating the ‘magic negro’. Deborah Posel has argued that “the early ingredients of Madiba magic were distilled during Mandela’s years in prison, when he began to craft a role for himself as principal magician” (Posel 2013: 73) and if all the films to a greater or lesser extent represent him in this guise, this film is the supreme instance of Mandela as the Prospero-like creator of the allegory of the nation. As has been pointed out, it is also a film which seems to work mostly within the parameters of an American narrative, Manichean and individualist and, despite its South African setting, “American preconceptions, frames of reference, and narrative designs readily take precedence” (Nixon 1994: 78).

Given that the commanding heights of the South African economy remain in corporate hands and the deep inequalities which still exist between blacks and whites, it is perhaps not surprising that primacy is given to the cultural and the symbolic, the realm of affect, as resources for identification and unity. As George Yudice has shown,

culture in the period of globalization has bled into economic and political realms. In this way, culture has been used as a political and economic tool in the service of increasing political participation or economic growth. Culture has been recognised as interested and redefined itself as ‘utility’ in order to validate its existence. (Yudice, 2003: 11)

A globalized product localizes its narrative, and conflict and power are reduced to the cultural and, in the process, depoliticized and confined to an agonistic ritual. Ritual is a characteristic of much of the film with its pairings, mirrorings, duplication, reversed identification and projection. It is almost as if apartheid itself is recast as a kind of elaborate misrecognition or structural displacement. South African rugby refers by synecdoche to the apartheid regime while Mandela, by the same process, becomes the black majority – all condensed into two singular figures. This is the principal symbolic code (black and white) which organises the film’s narrative structure, the central configuration which is repeated and reproduced in different forms, figures, and



symmetries throughout the film and out of which is generated the core antitheses and, finally, the unitary vision. In this way, the film resembles a structuralist *combinatoire*, “supporting formal elements which by themselves have neither form nor signification, nor representation, nor content, nor given empirical reality, nor hypothetical functional model, nor intelligibility behind appearances” (Deleuze 2004: 172). Out of this combinatory formula – black/white, father/son, team/nation – is constructed the film’s form and meanings, its ideological currencies and ‘miraculous’ transformations.

The film opens and closes with a defining trope which resonates throughout. A caption states that it is February 11th, 1990 and a car escorted by motorcycle outriders is driven along a road dividing two playing fields. On one of the fields, white boys are playing rugby on a cultivated grass surface, wearing uniform kit and supervised by a coach. The playing area is surrounded by a solid, well-constructed fence. On the other side of the road, a group of black children, wearing a motley collection of shirts or none at all, are playing soccer unsupervised on a rough tract of sparsely grassed land, surrounded by a ramshackle fence. This scenario announces one of the key features of apartheid, its *territoriality*. As the car, carrying Mandela we learn, passes, the black boys rush in enthusiastic and noisy fashion to greet him while, on the other side of the road, the high school boys move slowly and in orderly fashion to the fence. One boy asks the coach who it is in the car, and he replies that it is “that terrorist, Mandela, they’ve let him out”. “Remember”, the coach says, “this is the day our country went to the dogs”. This scene is the site of the primal antagonistic frontier which the film is designed to overcome. At the end of the film, the scene is partly reprised but now ‘our country’ is no longer the sole possession of the Afrikaner but the pronoun has been extended to include (or is it enclose?) the ‘other’, and the black schoolboys are now playing *rugby* on a grass arena. The all-white schoolboys have disappeared – have they become the new, multiracial Springboks, and are the black schoolchildren preparing for the day when they will become Chester Williams (the only non-white player in the World Cup- winning Springboks team)? The credits are running over this final scene and the song *Colorblind* is being played, celebrating, as Stéphane Robolin argues, “the triumph of colorblindness as the bedrock of the post-apartheid dispensation”(Robolin 2012). Given the symbiotic relation between rugby and Afrikaner nationalism, the film leaves more questions than it answers about who, at the deepest level, the country really belongs to and just how much of a transformation has taken place (something I will take up later in discussion of Khalo Matabane’s film). In a brief essay, “Retrospect: the World Cup of Rugby”, J.M. Coetzee speaks of the way in which the 1980s apartheid government was advised that they were losing out in a war over images, perceived as racists while their opponents were seen as a liberation movement, and they were recommended to “mount campaigns to reverse these perceptions, not to change their hearts and mend their ways” (Coetzee 1995). In the same essay, Coetzee argues that “part of the experience of being colonised is having images of yourself made up by



outsiders stuffed down your throats". It may be too cynical to claim that the outsiders from Hollywood are part of a perception-reversing exercise, or that they have stuffed colonising images down the throats of black South Africans, but the film's over-neat symmetries are nevertheless troubling.

The film's title, *Invictus*, is taken from the poem of the same name, with its last two lines – "I am the master of my fate/I am the captain of my soul" – shaping the film's ideological vision. It invokes a Victorian world of sport and muscular Christianity (Pienaar asks Chester Williams to lead a prayer of thanks on the field at the end of the World Cup final), with Mandela and Pienaar constructed as joint captains of their 'soul'. The poem was an inspiration to Mandela on Robben Island, and he gives a copy of it to Pienaar when they meet for tea at the Presidential residence. This fits in with the film's theme of inspiration although, in actuality, Mandela gave him a copy of Theodore Roosevelt's speech about "the man who is actually in the arena", the war-worn Hotspurs who "quell the storm and ride the thunder" which, I would have thought, fitted equally well with the film's ideology but perhaps is not individualist enough. Nevertheless, Mandela and Pienaar are combined in the "mastery of their fate", architects of a new imagined community, or is it an 'imaginary' community? As Albert Grundlingh has commented, the euphoria following the victory has not lasted but the image has: "In some respects rugby had now moved on, becoming a surrogate, compensating for the loss of Afrikaner political power and becoming a major cultural-political outlet. Afrikaners have all but disappeared from formal politics" (Grundlingh 1999: n.p). While this may be true, as I mentioned earlier, this formal disappearance is not to be confused with an actual disappearance from the resources of power.

The ritualised binary structure, or schematic antagonism, is manifested in different ways. The symbolic father, Mandela, invites the prodigal son, Francois Pienaar (emblem of the excesses of Afrikanerdom) to his residence and, if he doesn't kill the 'fattened' calf, he does serve him tea. In the construction of their relationship, Pienaar becomes the 'son' of the nation and, for the most part, the film separates him out from his team and his family, as it distances Mandela from his movement and family. When the Springboks visit Robben Island, prior to the match with France, Pienaar leaves his wife behind while he enters Mandela's cell, closing the door behind him, as, in a simultaneous act of separation and identification, he imagines Mandela in the cell reading "Invictus" (the image and voice of Freeman/Mandela appear in the cell). This act of identification and isolation enables him to bond with Mandela as the essence of liberal individualism. Pienaar's parents, his father in particular, ritually mouth apartheid-era racism, their black maid confined to her subservient space. Mandela's family rarely figure in the film, except when he chides his daughter, Zindzi, calling her objections to his conciliatory strategy "selfish". Similarly, when he confronts the ANC sports council over their proposal to abandon the Springbok symbol and colours, he is in a minority of one as he asserts rather than argues his position. As the retention of the colours was only symbolic, however culturally important to the Afrikaners,



Mandela's role in choreographing the whole World Cup 'project' was, even if individualistic, a masterstroke of strategy as was his use of Pienaar as an instrument of reconciliation, because the ANC was now in government and able to act with some magnanimity, condescension even, in making symbolic concessions at the level of the cultural. As one journalist remarked somewhat cryptically: "Afrikaners had swapped apartheid for rugby, and there was every sign they thought it was a fair deal" (*Safundi* 2012: n. p.), but this assumption will be examined later with reference to the Matabane film.

The Mandela/Pienaar symbiosis, joined in a fantasy of quasi-magical leadership, is a model of transformation. They are stock characters in a 'mirror of princes' scenario from the medieval and Renaissance period. Neither has any real space for subjectivity as they are destined to be *representatives*, moral *exempla*, monarch and prince respectively, of an idea which is larger than they are, performers in a narrative enactment of cultural/spiritual authority. Their performance acts to generate other doublings in the film. Mandela's security detachment is initially all black until a white cohort (from the apartheid regime) is grudgingly partnered with them. They start out clearly separated but are progressively paired in black/white two-shots on duty and socially. The Springboks reluctantly visit children in a township and, except for Chester Williams (the only non-white player) whose name is chanted enthusiastically, they stand apart, virtually ignored. In time, we see the white players coaching and playing with the children harmoniously. The predominantly white crowd at Ellis Park stadium chant "Nelson, Nelson" (his *English* name, incidentally; a black crowd presumably would shout "Madiba") as Mandela appears on the playing field transformed by his cap and number 6 jersey (the captain's shirt) into an honorary, but self-anointed, Springbok, who has stage-managed his whole presence there, as he had also arranged his visit by helicopter to their training ground, where he was given his cap by one of the players.

The team/nation binary which gradually becomes a unitary mantra (one team/one nation) has already been mentioned but two other instances of duplication are also of note. The first is that Pienaar's family are puzzled by the receipt of five complimentary tickets for the match as they only think of themselves as four. The extra ticket is, of course, for the black maid, Mary. Seemingly overnight, their intractable Afrikaner mentality is overcome as we see Mrs Pienaar and Mary seated together in what seems to be a predominantly white section of the stadium. They converse animatedly as apparent equals and Mary has shed her almost invisible persona and maid's beret and overall for a smart African dress and headwear. The family is fascinated when the previously silent and separated maid ululates when victory is achieved. Like so many of the other pairings, this is sentimentalized and simplified by the evacuation of a whole range of complex 'negotiations' as is the 'master/captain' *combinatoire* of Mandela and Pienaar. There are also images beyond the stadium of



separated groups watching the game at home and in bars, while at the end *mixed* crowds emerge from public venues celebrating the victory together.

One particular scenario underscores the easy sentimentality of the film and plays out the temporal and spatial divisions organised within the script. It is a comic sub-plot which takes place just outside the stadium and runs throughout the duration of the game. Four white police officers watch suspiciously as a poor black boy scavenges in a gutter near their car. They are listening to the match on the radio. In the course of the game where the main focus of the film is inside the stadium, the camera occasionally moves outside and narrates the progress of the boy who, initially distant and seemingly uninterested in the game, moves to a position closer to the car where he can hear the broadcast. A further scene sees him sitting on the bonnet of the car. Later, with the scores even, he is now wearing the hat of one of the officers as they are standing outside the car and the space between them and the boy, and the boy and the game, gradually closes in rhythm with the time of the match. When victory is achieved, one of the officers lifts the boy up and embraces him. In synoptic form this 'coupling' mirrors the simplifications deployed throughout the film which, though released in 2008 and based on an event in 1995, freezes all the intervening time between and excises any reference to continuing tensions and conflicts, deprivations and inequalities. Both main plot and sub-plot enact the moment of *convergence* which the film has been leading up to throughout, the pluralist claim. As the outcome is already known, and even though the staging of the games is very effective, with its 'Chariots of Fire' build-ups, its amplified clashes, grunts and groans, and slow-mo camera work, the event itself is an insufficient foundation for the destinarian trajectory of the film: "listen to it [the African singing]", Pienaar says, "listen to our country – this is our destiny".

The real destiny is embodied in the sacred bond between the black father and white son. In medieval times, the monarch went into battle in his colours with his troops and, symbolically, by entering the playing field in Springbok jersey and cap, the regal Mandela is re-enacting this in the form of an exemplum, a moral tale of conquest by the undefeated (*invictus*). The film's use of stylisation and quasi-documentary montage confirms the 'truth' of the 'rainbow nation'.

Invictus is a film about transition but a transition not brought about by collective struggle, even if the ideology of the 'team' permeates it, but, as has been noted, by two exemplary, solitary individuals, accentuated by the ending with shots of Mandela in a car alone, surrounded by crowds but relaxing, taking off his dark glasses and saying to the driver, impeded by the crush of people, "no hurry, no hurry at all", as if his task is completed and time is no longer a factor, as if the car carrying "that terrorist Mandela" is now carrying "that saviour Mandela". If *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* elevated the familial over the political to a certain extent, this film abandons both to the consecration of a figure above both: the romantic hero, "captain of his soul and master of his fate" a secular humanist displacement of the divine.



NON-PLAYING CAPTAIN

The 16th Man is a documentary, directed by Clifford Bestall, based on the same events as those in *Invictus*. Made a year later, it is produced and narrated by Morgan Freeman who played the role of Nelson Mandela in the feature film. According to the sleeve cover of the DVD it purports to “tell the inspirational story of the emotional moment when two nations became one”. Whether the two nations ever become one is very much a contested claim but the story is inspirational and here it is told with a very different tone and style, and without the sentimentality and simplifications which marred the Hollywood film. It combines voice-over commentary with original footage together with a series of interviews with some of the key personalities involved, with the exception of Mandela himself, presumably on the grounds of his ill-health. The coach and several of the Springboks, whose fictional equivalents were, with the exception of Pienaar and Chester Williams, merely props in *Invictus*, are present.

The film also has its binary pairing in the shape of Justice Bekebeke, a convicted murderer and political radical, and Koos Botha, former Conservative Party leader and member of parliament, and also a convicted criminal. They have been chosen to represent polarized extremes of dissent from the Mandela ‘consensus’ and the post-apartheid settlement. Interviews with both men are threaded throughout the film in contrapuntal fashion until a point is reached when they arrive at a moment of convergence and enter the ‘Mandela narrative’.

The epilogue, using Mandela’s words, “Sport has the power to change the world” is both reductionist and disingenuous, given South African history since 1995 and weakens what is, otherwise, with the stylistic excesses noted, a very effective documentary which is analytical, reflective, and not uncritical, but also manages to convey the excitement of an amazing sequence of sporting encounters.

THERE ISN’T ENOUGH SPACE

The most challenging documentary made to date about Nelson Mandela, *Mandela: the Myth and Me* (2014; originally titled *A Letter to Nelson Mandela*), is by Khalo Matabane and is in keeping with Mandela’s farewell address to the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory in which he said that his legacy should be interrogated. Too many of the films made about Mandela fail to do this, as we have seen, and, as Teresa Phelps has cautioned, there is the need to be wary of any template “that calls for a certain kind of story, a certain kind of process”, something which the TRC did not always manage to avoid for example, and “be brave enough to trust stories to be tools of disruption”. (Phelps 2004: 128). The form of the documentary is epistolary and is shaped around an imagined letter that Matabane is writing to Mandela. It was premiered in November, 2013 at the International Documentary Festival, Amsterdam. The structure of the film



is constructed around a prologue followed by three sections: Freedom, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness, ending with an epilogue. The letter, which addresses a series of questions to Mandela, threads through the documentary and alternates with archival footage mixed with interviews with a number of people who speak from a range of perspectives, many of which are critical. In the absence of Mandela, responses to these questions are put together in random form through the medium of the talking heads. Rather than following the conventional trajectory of most documentaries, the form is that of a fragmented patchwork or mosaic with no overarching narrative which connects the different components in any explicit sense, other than through the letter. It is not a work of iconoclasm as such but it does attempt to widen the lens on Mandela beyond the hagiographic and the dutiful. The film was made over two years, in the final months of Mandela's life, and consists of interviews with those who knew him as well as some who did not but are asked to reflect on the implications of his release and efforts at forgiveness and reconciliation. In some respects, the focus of the film is not so much on Mandela but is a critical meditation *on the uses to which he has been put*, and, to a certain extent, the uses he made of himself in terms of image-management.

Matabane was born in 1974 and, influenced by his grandmother, came to 'worship' Mandela as a hero even though it was forbidden to mention his name. The letter begins with the affectionate "Dear Tata (father)" and repeats this each time he resumes the letter, either in voice-over or on camera. It is partly an autobiography, partly a tribute, as well as a series of questions to the figure who "captured my imagination". Some of the extracts in the film are from Mandela's own speeches, others focus on public figures like Colin Powell, Peter Hain, Albie Sachs, Wole Soyinka, the Dalai Lama, Ariel Dorfman, Henry Kissinger and Archbishop Tutu. There is a generational structure to these interviews as many of the 'unknown' subjects are peers of Matabane, and tend to be more personal and critical while the 'known' are mostly of an older generation, weighing their words in more formal fashion.

Taking Mandela's words on his release literally, Matabane seeks to address not the prophet but the 'humble servant of you, the people' and his focus is not just on Mandela but on the state of South Africa since 1990 and in the present day, building a picture which is less illusory than so much of the Mandela 'industry'. In this context, he explores issues of the burden of history and memory, what of the past should be forgotten and what remembered. As a child, he envisaged Mandela as a mythical figure, a character from a fairy tale and the letter is an attempt at dismantling this version and trying to understand whether he had to take on a new identity, become a different person, in order to transcend the past. It is, by implication, not only Mandela that this is addressed to but also the filmmaker's contemporaries as they seek to overcome the contradictions posed by the need for reconciliation, forgiveness and peace in the face of scars and continuities from the past. In the initial stages of the film, Matabane is constructing a profile of Mandela from brief sketches given by those who



met him and it is a contradictory account – “the people’s man”, “cold as ice”, “with the non-violence principle in his face, his eyes”, “man with a strong temper that people didn’t want to cross”, and trivialized by his association with hollow celebrities – images are shown of Michael Jackson, the Spice Girls, Oprah Winfrey, and Prince Charles.

A sharp break with this profiling is made by Professor Pumlagoola, a feminist who changes the tone of the documentary through a critical analysis of the dominant Mandela narrative with what she perceives as its narrow framework, arguing persuasively that there isn’t enough space for the revolutionary, for argument, for taking up arms, for land and real redress in that narrative, but only for “the man who doesn’t like suits”, “the teddy bear old man”. What she is articulating is the displacement of an earlier Mandela narrative (revolutionary, the armed struggle) by an anodyne set of media-friendly images. It is a displacement which recurs throughout the film and forms one of its core items in the interrogation of the legacy, the contrast between the miracle worker in a country where there are no miracles, a country in which people fought for freedom and paid a huge price in a land stained with blood and are asked to forgive. Footage of the 1961 ITN interview with Mandela when he was ‘underground’ emphasizes his shift from non-violence to the armed struggle, as does the Rivonia trial and the life sentence passed on the feared ‘revolutionary’. “Tata Mandela”, the letter resumes, “how do you feel about interacting with the very same people who once labelled you as a terrorist?” This whole segment is not designed to undermine Mandela’s massive contribution to the ending of apartheid but to demystify it and open up spaces, to interrogate, not the man himself, but the mis/uses to which he has been put, to restore for a generation who were children or teenagers when he was released from jail the gaps in the narrative. It is a struggle with ‘organised forgetting’, between history, memory and myth, addressed to his own generation but, in the context of archival images of protests, black funerals, and white violence, also seeking to recover the ‘lost generation’ which tackled the apartheid regime head on, and were killed or detained while Mandela was incarcerated. This, again, is not to demean Mandela, but to retrieve, document and register dimensions of the struggle and sacrifice cleansed from the ‘rainbow nation’ story. An interview with an activist of that generation, Zubeida Jaffer, dramatically reinforces this argument as she tells of her imprisonment and the threat to kill her unborn child if she refused to inform on her comrades. Her situation is not necessarily representative but it illuminates the kind of choices faced by those in the struggle, the ‘foot soldiers’.

Matabane raises a series of hard questions as he returns to see the poverty in his own village and learns of the death of many of his peers. Whose freedom is it, he asks, “was the struggle for all, or for a few?” touching on issues dealt with by Patrick Bond in *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (2000) and Sampie Terreblanche in *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (2002), both of whom address problems of poverty, health, land scarcity, continuing racism and exploitation, as well as the links between white corporations and ANC leaders. What the film also



questions is the ANC's commitment to market capitalism and why nationalisation of the banks and the mines, central to the Freedom Charter of 1955, and the demand for restitution had been abandoned. By using captions which spell out the realities of poverty, inadequate housing, and gross inequalities in wealth and education, Matabane brings up the kind of questions few dare to ask and backs these up with the testimony of a number of activists, or, in the case of Selina Williams, the sister of a woman who was blown up in a bomb blast. In the mortuary, she says she saw not her sister but 'a broken human' which causes her to reflect that South Africa was created by its people and not one individual's greatness: "there were too many sacrifices and it was a unified struggle; we can't give all the glory to one person". This is a necessary corrective, not to Mandela, as he always asserted this, but to the visual and print industry that has grown up around him. As Albie Sachs, an ANC leader seriously injured in a car bomb explosion in 1988 in Lusaka, points out, the *symbol* of Mandela became more powerful than what he stood for.

Matabane fantasises about "the revolution we never had", asking if it is better "to accept a dirty compromise than go to war?" (this is asked over an image of an amputee on crutches, perhaps offering a visual answer to his own question). One of the main complaints of the non-establishment figures is that the price of peace was too high and that structural violence, degradation and re-traumatization have occurred because of the failure to materially transform and transfer power. There is a debate running through the film between the 'non-establishment' and 'establishment' figures, even though they never engage with each other, or one another, explicitly, and people like Sachs, Dorfman, and Soyinka, who have experienced systemic violence and tyranny, all counsel against violence, perhaps because they have seen the scale of military power of oppressive regimes.

One of the most powerful segments of the whole film is that where the focus is on Charity Kondile, a woman whose refusal to forgive her son's killers at the TRC epitomises the dilemma at the heart of the documentary. Initially, she refuses to meet Matabane but when she does agree she becomes the most powerful witness to the irresolvable enigma at the core of the interrogation. Kidnapped in Lesotho in 1981 and missing for nine years, her son was burnt to death by Dirk Coetzee and his accomplices. Coetzee finally confessed to her, and told in graphic details how they ate while watching his body burn for nine hours – "they acted like cannibals", she says over images of transcripts of her TRC evidence. While others were being jailed for murder she could not see the fairness in forgiving them for their atrocities. She speaks philosophically about the need not to be rushed, articulating that forgiveness is a process with several stages which takes time and how important it is to acknowledge anger followed by forgiveness, eventually, but not forgetting. In other words, there can be no shortcuts. This model of a deliberative procedure acts in exemplary fashion to point up what for many of Matabane's interviewees has been a crucial problem since the release of Mandela, the seemingly obligatory one size fits all model of



reconciliation. For many, the whole question of reconciliation is too conflicted, too challenging to be fitted into a single template, and they do not wish to see it practised unconditionally but with a set of conditions linked to justice and equality.

In the final section of his letter, Matabane acknowledges that even after two years of making the documentary he does not understand Mandela but seeking answers, clues in Mandela's childhood village, uncovering traces and metaphorical footprints, he comes to realise that the meaning of the whole Mandela phenomenon cannot be reduced to simplistic or facile stories of greatness or heroism but is inextricably tied up with the antinomies and contradictions of South African history, an unresolved and complex, ongoing history which 'weighs on his shoulders' and those of his generation that came of age when apartheid was on its way out and a new South Africa was being born. It's this new South Africa which he seeks to uncover in his final interview with two very articulate young, black men and a woman, born in the 1990s. Almost everything they say is positive, if materialistic, but also checked by the ways in which the mantras they echo ('rainbow nation'; 'Mandela gave us freedom') are partly undercut by the contradictions they are aware of. One clear position emerges and it is that their version is a bourgeois one - "we want to get to the top, to be multimillionaires" – or a total fantasy, which suggests, along the lines of the comment on black elites earlier that where race was the primary marker of difference under apartheid, class may well be the factor which divides the new South Africa.

According to de Certeau, "Stories map out a space which would otherwise not exist" (quoted in Humphrey 2005: 17). One of the primary *cultural* tasks of any post-conflict recovery is this mapping out of spaces which had not previously existed or which had been obliterated. Apartheid disempowered, immobilised, silenced and isolated its 'others'. Legal, political and sensory deprivation combined to dominate and abuse, to remove the possibilities of language and communication, of *the power to story*. One of the tasks of reconstruction after such terror is to reconstitute society in terms of *mutuality*, not as some kind of abstract or woolly process but as a form of political action itself. In this context, forgiveness is not simply a personal act but is, as Arendt has argued, inherently *political*, in that it seeks to re-associate the individual with their *belonging*, to make possible a return to the presence of others. As Aletta Norval has said, apartheid functioned "as a signifier of closure" (Norval 1998: 259). There is some danger, as has been indicated, that a similar closure might have been produced by the dominant mythologies of Mandela. Following his death, there is a need for narratives which extend, defamiliarise and subvert existing liberal-rationalist paradigms – multi-dimensional, challenging, and radical explorations of the relationship between power, discourse and the symbolic. Stories do not simply describe or relate but are also actually constitutive/reconstructive of something new.



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