

Periodisation, Cultural Construction and Representation of ANC Masculinities through Dress, Gesture and Indian Nationalist Influence*

*Raymond Suttner***

ANC, Gender and the Official Dominance of Men

Insofar as one may wish to offer a gendered history of periods of ANC history, their cultural construction and representation through dress and other forms of communication, much of that history is officially a male history and the visual record is predominantly male. This is not to say that women were absent from the public political scene, for they were often seen in places that they were not, as women, supposed to be, but space constraints and the level of competence that I have thus far acquired, make it desirable that I construct this article primarily around masculinities.

There has not been much writing on the notion of masculinities within the ANC¹ and existing works relate, on the one hand, to the notion of heroic or revolutionary masculinity and, on the other, to nationalist discourses. This article is a provisional attempt to map out phases and characteristics of ANC masculinities at various key moments of struggle. Major elements of masculinity formation and their modes of manifestation and representation within the organisation are developed in this contribution through means that are not attended to in existing literature. It is not

* Although I do think I am doing some new things in this article, I am aware that there is a huge amount of material that I leave unexplored, for example, the role of clothes and missions, the role of clothes as one of the means of exerting colonial control, the role of clothes in the presentation of various chiefs to colonial authorities in European dress in most but not all cases. I therefore see this as an opening of an enquiry in South African resistance historiography into an alternative archive of dress and clothing, as Jean Allman calls it. See: J Allman (ed), *Fashioning Africa. Power and the Politics of Dress* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2004), p 5. While this is work in progress I am aware that there is a great deal of literature, especially on Indian people in South Africa, that has not been encompassed in this article, because it represents the early stages of research. But I am already indebted to Greg Cuthbertson, Omar Badsha, and Peter Limb, Enuga Reddy, Sandra Klopper and Eric Itzkin who have engaged me in some of the issues that are canvassed. Discussions with Nomboniso Gasa have helped clarify some of the changing cultural influences which I raise. I am also indebted to picture researcher Rita Potenza whose collection of photographs opened new lines of enquiry. Lulu van Molendorff has improved the text by careful editing. Since this article has been written, a new book by Robert Ross, *Clothing. A Global History* (Polity, Cambridge, 2008) appeared. Time has not permitted adequate examination of its relevance to this work.

** Raymond Suttner is Professor and Head, Walter and Albertina Sisulu Knowledge and Heritage Unit, School for Graduate Studies, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa. Email: suttners@unisa.ac.za and rsuttner@worldonline.co.za. Author of *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976. A Social and Historical Study* (Jacana, Johannesburg; Lynn Rienner, New York and London; Tulika, New Delhi, 2008).

1 E Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation: Heroic Masculinity in South African Autobiographical Writing of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle", *The European Journal of Development Research* 12, 2, 2000, pp 157-178; N Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912-1950", *Feminist Studies*, 29, 3, 2003, pp 653-672; R Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976. A Social and Historical Study* (Jacana Media, Johannesburg; Lynn Rienner, New York and London; Tulika, Delhi, 2008); R Suttner's forthcoming "The Jacob Zuma Rape Trial: Power and ANC Masculinities".

argued for any mode of expression of manhood representing an unqualified “hegemonic masculinity” within the ANC throughout time or for most of the periods.² In most of its history a range of masculinities tends to coexist in a division of labour, engaged in what has been described as “the work” of the struggle, where for many men the notion of work applied to their revolutionary tasks and their conventional occupation as an architect or labourer or trader or whatever their job happened to be was of little consequence as “work”.³

Likewise, within the notion of “heroic masculinities” these are often played out in very distinct ways, with Chief Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani and Jacob Zuma arguably all fitting the label, but in very different ways, sometimes with aspects of the conduct of an individual diverging from what many may regard as the heroic.⁴

Distinct masculinist discourses, modes of signifying masculinity through dress, discourse, various changing cultural activities, gestures, songs, dances and other forms of conduct, which are generally but not exclusively adopted, are required by or attributed to men as emblematic of the masculinity or some of the masculinities at a particular time and of a particular character. It may well be that no such association has been intended by the men concerned or understood that way by some or all others. One is entitled to draw conclusions that may run against the intentions of the actor in the same way that an author cannot determine the way his or her work is understood by reviewers or others. Consequently, there will be an attempt here to elaborate some implications, drawing to some extent from examples in other countries, in particular the Indian nationalist struggle and some Indian scholars.

I draw on the Indian struggle and Indian scholarship because both countries were subjected to British colonialism and fought long struggles for liberation, both countries benefited from the direct influence of Gandhi, both countries experienced armed struggles,⁵ India was one of the first countries to demonstrate international solidarity in the struggle against apartheid and I have a deep respect for much of the Indian scholarship I have encountered. In later work I want to pay further attention to the inauguration of mass-organised struggle involving women together with men in South Africa, which in the Indian community preceded the ANC by many decades (though the numbers of women may have been small).

The discourses around men or masculinity in the ANC sometimes or often signify wider issues, the denial or recovery of manhood being seen as more than just that, qualifying the meaning of the words, imagery or contexts to give them a connotation which often suggests something beyond a specifically masculinist subjectivity.

2 The term “hegemonic masculinity”, referring to a male gender hierarchy, has been popularised by R W Connell, although used by others before him. It argues that within any community of men there is a hierarchy, and some men, representing particular modes of behaviour and other characteristics, are hegemonic. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy are the marginalised who depart from the norms established by those who are hegemonic. See: R W Connell, *Masculinities* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005)

3 Unterhalter, “The Work of the Nation”, p 163ff

4 Suttner, “The Jacob Zuma Rape Trial”

5 I think most South Africans are unaware or there has been little written in the country and elsewhere about the establishment of the Indian National Army by Subhas Chandra Bose. See below

It is important also that one treats the implications of such discourse for gender relations as a whole with considerable care; one cannot simply read off meanings for gender equality from such masculinist images or language or conduct. Also, the discourses are in many cases directed at men, as models of manhood, as John Tosh says of nineteenth-century Britain:

Although all codes of manliness laid down the lineaments of proper conduct towards women, that was never their prime concern. Manliness was fundamentally a set of values by which men judged other men, and it is a mistake to suppose that those values were exclusively – or even mainly – to do with maintaining control over women ... [A]ssertiveness, courage, independence and straightforwardness were the common currency of manliness, on which a highly varied superstructure was built by different classes and denominations. Those qualities provided the basis of a pecking order among men, and as the Victorian period proceeded they also furnished the basis of a political persona suited to the requirements of an expanded Parliamentary representation. But they had little to do with the upholding of patriarchy. The prevalence of manly discourse is as much about homosociality as about patriarchy.⁶

Beyond that, the content and attributes of manhood are time and context bound and at any one phase these are usually contested among men and operate between and within various manifestations of hegemony. I have been asked whether time and context are different.⁷ My answer is that within one period of time there may be a range of contexts under which a variety of activities are carried out, as with the period of apartheid.

In line with these sentiments, I am generally reluctant to infer all the implications or even the meanings of ANC masculinities from discourses and practices used at a particular time, unless these are adequately contextualised and also read in relation to what women did then and how they related to masculine discourses and practices insofar as evidence is available. The intersection between gender and nation, as with other factors, leads to a multiplicity of results and meanings that need to be fully understood in their specific location.⁸ Walby points to the centrality of contestation, that the dominant conception of nationalism as masculinist has always been contested and always is to a greater or lesser degree. “These contestations over the development of one preferred model of gender relations or another are entwined within the development of nations and nationalism.”⁹

She refers to this contestation as having been “under-reported” in the past. She speaks of recent feminist literature attempting to

counter any essentialising approach to the conceptualisation of gender. The focus is resolutely on the multiplicity rather than singularity of models of gender relations. The intersection of gender relations with other sets of social relations, especially ethnicity and nation, is seen to create new diverse forms of gender relations ...¹⁰

6 J Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Pearson and Longman, Edinburgh, 2005), p 5

7 Personal communication with Greg Cuthbertson

8 S Walby, “Gender Approaches to Nations and Nationalism”, in G Delanty and K Kumar (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism* (Sage, London, 2006), p 119

9 Walby, “Gender Approaches to Nations and Nationalism”, p 118

10 Walby, “Gender Approaches to Nations and Nationalism”, p 119; but see: J Nagel, “Nation”, in M S Kimmel, J Hearn and R W Connell (eds), *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Sage and Thousand Oaks, London and New York, 2005), pp 397-413, for a much less qualified perspective, essentialising the gender/nationalist relationship

While this enquiry relates to gender and masculinities in particular, the evidence that follows appears also to raise issues that bear on the periodisation of resistance history. It is hoped that this will contribute towards a rethinking of rigid periodisations of the development of ANC history in general, which have in my view become a barrier to understanding the way in which periods, apparently past, still have an influence beyond “their time” or where embryonic forms of future phases emerge before “their time”. While the extent to which the Indian nationalist and masculinist experience is drawn on is too small to treat this as a comprehensive comparison, what has been used, as will be seen, is nevertheless suggestive of new interpretations to enrich our ways of seeing distinct periods and changing masculinities.

Early ANC Masculinities

Before the establishment of the ANC, a number of regional organisations and political formations and other manifestations of African political aspirations found expression in the mid to late nineteenth century.¹¹ The early ANC was born as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, an organisation whose membership was open only to African men. This was in the aftermath of military defeat and there was a need to operate in a new terrain, where the book and pen were required as opposed to the spear. This transition was captured by more than one writer or poet at the time. I.W. Citashe, one of the early isiXhosa poets, wrote:

Your cattle are gone,
my countrymen!
Go rescue them!
Go rescue them!
Leave the breechloader alone
And turn to the pen
Take paper and ink,
For that is your shield
Your rights are going!
So pick up your pen
Load it, load it with ink
Sit on a chair
Repair not to Hoho
But fire with your pen¹²



Early SANNC delegation, 1914.
(Photograph: Wits Historical Papers).

It is interesting that the imagery of the pen as a weapon recurs in mid-twentieth century Hungary. When Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs was arrested and asked to surrender any dangerous weapons, he put his pen on the table.¹³

11 A Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912* (David Philip, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1984); P Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa. The African National Congress 1912-1952* (Hurst, London, 1970), Chapter 1

12 Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*, p 6 See also: D P Kunene, “Deculturation – The African Writer’s Response”, *Africa Today*, 15, 4, 1968, pp 23-24 “Hoho” was the mountain-forest stronghold where Chief Sandile was shot and killed Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*, p 294 (note 20)

The Act of Union in 1910 constituted a handover of power by Britain to the white settlers, and in a sense presented the African people with the continuation of colonial rule, albeit with local overlordship. Through its new, mainly professional leadership that had emerged via a limited range of opportunities in law, journalism, medicine, the church and other areas, they engaged on a fresh terrain – as petitioners to the Crown and on some occasions to the Union government.

This was not unprecedented, following the pattern of many of their predecessor organisations in the nineteenth century which continued to believe in the potential benefits to be derived from allegiance and/or appeals to Empire. Many are inclined, mainly for this reason, to treat the early ANC as a somewhat pathetic and conservative organisation. Thus Mokgethi Motlhabi, writes of the early ANC as:

[A] Congress of defeated people ... Throughout the early years ... the strategy of the ANC was based on beggar-tactics, making the early history of the movement that of obsequious representations and cap-in-hand deputations ... Since 1882 until this time the Black struggle had ... experienced nothing but failure in its aims. Yet the ANC had not once attempted to revise its approach¹⁴

Robert Ross adopts a similar position, writing:

[I]t was not the organisation which could effectively challenge the development of segregation. It was from the beginning in the hands of the mission-educated Christian elite. A majority of its first council were ministers of the gospel. It remained in the tradition of petitions and delegations, largely ineffective, for several decades¹⁵

Ross indicates that its name derived from that of the Indian Congress and suggests that there were links with Gandhi. While Motlhabi's characterisation may be blunt, both he and Ross fail to see the potentiality for the future in the early gathering. This potential is illustrated significantly through one of its founders, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, who referred to it as a "native union".¹⁶ The meaning of this phrase may not obviously or immediately signify all the connotations that can be read into it. One of these is to carry the potentiality of a counter-union to that which was propounded by the establishment of the white Union of South Africa, as such a potentially subversive notion.¹⁷ Pallo Jordan, without placing specific weight on the word "union", nevertheless sees the formation of the Congress itself as posing an alternative conception of the "nation":

By [the convocation of the ANC] alone the emergent black national leadership posed an alternative conception of the "nation". Though few at the time would have recognised this, Seme and the founders of the ANC were laying out the tasks that the national liberation movement would have to assume in order to fulfil its historic mission. In

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- 13 S Zizek (ed), *Revolution at the Gates. A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917* (Verso, London and New York, 2002), p 12
- 14 M Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid. A Social-Ethical Analysis* (Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg, 1984), pp 38, 71
- 15 R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), p 86
- 16 S. Johns, *Protest and Hope. 1882-1934. From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964 I* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1972), pp 71-73
- 17 See various works of Peter Limb: "Early ANC Leaders and the British World: Ambiguities and Identities", *Historia*, 47, 1, 2002, pp 56-82; "Sol Plaatje Reconsidered", *African Studies*, 62, 1, 2003, pp 33-52; "'No People Can Be Expected To Be Loyal under Such Difficulties': Ambiguities and Identities among Early ANC Leaders", *Social Dynamics*, 29, 10, 2003, pp 1-26

addition to abolishing the colonial relationship, establishing democracy to secure self-determination, it would also have to unify the South African people and act as the midwife at the birth of a new nation¹⁸



Pixley ka Isaka Seme.
(Photograph: Wits Historical Papers).

Their formulation carried the possibility or potentiality of revolutionary connotations. As with communication in general, it is in the nature of words that once they have been uttered, those other than the speaker are free to place a range of interpretations on them, often going beyond what the speaker intended. In the light of some of the precursors of this “native union”, especially independent churches having fairly radical Africanist inclinations, one must accept that some of the ANC’s constituency may have had such ideas.¹⁹ Few of the leadership could have been unaware of these sentiments.

18 Z P Jordan, “The South African Liberation Movement and the Making of a New Nation”, in M van Diepen (ed), *The National Question in South Africa* (Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1988), pp 113-114

19 Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*; Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, Chapter 1; J T Campbell, *Songs of Zion. The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1998)

Before considering the relationship between nationalist and Crown/Union government, let us note the formation of the ANC as composed purely of African men. In other words, the notion of the nation in the process of becoming, if it was embodied in its membership clauses, meant the bearers of nationhood were only African men, not women or non-Africans.

Immediately, however, and throughout the history of the organisation, this assumption was contested by women, not necessarily as a conscious act at all times, but by their actions constituting such a contestation. They may not have been constructed as political subjects by the ANC at its birth, but they constituted themselves and, in fact, from a very early stage engaged in their own political activities in the public domain. Some of the most dramatic activities of the time were initiated by women. In 1913, for example, women in Bloemfontein²⁰ – and this was not without precedent²¹ – marched in the streets of one of the most conservative cities under a banner declaring “we are done with pleading, we now demand!”. This is of course contemporaneous with similar struggles involving Indian women in South Africa, but unlike the ANC, together with their menfolk.

Interestingly, the official ANC male politics of the time may have reached its highest moments in petitioning, sending delegations to present grievances or make representations – what may have entailed what their womenfolk referred to as “pleading”, though there is no indication that the banner represented a criticism, as in the case of the citation from Motlhabi above. But initially this was equally true of Indian politics in South Africa before and after the arrival of Gandhi. Indian politics, led by Gandhi, as we shall see, was more mass orientated even before the formation of the ANC. It also involved women combined with men in mass action in Gandhi’s last years in South Africa, some four decades before the ANC. There are in fact young Indian women and girl martyrs in the early decades of the century – they were jailed for crossing provincial boundaries without permits.²² At the same time the early Indian delegations were very similar in orientation to that of the SANNC. Gopalkrishna Gandhi remarks that satyagraha was devised as a method that would come into effect only after efforts at negotiations had failed.²³

It is valid to conclude that the politics of African women at this time was of a more radical, mass and grassroots character²⁴ than that of their menfolk and that it implicitly contested the notion that they should be confined to the private domestic sphere. Implicitly because there was no explicit statement on such notions at the time. But they were where women were not supposed to be.

To add to the complexity, while it is possible to read the women’s protest as having a more radical stance towards petitioning the British Empire, Nomboniso Gasa presents evidence that complicates the picture:

20 J C Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women’s Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1993)

21 N Gasa, “Let Them Build More Gaols”, in N Gasa (ed), *Women in South African History* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007), pp 129-152

22 E Itzkin, *Gandhi’s Johannesburg: Birthplace of Satyagraha* (Witwatersrand University Press and Museum Africa, Johannesburg, 2000), pp 33-37, 82-85; M K Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi. Essential Writings* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008), p 161

23 Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 103

24 See Gasa, “Let Them Build More Gaols”, pp 137-138 on the class character of the 1913 movement, contesting Wells’ suggestion that they were mainly middle-class women

On the day of the court appearance of the mass of women who had been arrested, 600 other women marched from Waaihoek to the court singing and dancing in solidarity with those who had been arrested. In the leadership was a certain Mrs Molisapoli, who wrapped herself in the Union Jack. The use of the Union Jack is of interest. Many historians have taken this to be related to the attitude of the nationalist men towards the empire. From this it can be argued that women were appealing to that power, from which they hoped to get support against the Afrikaner's oppressive practices.

... On the one hand, women may have been taking their cue from the nationalist leaders and appealing to the empire. This is the dominant reading of this symbolic action, in keeping with the argument that the nationalists looked to the empire to save them. But could there be other readings? Perhaps there is a more subversive (even if it is in the use of irony) reading of the symbolic wrapping in the Union Jack. Perhaps Mrs Molisapoli was protesting against the empire, or using the symbol of power to state her belonging and citizenship of South Africa, then a British colony.²⁵

This mode of self-representation through dress shows the limitations of attempting to attribute a single meaning to attire.²⁶ It may sometimes signify unity or allegiance, sometimes separation and distinctiveness of oneself and the people from whom one comes (as in Gandhi's attire, starting near the end of his period in South Africa, and in certain cases in Africa where the nationalist movement adopted distinct local dress).²⁷ In many cases the connotation may have carried more than one meaning. It was an ambiguous relationship between the colonised and native peoples, who at once sought relief from and were also not as blinded by loyalty in the case of both men and women as some writers have suggested. There was often a combination of loyalty and ironic loyalty. The empire was seen at once as a counterweight to the local settlers and with a degree of hope mingled with distrust.²⁸ In fact, one of the most famous isiXhosa poets, S.E.K. Mqhayi, has satirised the British Empire while adopting the modalities of a praise poem.²⁹ The work of Homi Bhabha on the colonial relationship suggests mimicry as a fundamental characteristic, because the colonised could never become the same as the coloniser. Insofar as this has application to South Africa, the irony is primarily applicable to the earliest stages of nationalist response to the Union.³⁰ It obviously has very little application to those in the working classes, who were outside of the range of such contacts, and Bhabha's insights may be drawn from primarily French colonial experience, particularly through the work of Fanon.

At the same time, as Allman shows, we must not assume that the use of dress as representation always amounted to a choice between "tradition" and modernity, for

25 Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols", p 139

26 See Allman, *Fashioning Africa*, pp 5-6

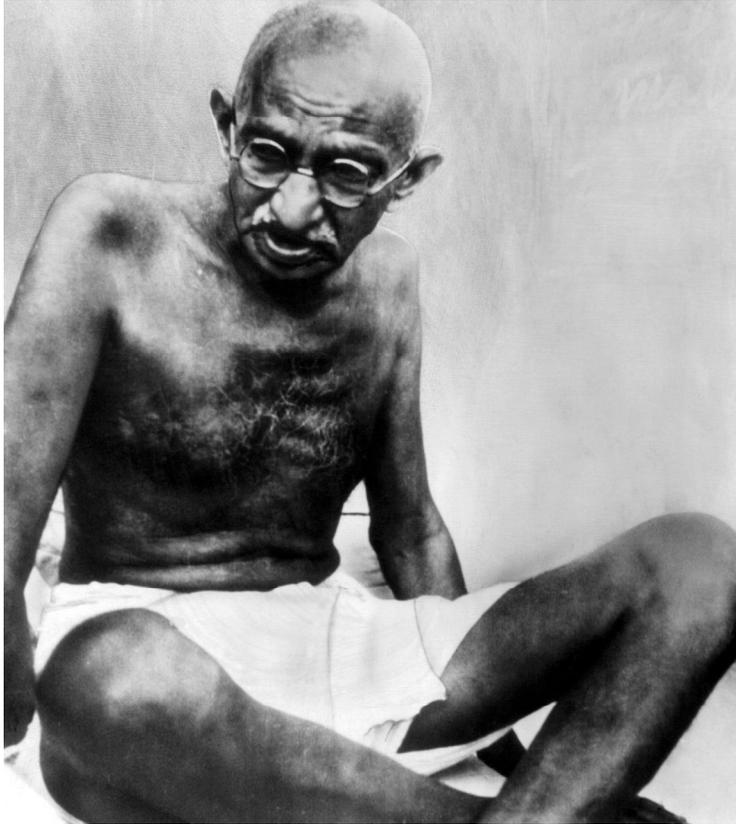
27 Allman, *Fashioning Africa*, pp 6-7; E. Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (London and Chicago, 1996); Tarlo, "Khadi" (unpublished), "This is sacred cloth" Accessed on 18 March 2008 at http://unjobs.org/authors/m_k_gandhi

28 See Limb, "Early ANC Leaders and the British World"; Limb, "No People Can Be Expected To Be Loyal"; C. Saunders, "African Attitudes to Britain and the Empire before and after the South African War", in D. Lowry (ed), *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2000)

29 See the careful discussion in A.C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature. The Emergence of Literary Forms in Xhosa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1973), p 114; a translation of the whole poem appears in R. Kavanagh and Z.S. Qangule, *The Making of a Servant and Other Poems* (Ophir, Johannesburg, 1974) pp 14-16

30 See H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, London and New York, 2005), Chapter 4

they were often combined.³¹ In general, while Gandhi stressed the revival of the Indian cottage industry and other elements of local activity that had been destroyed by foreign manufacture, he was not blind to the advantages of scientific advances and used radio, telephones, microscopes and other technology, where these served his purposes. His dress, after adopting Satyagraha (literally “soul force”, according to Gandhi, referring to the power of the truth, manifested in activities to achieve justice³²), especially in India, was always at once tied to identification with the poorest of the poor and rejection of British occupation.



Gandhi in loincloth.
(Photograph: INPRA).

When one looks at South African resistance history from the mid-nineteenth century, there is a distinct protocol which appeared to have determined the dress code for political leaders, but also for professional persons and others of the educated stratum. The genesis of dress as an important signifier of status may be traced to earlier

31 Allman, *Fashioning Africa*, p 5

32 M K Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991), p 308ff

phases of history where specific modes of dress were required by colonial authorities for entry of Africans into “colonial towns” or becoming converted to Christianity.

Particular dress or items of clothing are associated with specific activities and norms and signify status in varying ways, depending on the context professionally, organisationally and elsewhere. The adoption of “Western” clothing was a professional necessity, or a way of signifying social advancement and also a source of tension with some people in their community of origin.³³ The early members of the ANC who had to engage with representatives of the Empire and royalty, are pictured wearing top hats, pocket watches, waistcoats and suits in carefully posed photographs, sometimes also with a British-style walking stick. This is the overall image that prevailed for some decades during which the major activities of the organisation were to meet at annual conferences or petition the King or the South African government to forestall legislation that was prejudicial to black people.

It should be noted that insofar as we attribute this to the notion of manhood among the professionals who led the ANC, we should accept that it was not their agency that initially determined dress so much as the requirements of the terrain. They projected themselves in this way because that was what was needed in the kind of engagement, though it may be that many of these men wore such clothes conventionally, as they did in their professional lives and at ANC conferences. For petitioning, just as one may generally “dress for the occasion”, the ANC, just as all people in difficult situations, adopted certain conventions for operating effectively on a platform which was at once difficult and new for the leaders. While they had an unwelcome message to convey to an audience repeatedly found to be unsympathetic, they obviously would not have thought of rendering this disadvantageous relationship even more problematic by dressing in a manner that distracted attention from their claims.

At the same time, while the terrain may have required the dress, by wearing such clothes it may also have signified a claim, asserting imperial subjectivity (in the sense of citizenship) and the rights that this implied, implicitly ruled out in the earlier quotation from Ross.³⁴ John Berger writes of the suit:

The suit, as we know it today, developed in Europe as a professional ruling class costume in the last third of the 19th century. Almost anonymous as a uniform, it was the first ruling class costume to idealise purely *sedentary* power. The power of the administrator and conference table. Essentially the suit was made for the gestures of talking and calculating abstractly. (As distinct, compared to previous upper class costumes, from the gestures of riding, hunting, dancing, duelling)

It was the English *gentleman*, with all the apparent restraint which that new stereotype implied, who launched the suit. It was a costume which inhibited vigorous action, and which action ruffled, uncreased and spoilt ... By the turn of the century, and increasingly after the first world war, the suit was mass-produced for mass urban and rural markets.³⁵

Berger dwells upon the discomfort of peasants in such suits, being accustomed to vigorous movements that are constrained by the shape of the garments. In that sense, the adoption of the suit by African leaders in South Africa may be symbolic of

33 Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu!*

34 See also Gasa, “Let Them Build More Gaols”

35 J. Berger, *About Looking* (Vintage, New York, 1991 [1980]), p 38. Italics in original

the shift from the bodily movement of the warrior to the more sedentary requirements of the professional man engaged first in professional life and then in talks with the Empire.

This pattern of dress is replicated in other liberation movements and was initially used by Indians in South Africa, including Gandhi, when they made representations. But we should also note the frequent use of non-Western clothing in other parts of Africa, and notably by Mahatma Gandhi in India, as a signifier of difference, distantiating, affirmation of identity and rejection of British overlordship. Gandhi specifically chose this dress in order to signify difference and alienation from Britain.³⁶ At the same time, while intending to emphasise a specific identity, the “Gandhi cap/topi” can be seen to have become “internationalised”, as is evident from its adoption by Luthuli and its use as the uniform of Congress volunteers in the 1950s.³⁷ Gandhi had specifically chosen this cap or had it adapted from the Kashmiri hat as an emblem of the Indian struggle and nation to be.³⁸ Examples of such emphasis on local cultural dress to stress an identity alien to the coloniser in nationalist movements are common on the African continent.³⁹



**Chief Albert Luthuli in Congress volunteers uniform.
(Photograph: Bailey African Historical Archive).**

36 Tarlo, “Khadi”

37 I am grateful to Sanghamitra Misra and Devaki Jain (personal communications in 2007) for first correcting my following of the association, among many historians of South Africa, of such a cap with Nehru and its origins in Gandhi, drawing on his peasant past

38 Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p 70

39 Allman, *Fashioning Africa*



**Mandela and Sisulu in the prison yard.
(Photograph: UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives).**

The suit and tie and top hat have been subjected to ridicule, though they were just as necessary in the terrain in which these men operated as the military uniforms later adopted by Chris Hani and Nelson Mandela, who is of course associated with many dress styles in different phases of his political life. Mandela exchanged prison clothes for suits because that was the dress code required in the context of negotiations and international visits as an ANC leader but not yet State President.



**Mandela in a suit after release.
(Photograph: © D.G. Williams).**

It was again a time of constitutional and legal argument and that was what accompanied the discourse and activity, the discussions at the “conference table” of which Berger speaks.

One should also bear in mind that the early ANC was not entering the domain as master but as novice, who had to learn the rules of the game. Consequently, they adopted prevailing conventions in order to put this case across effectively. According to Bhabha, however, the “imitation” was never accepted as “sameness”. There may have been an appearance of sameness but it coexisted with an affirmation of difference.⁴⁰

This politics through petitioning would later be ridiculed by the ANC Youth League as not wanting to get their hands dirty or, as we have seen, by some commentators as going cap in hand to their masters.⁴¹ We need, however, to move towards a multivalency in the interpretation of words and appearance, even if some of the dimensions may not have been in the minds of the actors (and some of the observers at the time or in all of subsequent historiography, although Limb hints at complexity in other respects⁴²). If such an interpretation is one of the possible implications, it needs to be recognised that the presence of Africans in attire similar to that of their overlords could also have borne symbolic overtones of a claim or demand.

In the decades that followed up to the 1940s, the ANC pursued this type of approach to politics and it is interesting that even though women were excluded from participation and membership, they graduated, in practice, from providing tea to being actual participants in various conferences. There is one recorded instance of a disputed election where women voted, but the dispute was not about the female “non-members” voting.⁴³ In South Africa at the time of the formation of the ANC and later in India, Gandhi involved women in large numbers, empowering them to enter the public sphere. At the same time he stressed that they should simultaneously be good homemakers. In this approach, an attempt was made to create a coexistence between private and public roles, thus avoiding conflicts with patriarchal power in the home.⁴⁴ This entailed a very complex interrelationship between women and nationalism and indeed the whole household and the nationalist struggle, because with women entering into the public sphere, domesticating the public sphere and politicising the domestic sphere, pressure was often put on all members of the household to participate in the nationalist struggle.⁴⁵

When women were eventually admitted to ANC membership in the 1940s and a Women’s League was established, they did not play a leadership role in the organisation as a whole, even though some were formidable individuals, for example Charlotte Maxeke who had graduated under the supervision of W.E.B. du Bois in the United States.⁴⁶

40 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 122

41 Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid*

42 Limb, “Early ANC Leaders and the British World”

43 F Ginwala, “Women and the African National Congress: 1912-1943”, *Agenda*, 8, 1990, pp 77-93

44 M Kishwar, “Gandhi on Women”, in A Raghuramajraju (ed), *Debating Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006), pp 269-323

45 S Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement. Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42* (Sage, New Delhi and Thousand Hills, London, 2006)

46 Campbell, *Songs of Zion*

There were periods during these years when the ANC was very weak, practically dormant in the 1930s. Steps were taken towards revival and again the Indian influence had some relevance. Among those who participated in the Transvaal co-ordinating committee for the revival of the ANC in 1937 was the Reverend S.S. Tema who established personal contact with Mahatma Gandhi.⁴⁷ He had been received by Gandhi on a visit to India.⁴⁸ The difficulty of the task of revival is indicated by the decision that Reverend (later Canon) James Calata, as the Secretary General, should undertake a nationwide tour. That it took him three years to complete the task, indicates the difficulties of securing transport and finding the necessary resources at the time.⁴⁹ It was in the 1940s under the leadership of Calata and Doctor A.B. Xuma that the process of building the organisation started and sound administration was put in place.⁵⁰

During the 1940s a new radical current of thinking emerged under the leadership of Anton Lembede, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and A.P. Mda, who established the ANC Youth League (YL). They espoused a radical Africanism and self-determination. They were critical of the early ANC operating in a moderate, self-effacing manner and they called for a programme of action.⁵¹

Two important points are worth noting and these relate to a wider theme in ANC history, namely that of repeated ruptures and continuities. That tends to be erased by the operation of periodisations which divide phases by decades or focus on one significant element to the neglect of surrounding features. Radical as the discourse of the YL may have been, it would never have led to much had there not been the earlier foundational organisational steps of Calata and Xuma, which created conditions for their ideas to be implemented. It is also interesting to note that radical though they may have been and critical of their predecessors, the dress code of the YL was formal and by no means represented the type of associations that later generations of radicalism would have with casual or military dress. The Youth League dressed very much like their predecessors, with the exception of top hats and bow ties. In fact, some of these individuals like Mandela paid considerable attention to their appearance and the suits they wore. Ellen Khuzwayo writes:

I remember the glamorous Nelson Mandela of those years. The beautiful white silk scarf he wore round his neck stands out in my mind to this day. Walter Max Sisulu, on the other hand, was a hardy down-to-earth man with practical clothing – typically a heavy coat and stout boots. Looking back, the third member of their trio, Oliver Tambo, acted as something of a balance with his middle-of-the-road clothes!⁵²

This was a period when dress clearly served as a signifier of specific masculinities. It was a time when gangsterism was rife in the townships and the main gangs were always distinguished not only by their daring law breaking, but their flashy clothing.⁵³

47 Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, p 257

48 Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, p 259

49 Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, p 257

50 Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, pp 256-258

51 R. First, Speech paying tribute to Walter Sisulu on his 70th birthday, 1982 CD in author's personal possession, held with permission of the Slovo family, but to be made publicly available in the near future

52 E. Khuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985), p 139

53 See, for example, C. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi. The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH; James Currey, Oxford; David Philip, Cape Town, 2000), pp 4, 50ff, 68-70



Mandela with Kotane at Treason Trial in 1958.

(Photograph by Jurgen Schadeberg, 1958 - www.jurgenschadeberg.com).

The 1950s was a decade of mass struggle for both women and men. Although men were in the leadership of the ANC and its allies, some women, like the assassinated Ruth First, wife of late Communist leader Joe Slovo, definitely wielded considerable authority often at an informal or secret level through the underground



Ruth First.

(Photograph: Eli Weinberg, UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives).

Communist Party.⁵⁴ It is, however, noted by Unterhalter that the way Joe Slovo depicted the role of women, and especially Ruth, is not gendered. The women were described as brave, as their menfolk were, in a sense “substitute men”, but what it meant to be a woman in that situation was not understood by Slovo in specific terms as having a power and relational dimension necessary to explore.⁵⁵

But manifestations and the formation of masculinities during the 1950s were ambiguous and represented in many ways. On the one hand, there was the continuity in terms of addressing the government of the day, albeit in a tone of defiance, which nevertheless looked forward to a day of talking and negotiations, with periodic allusions to a new national convention or to sit down and talk about a true Union of South Africa (see, for example, evidence of Chief Albert Luthuli in Treason Trial).⁵⁶

On the other hand, there was on the part of some of the leading cadres as well as regional leaders an anticipation of conflict and the day when the African people would again be soldiers. We have thus far only the testimony of males, and it may be that there was similar talk among the women, but we do not know, insofar as available evidence is concerned. This is also a period during which the most dedicated, the voluntiyas (volunteers), wore a specific uniform (seen in the photograph of Chief Luthuli above), distinguishing themselves as cadres of the movement, willing to make unlimited sacrifices. The uniform marked them off as a special group of highly disciplined and not merely casual members or followers of the ANC. There does not appear any evidence to suggest a uniquely African influence or other evidence of black people having influenced the form of this uniform, apart from the use of the “Gandhi cap”. Luli Callinicos⁵⁷ has suggested that the jacket derives from the shirts Nehru used to wear. There is an undoubted similarity, but the Nehru shirt was multicoloured and of soft fabric, whereas the voluntiyas only wore tough khaki jackets, with nothing underneath. (Nehru often wore a shirt or vest under the shirt). It seems most likely that it was an adaptation of the uniforms worn during the World Wars, although no one with whom I have spoken has been able to point to the precise origins. Yusuf Dadoo, Indian and South African Communist Party (SACP) leader, appears in photographs in a uniform more than a decade earlier, but it does not seem to be related in appearance to that adopted by the volunteers.

They also swore an oath, undertaking to operate within the discipline of the organisation. Significantly, Gandhi also placed great weight on oaths and vows. They “could foster unity not only within the self but also be of use in the structures of the organisation”.⁵⁸

54 D Pinnock, *Writing Left: the Radical Journalism of Ruth First* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2007); interview with Joe Matthews, Cape Town, 2002

55 Unterhalter, “The Work of the Nation”, pp 167-169; J Slovo, *The Unfinished Autobiography* (Ravan Press and Hodder & Stoughton, Randburg and London, 1995)

56 T Karis and G M Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence 1953-1964 III* (Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1977), pp 582-592; A Luthuli, *Luthuli. Speeches of Chief Albert John Luthuli* (Madiba Publishers, Durban; UWC Historical and Cultural Centre, Bellville, 1991), p 57ff

57 Personal communication

58 M Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought. Exploring a Perspective on His Life and Work* (Promilla Publishers and Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi and Chicago, 2007), p 76; see Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, pp 177-208

In conflict with Gandhi's sartorial inclinations, the significance of a uniform was stressed by Subhas Chandra Bose in building a "new man" in India, in the late 1920s. Bose later formed the Indian National Army. He was photographed in various uniforms of a military type from the 1920s.

"He held out the ideal of the *strong* Indian, smartly turned out in uniform, the money spent on which, contrary to what many implied, was not a waste for it created an esprit de corps."⁵⁹ Note, in the light of the British construction of Indian men, especially Bengalis, as effeminate, that the emphasis on qualities of manliness was found also in most of the Indian leaders emphasising physical exercise. Gandhi was well aware, despite their sharing a great deal spiritually, that he and Bose were "sailing in different boats",⁶⁰ saying "Subhas Babu will never pardon the loincloth. We must bear with him. He cannot help himself. He believes in himself and in his mission. He must work it out as we must ours".⁶¹ The construction of Indian men as effeminate was not uniform and some parts of India were credited with being "martial races".⁶²



Subhas Chandra Bose.
(Source unknown).

After the 1928 Calcutta Congress, one of Bose's biographers writes: "Subhas had organised and led with a panache for leadership which had earned him words of praise from many Congress elders." But Gandhi explicitly criticised the volunteer corps. He related his objections to the European character of the dress: "The

59 R. Som, *Gandhi, Bose, Nehru and the Making of the Modern Indian Mind* (Penguin and Viking, New Delhi and New York, 2004), p 45 Emphasis inserted

60 Som, *Gandhi, Bose, Nehru and the Making of the Modern Indian Mind*, Chapter 2

61 Som, *Gandhi, Bose, Nehru and the Making of the Modern Indian Mind*, p 45

62 D C Ellinwood, "Two Masculine Worlds Compared: the Army Cantonment and Jaipur Rajput Male Society in Late Colonial India", in K Roy (ed), *War and Society in Colonial India, 1807-1945* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006), pp 246-274

volunteers dressed in European fashion presented, in my opinion, a sorry spectacle ... and the expense incurred was out of keeping with the pauperism of the nation. They were no representatives of rough and rugged business-like farmers".⁶³

For Gandhi the priority was to dress simply, gradually reducing his clothing to a minimum, especially when the costs of material increased, reducing his attire to the loincloth, on the one hand to increase the use of local material and locally produced goods and oppose British destruction of village industry. On the other hand it was both an identification with the peasants and a signifier of difference asserting – being an Indian identified with the poor, unlike his earlier years as a lawyer, though Tarlo argues that he did not always communicate why he adopted specific dress.⁶⁴

Gandhi does not raise the potential relationship between adopting a uniform and military activity, for Bose did ultimately turn to armed struggle. Likewise, we may reread one of the signifiers of the embryonic moves to armed struggle in South Africa to have been the adoption of a specific uniform and code of discipline/sworn oath for the volunteers in the Defiance Campaign. They adopted an oath which probably for the first time in ANC history bound people to leaders in a hierarchical fashion and in a tight unity. Later, MK (the abbreviation commonly used to refer to mKhonto we Sizwe [the Spear of the Nation], the military wing of the ANC) would also adopt an oath.

Gandhi had long before this placed weight on oaths, and this gained specific significance in his development of satyagraha in South Africa. When the Natal Indian Congress was established in 1894, its members had to sign pledges.⁶⁵ A similar pledge of resistance to an unjust law was adopted at a large gathering in Johannesburg in 1906. Gandhi placed weight on vows in a number of distinct ways, relating to one's willingness to serve the truth and fight injustice, vows made privately, but in addition ones of direct political significance, as public oaths.⁶⁶ While all who abided by the oaths could swear according to their own beliefs, in Gandhi's personal case the oath appears to have derived from his own upbringing as part of Hindu tradition. In the case of Mau Mau, one can trace the origins to precolonial belief systems.⁶⁷ In the case of ANC volunteers there does not seem to be a similar lineage. It may have derived from diverse sources, including World War II or Christian and other belief systems, or have been taken from Indian resisters of earlier periods.

Returning to South African Indians, it is in consonance with such vows or oaths that the decision to burn registration certificates was taken and executed in Johannesburg in 1908. Gopalkrishna Gandhi writes of this period that "Gandhi and fire went together in South Africa. He burnt the offending certificates".⁶⁸ There were previous cases of bonfires in India, with British clothing and other items being burned, especially against the partition of Bengal.⁶⁹ Fire has many symbolic

63 S Das, *Subhas. A Political Biography* (Rupa, New Delhi, 2001), p 180

64 Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p 70 and generally

65 Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought*, pp 80-81; S Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress, 1894-1994* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1997)

66 Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought*, p 83

67 R M Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonization to Independence, 1888-1970* (McFarland, Jefferson, NC, 2005), Chapter 18

68 Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 104

69 B Chandra, M Mukherjee, A Mukherjee, K N Panikkar and S Mahajan, *India's Struggle for Independence* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1988), p 129

associations in Indian culture and religions,⁷⁰ as can be seen from a glance at the range of festivals in which bonfires play a part. There are not many precedents for such burning in South African history. The arrival of British troops at one stage during the South African/Anglo-Boer War is the only example I have uncovered so far that evoked the burning of passes by Africans.⁷¹ It would, of course, be used extensively around 1960 in pass burnings.

The Defiance Campaign of 1952, deriving from the YL programme of action, was adopted by the mother body and represented a qualitative change in ANC politics. The organisation, while influenced by the Indian Passive Resistance Campaign in South Africa,⁷² where many men and women were jailed, nevertheless chose not to use the words “passive resistance”, which are used ambiguously by Gandhi himself. He said that a range of actions may be “passive resistance”, but they were not satyagraha.

It is said of “passive resistance” that it is the weapon of the weak, but the power [of satyagraha] can be used only by the strong. This is not “passive” resistance; indeed it calls for intense activity. The movement in South Africa was not “passive resistance” but active.⁷³

Gandhi, we have seen, in fact understood non-violent disobedience as the “moral equivalent of war”, a phrase which requires considerable unpacking.⁷⁴

Walter Sisulu explained that the ANC consciously adopted the word “defiance” in order to signify a higher, more intense level of resistance, indeed the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness. The volunteers were known as “defiers of death” because in the course of defiance they were prepared to suffer any response, including death, if need be.⁷⁵ While Sisulu differentiates this from the local campaign, this is in fact completely compatible with Gandhi’s position.⁷⁶ Mandela says that what they learnt from the Indian campaign of 1946-1948 was a willingness to be imprisoned; something which he claimed still held a stigma for Africans.⁷⁷ But Mandela appears to have erased from his memory the earlier-mentioned 1913 imprisonment of scores of African women, which was not the first of its kind.⁷⁸

The 1950s was an era that comprised lawyers in suits, defendants in many court cases, volunteers who engaged in mass democratic campaigns collecting demands for what later became the Freedom Charter, just one of a number of mass

70 Vahed and Bhana warn against the neglect of influences from India on Gandhi’s work in South Africa and treating his influence in India as being derived purely from South African experiences. See S Bhana and G Vahed, *The Making of a Political Reformer. Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914* (Manohar, New Delhi, 2005)

71 Campbell, *Songs of Zion*, p 149

72 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Macdonald Purnell, Randburg, South Africa, 1994); W Sisulu, *I will go Singing. Walter Sisulu Speaks of His Life and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Robben Island Museum in association with the Africa Fund, New York, 2001)

73 Gandhi, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p 308

74 See above and Chatterjee, *Gandhi’s Diagnostic Approach Rethought*, Chapter 6

75 Sisulu, *I will go Singing*, p 79

76 See Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi*, p 101 and P Ruhe, *Gandhi* (Phaidon, London, 2001)

77 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 129

78 Gasa, “Let Them Build More Gaols”, pp 140-141

campaigns of men and women that advanced a democratic counter-agenda to that of the apartheid regime.⁷⁹

Although males dominated most organisations, there was a commitment to democratic values and a movement of women emerged, centred to a large or significant extent around mothers – an issue causing some controversy between those who accept and those who deny that the word “feminist” can be applied to gatherings or organisations where mothers and the discourse of motherhood are prominent. This position was a variant of the approach which sees concepts as operating in the singular or in a multiplicity of forms. (For contrasting perspectives, Wells⁸⁰ and Walker⁸¹ suggest singularity, whereas Walby,⁸² in her methodology but not directly applied to South Africa, and Gasa⁸³ strongly emphasise plurality of meanings). This issue is clearly also very salient to gender relations within nationalism in other African countries, India and other South Asian countries.

This was a period of militancy and legal activity, and that is why the Treason Trial of 1956-1961 failed to convict the 156 accused, because they had observed the law as far as could be ascertained.⁸⁴ The SACP had been operating illegally but non-violently underground, without a public presence.

Moving Towards Heroic Manhood

Legal and illegal militancy also coexisted with the actual preparation for secret illegal organisation in the ANC M-Plan of the 1950s and in the contemporaneous reconstitution of the SACP as an underground organisation.⁸⁵ There was also an emerging militarism or attraction to the military option as the inevitable route for resolving the apartheid conflict, even though the very proponents of this option at that time were often in the forefront of non-violent activities, as indicated. In 1953, Walter Sisulu, when about to travel to the People’s Republic of China, agreed with Nelson Mandela to enquire whether the Chinese would be prepared to arm the ANC in the event of the organisation taking up military struggle.⁸⁶ The answer was in the negative, with the Chinese stressing that careful preparations are required prior to taking up arms.⁸⁷ At the same time similar discussions were under way in the former Northern Transvaal, Eastern Cape and other parts of the country.⁸⁸ Nelson Mandela

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- 79 R. Suttner and J. Cronin, *50 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 2006)
- 80 Wells, *We Now Demand!*
- 81 C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, second edition (David Philip, Cape Town and Johannesburg; Monthly Review Press, New York, 1991)
- 82 Walby, “Gender Approaches to Nations and Nationalism”
- 83 N. Gasa (ed), *Basus’imbokodo, bave’imilambo/They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers. Women in South African History* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007)
- 84 Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 3
- 85 Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapters 2, 3
- 86 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 146
- 87 B. Magubane, P. Bonner, J. Sithole, P. Delius, J. Cherry, P. Gibbs and T. April, “The Turn to Armed Struggle”, in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa I (1960-1970)* (South African Democracy Education Trust and Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004), pp 53-146
- 88 P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle. Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH; Ravan Press, Johannesburg; James Currey, Oxford, 1996); R. Mhlaba, *Raymond Mhlaba’s Personal Memoirs: Reminiscing from Rwanda and Uganda* (HSCR, Pretoria; Robben Island Museum, Robben Island, 2001), p 116; Magubane et al., “The Turn to Armed Struggle”, p 53ff

was reprimanded more than once for speaking of or implying resort to armed action or resistance before an organisational decision to that effect had been taken. While accepting the reprimand at the time, he was in fact unrepentant and believed that he represented the mood of the time.⁸⁹



Mandela and Sisulu at a rally after their release.
(Photograph: © D.G. Williams).

This is just one indication of the complexity of drawing comparisons between Mandela and Gandhi.⁹⁰ Mandela, as indicated, was an early convert to the use of arms. But we need to avoid focusing purely and narrowly on this element of the political personae of Gandhi, Mandela and other South African and Indian liberation figures. There is no doubt that there were elements of similarity in their total commitment to struggle, whatever its personal cost may have been. Neither would exhort others to do what they were unwilling to do themselves.⁹¹ Admittedly, the more one departs from the almost exclusive “struggle focus” on essentialist notions of non-violence versus violence in the lives of these two men, the more plausible such an argument for kinship between them may become. We need to open ourselves to the range of meanings that may constitute both of these concepts and avoid the reductionist tendencies that notions of revolutionary warfare may sometimes evoke.

The leaders of the ANC who were moving towards taking up arms were in fact in line with the sentiments of many of the rank and file members and supporters, who “jumped the gun” and started burning sugar cane fields in Natal in the late 1950s, before the question of armed action had been formally placed on the ANC’s agenda.⁹²

89 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp 258-260

90 R Gandhi, “Foreword”, in T Weber, *Gandhi, Gandhism and the Gandhians* (Roli Books, New Delhi, 2006), p vii

91 Gandhi, *Mohandas*; Ruhe, *Gandhi*

92 Magubane et al , “The Turn to Armed Struggle”, p 62ff

While there were these currents moving towards a military option, others counselled caution. Chief Albert Luthuli, although not a pacifist, is reputed to have been slow to approve of any non-violent action – on principle. Mandela argues that the Chief, while firmly inclined towards non-violence, did not stand in the way of armed struggle.⁹³ This will not go unchallenged and it is likely to remain controversial among historians.⁹⁴ Moses Kotane, the SACP General Secretary, while not non-violent in principle, initially considered a resort to arms as being reckless on the revolutionary basis that one should not risk lives until all other options had been fully exhausted. It required an all-night discussion with Mandela chiding Kotane with the example of the Cuban Communist Party having fallen behind the popular organisations by its slowness in taking up arms in the Cuban revolution. Kotane agreed not to oppose Mandela and be silent in the ANC National Executive Committee, that is, not necessarily signifying that he approved without qualification.⁹⁵

It is important that we do not restrict the potential scope and meanings of either violence or non-violence as modes of engaging in struggle. This can be seen in the actions and words of Chief Luthuli, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. As indicated, there is some controversy regarding Chief Albert Luthuli's stance over the formation of MK in 1961. There are aspects of his autobiography, however, that show that his non-violence was not unconditional.⁹⁶

In 1961 Chief Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and it is said that the formation of MK and its initiation of sabotage was postponed so as to avoid embarrassing Luthuli when receiving this award and also casting doubts on the long-standing peaceful campaigns of the organisation that he led. Their proximity in time was nevertheless considered unfortunate.⁹⁷

But even in his non-violent statements Luthuli gives indications of the ultimate fruitlessness of these efforts. Indeed, in one of his speeches he remarked:

Who can deny that 30 years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly, at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of my many years of moderation? Has there been any reciprocal tolerance or moderation from the government? No! On the contrary, the past 30 years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all⁹⁸

In his statement after the Rivonia trial verdict, Luthuli said:

The African National Congress ... held consistently to a policy of using militant, non-violent means of struggle ... But finally all avenues of resistance were closed. The African National Congress and other organizations were made illegal; their leaders jailed, exiled or forced underground

93 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 260

94 See Magubane et al, "The Turn to Armed Struggle", pp 89-90 for opposing views

95 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp 258-260

96 For example, A. Luthuli, *Let my People Go. An Autobiography* (Collins and Fontana Books, Glasgow, 1962), p 186

97 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 273

98 G J Pillay, *Voices of Liberation. Albert Luthuli* (HSRC, Pretoria, 1993), p 47

Like Mandela in his court statement in the Rivonia trial,⁹⁹ he referred to the need to contain spontaneous acts of violent resistance in the face of apartheid repression intensifying.

[S]poradic acts of uncontrolled violence were increasing throughout the country. At first in one place, then in another, there were spontaneous eruptions against intolerable conditions; many of these acts increasingly assumed a racial character

The African National Congress never abandoned its method of a militant, non-violent struggle, and of creating in the process a spirit of militancy in the people. However, in the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies the African and other oppressed South Africans their rightful heritage – freedom – *no one can blame brave just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods; nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organized force in order to ultimately establish peace and racial harmony.*¹⁰⁰

This is a statement which signals that non-violence has not yielded results and is in itself a qualification of his allegedly absolutist position on violence. If logically, what Luthuli recounts as the results of his moderate knocking on closed and barred doors had seen a worsening of the situation, is it not implicit that more aggressive steps may follow? That is obviously not the only inference that can be drawn, for some have said it means that non-violent resistance was not persisted with with sufficient vigour. It is not non-violence that has failed, but as J.N. Singh put it, “we have failed non-violence”.¹⁰¹ Gandhi had similar sentiments when he saw that his message had not prevented intercommunal violence.¹⁰²

But there is no denying that one of the interpretations to which Luthuli’s own words are open, is that the time for armed struggle or debate over other methods than non-violence had arrived. It does not worry me greatly whether or not Luthuli fervently supported or gave qualified support or was simply silent on the armed struggle and the formation of MK. All I am indicating is that within his non-violent stance, he himself voiced frustration at the results it had yielded and provided the foundation on which an armed struggle could be discussed or justified.

I am reading into what Luthuli said, elaborating more than he ever did in his lifetime, because I believe we should not fetishise the difference between violence and non-violence in ANC history, just as I have consistently argued that continuities contain ruptures and likewise ruptures bear within them elements of continuity. That is why, even in the words of the allegedly main proponent of non-violence, one can read an argument for changing tack towards armed struggle, among other possibilities. That is not to suggest that this was in the Chief’s mind, but only that it is a legitimate and possible inference. It is important that we understand that in practice no approach was irreversible nor displacing all others.

This argument is similar to that which was advanced earlier in this article with regard to the adoption of an oath and uniforms, that they represented embryos which may have and did in fact lead to violent activities. In other words, it was not merely

99 N Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life. His Speeches and Writings Brought Together with Historical Documents and Accounts of Mandela in Prison by Fellow-Prisoners*, third edition (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 1990), p 165ff

100 Karis and Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp 798-299 Italics inserted

101 Quoted in Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 261

102 Gandhi, *Mohandas*; Ruhe, *Gandhi*

that they preceded chronologically, but that there is a logic in the adoption of armed struggle that can also be read from the words and actions of Luthuli. It is significant that Luthuli is often pictured in the military-type regalia of the volunteers (with the Gandhian cap). At the same time, there is a photograph of Chief Luthuli reading Gandhi on war and peace. My argument is that the Chief was wrestling with these issues, reading Gandhi and also reading Marx.¹⁰³ It is not suggested that he was on the verge of being a Communist, nor that he rejected Gandhi whose non-violence, as I have tried to indicate, was full of complexity and militancy.¹⁰⁴ His interest in Marxism related partly to his close friendship with Kotane and his desire to learn about a doctrine that had featured so prominently in the Treason Trial.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, since first preparing this article I have made contact with the Luthuli family and his one grandson and daughter indicated that part of the Nobel Peace Prize money was used to buy two farms in Swaziland. Jane Ngobese, MaLuthuli, Luthuli's daughter, indicated that these were used for ANC recruits or cadres in transit to other countries. She was very precise, emphasising that she would not say that every ANC person stayed there.¹⁰⁶ In many of the interviews that I have conducted on the ANC underground, individuals were met in Swaziland by veterans such as John Nkdimeng and they stayed at some unknown place.¹⁰⁷ It may be that the Chief, whatever his initial reservations may have been, decided to contribute to the success of MK through such logistical support. Caution is, however, still required, in that MaBhengu, Nokukhanya, Luthuli's widow, while confirming the farms, does not speak of any interface with MK but more of providing shelter and schooling for refugees.¹⁰⁸ More interviews will be required to provide clarity.

In a sense, when we speak of the period of underground and armed struggle as one of heroism, we cannot separate it from those who laid the foundations for that path, whether by directly arguing for illegality and the use of arms or by implicitly or explicitly raising the question in public debate, as Luthuli did. Luthuli, like Gandhi, was constantly pondering where his moral principles had led him at a practical level and he did not follow dogmatic prescriptions. It is therefore my contention that the life of Luthuli must be characterised along with Hani, Mandela and others like them as part of the "heroic male project" or "revolutionary masculinity".

No Single Approach Involved

The ANC never pronounced exclusively for any one form of struggle, violence to the exclusion of public democratic politics, or for any one form of democratic politics. It was in the back of many people's minds that the day could come when illegality would be essential, as is evident in the M-Plan, just as, we have seen, awareness of the non-violent option being displaced was evident in various statements and discussions during the 1950s. Most revolutionary organisations accept that whether or not certain

103 Interview with Billy Nair, Cape Town, 2003; Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 3

104 Chatterjee, *Gandhi's Diagnostic Approach Rethought*; Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi*, editorial notes and introductions

105 Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 3

106 Discussion with Nkululeko Luthuli and telephone conversation with Jane Ngobese, MaLuthuli, August 2008

107 Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*

108 P. Rule, with M. Aitken and J. van Dyk, *Nokukhanya. Mother of Light* (The Grail, Underberg, 1993), p. 131ff

options are available or chosen is determined by the degree of repression deployed by the oppressor.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, having embarked on an armed struggle, the ANC never excluded the possibility of reopening legal, public mass struggle in the event of such opportunities arising. The public terrain was not one to be foregone to the exclusive focus on illegal work. In the darkest period, in the early 1970s, when as an underground operative I wrote a pamphlet concluding from the arrest of Black Consciousness activists that the time for legal activities had passed, I was rapped over the knuckles.¹¹⁰ The ANC never relinquished the public space and, in fact, popular organisations reappeared openly at the end of that decade.

In some ways, then, the “fighting fifties”, which are generally portrayed as struggling legally and non-violently, were an interregnum between non-violent, peaceful activities and the formal adoption of armed struggle by the ANC in 1961.¹¹¹ The fighting image of Mandela as a boxer coexisted with Mandela wearing a suit as a conventional lawyer. It also resonated with his militant image. Letsau Nelson Diale, recruited to the ANC while working as a waiter, read the newspapers. “The people I worked with said: ‘This young man is very clever.’ They asked me: ‘What’s in the *Rand Daily Mail*?’ I told them: ‘Mandela is coming to court.’ They said: ‘He will beat the hell out of the boers. He is going to beat them.’”¹¹² Here we see this image directly translated in the minds of ordinary waiters into violent action against the apartheid regime (“the boers”).

The banning of the ANC and the taking up of arms were a reconnection with the heroic tradition that had been defeated in the nineteenth century, drawn on by Mandela in his major court appearances and in daily broadcasts by the ANC’s Radio Freedom. In a sense, emphasising the date of formation of MK denies its gradual development as a popular sentiment to move towards armed action, signified via a range of behavioural and sartorial manifestations.

The ANC’s Radio Freedom was a major propaganda weapon, secretly listened to by very many ANC supporters. Its overall tenor was male. It opened with the shots of AK 47 assault rifles and songs bidding farewell to the soldiers of MK. Many of these refer to mothers not crying for their sons who would return to free the country. One such song illustrates this conception of man as the liberator:

Here We Are / Khaya Bkulindle (Here We Are / They Are Waiting for You at Home)

Khaya bakulindle	They are waiting for you at home
Malibongwe igama lamkosikazi	Praise be to women
Akukho ntomb’ esambimfazwe	No woman is afraid of the revolution ¹¹³

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- 109 H Apterker, *The Nature of Democracy, Freedom and Revolution* (International Publishers, New York, 1967); Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life*, p 162
 - 110 R Suttner, *Inside Apartheid’s Prison. Notes and Letters of Struggle* (Ocean Press, Melbourne and New York; University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2001), p 19
 - 111 Technically a distinction was drawn between MK and ANC, which became of academic significance and was purely to protect those not engaged in armed or illegal activity from prosecution
 - 112 Interview with Letsau Nelson Diale, in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories I* (Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, Johannesburg, 2008), p 92
 - 113 Rounder CD, *Radio Freedom. Voice of the African National Congress and the People’s Army Umkhonto we Sizwe*, 1996

The programme drew on a list of heroic male warriors and broadcast statements of the male leadership. Even the Year of the Women was announced by the male (but gender-sensitive) ANC President, Oliver Tambo.¹¹⁴ Women did make appearances, but they were not the main focus, the heroic imagery, the intellectual imagery, the strategic imagery being purveyed by male leaders and commentators. Incidentally the military legacy that is drawn on is depicted as a male tradition, with a range of names of famous male warriors ritually cited. Yet this had also been a period when there were significant female warriors whose memory tends to be erased and needs to be reinserted into our histories.¹¹⁵

This then was the period of the heroic masculine project, the resurgence of the new warrior joining with the memory of those who had resisted conquest, now preparing to regain their freedom to decide their own destiny. This was a time when many men left their homes to pursue dangerous work, which ultimately placed them in perilous situations and often led to death or imprisonment.

Emergence of New Cultural Forms Accompanying Resistance

The changes in modes of struggle we have seen manifested in modes of attire. Certain gestures and changes in their form and the way the struggle was conducted also mark the characteristics of this period from around the late 1950s. These are not restricted to male actors but are mentioned as part of the cultural context. A gesture refers to a non-verbal action which carries a particular meaning, but it may sometimes be accompanied by words. In the case of the emerging liberation struggle, the clenched fist or Congress salute came to attain significance. It appears to have originated in Communist Parties in the early decades of the twentieth century as a clenched fist – in Germany, Spain and other places. It was counterposed to salutes used by fascist groups which emerged contemporaneously or adopted such gestures at more or less the same time. In consulting various written sources and the Internet, one sees many other such groupings adopting a clenched fist salute and some may have influenced its adoption in the South African struggle. It was also used by Subhas Bose. A Nazi-type salute is used by the Ku Klux Klan today.

In the case of the ANC, the clenched fist has been used in two ways which appear to signify changes in phases of the struggle. Initially the salute was not the same as the Communist clenched fist – the thumb was raised either high in the air or towards the back of the shoulder. Although some leaders I have met have been very specific as to where the fist is supposed to be in relation to the shoulder “unlike the PAC”, there is great variation. (The PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) is a movement which broke away from the ANC in the late 1950s. Henry Fazzie, MK veteran in the mid-1980s, was instructing United Democratic Front (UDF) activists. The UDF arose out of popular organisations aligned to the ANC after the 1976 uprising in Soweto and other places). The Congress salute appears to have been primarily associated with the slogan developed to reclaim the land seized in the wars of conquest of the nineteenth century. That slogan is “Mayibuye i Afrika!” – which means “Come back Africa!”. This slogan applied primarily to the African people and was developed for an African organisation and used in the main by African leaders.

114 African National Congress (ANC), “South Africa’s Year of the Women A Call to the Peoples of the World, November 1, 1983” <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/or/or83=12.html>

115 J Weir, “Chiefly Women and Women’s Leadership in Pre-Colonial Southern Africa”, in N Gasa (ed), *Women in South African History* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007), pp 3-20

The thumbs-up salute changed, probably in the late 1960s, to a clenched fist, held just above the shoulder (according to Fazzie) and was usually accompanied by the slogan “Amandla!” or “Amandla Ngawethu!” (“Power to the People!” or “All power to the People”). While the BC movement also adopted the clenched fist according to some like Fazzie, they held the fist high up in the air, which was not “our way”. The lack of uniformity or conformity to Comrade Fazzie’s dicta can be seen in a photograph of Nelson Mandela where he holds his fist high in the air during his speech at the FNB Stadium in 1990, shortly after his release.



**Bose with clenched fist.
(Source unknown).**

The change in the ANC as opposed to BC may also have coincided with the adoption of a non-racial and multiracial approach to membership, gradually intensifying from 1969, so that the fist is held by some to connote all the peoples brought together as one nation in the making or in accordance with phrases such as “as separate fingers we are nothing but bound together we have power”.

Song has always been a powerful unifying force in South African history, prior to conquest, in preparation for battle and through Church influences. A range of these earlier historical influences of a variety of kinds, Christian and indigenous African, was adapted to become freedom songs. These were also adopted by progressive trade unions in the 1980s. In the post-1976 period the *toyitoyi* emerged as a dance accompanying militant and military action. Its origins are mixed; elements appear to have come from the Zimbabwean liberation movement¹¹⁶ and possibly from

116 C Twala and Q Koetaan, “The *Toyitoyi* Protest Culture in the 1980s: an Investigation into its Liberating and Unifying Powers”, *SA Journal of Cultural History*, 20, 1, June 2006

further afield. Some elements are local and some renditions do not appear to depart greatly from bodily movements found in African churches of various kinds. Predominantly, however, toyi-toyi appears to have been associated with war and even though women did toyi-toyi, it was primarily a male warrior dance. One of the attractions of toyi-toyi is its repetitiveness and cyclical nature, making it easy to learn and transmit the words and movements to others, although there could be great variation in such movements. The overall message of most of the songs appears to have been militaristic and masculine, many relating to AK 47s and bazookas and “our boys” being trained to free their country.



**MK toyi toyi at Chris Hani funeral.
(Photograph: © D.G. Williams).**

This resistance culture spread into various activities and many other arenas, including sport, where names of heroes or words associated with the resistance were deployed long before the unbanning of organisations, for example the use of “Nkosi sikelele i Afrika” (“God bless Africa”, the ANC national anthem, a religious hymn widely sung beyond political circles) and a clenched fist at soccer matches, and the naming even of netball teams as AK 47.¹¹⁷ Much of this was treated as unremarkable and part of conventional township culture.

At some stage from the late 1960s or possibly earlier, the “freedom handshake” was developed whereby one did not give the “firm manly handshake” so much part of the Western image of a powerful man, but juggled the hands of the two parties, as is now commonplace in South Africa. In the same period it became very much part of resistance and black culture in general for men to embrace, something which would in another time have been taken as an indication of their being gay. This may have come from training in the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe where such “manly embraces” were very much part of communist culture, and possibly part of earlier pre-revolutionary Eastern European culture.

117 Author’s recollection of newspaper deadpan report around 1983

Interestingly, many of the features that have been outlined are also found in various forms in gangster cultures, especially the Mafia, where its members – like ANC/Communist Party members – are regarded as part of a family and there are various signs that differentiate this family and its loyalties from other affiliations.¹¹⁸

Manhood Discourses in the ANC

It has been noted that much of the writing and many of the speeches of the early ANC and of the radical Youth League are suffused with rhetoric concerning the recovery of manhood and ending emasculation. Erlank has read this to signify a discourse that had negative implications for women's rights and gender equality.¹¹⁹ It is my contention, however, that the context in which such statements were made, indicates their insufficiency for drawing such a conclusion without considerable qualification. Following Tosh, much of this discourse may in fact be directed at other men as models worthy of emulation or the right to human dignity.¹²⁰

In much manhood literature in our time there is discussion of an alleged crisis of masculinity, referring to some men in the United States and other places feeling threatened by the advancement of women.¹²¹ A different species of "crisis" is found in contemporary South Africa with many men reacting against the gender equality clauses of the present constitution and current legislation protecting women from abuse.

But the African under apartheid and colonialism experienced a real, not a fantasised robbing of his manhood. They were known as "boys" or by the generic name of "John" and generally infantilised. This coexisted with government discourse that related the need for overlordship of the African people to their being a childlike race in comparison with the whites. The construction of Indian men by British colonialism was not identical. While there were elements of infantilisation there was also a depiction of the Bengali educated elite, who were perceived as a potential political threat, as effeminate.¹²² The Indian colonial experience, in a different way from South Africa, nevertheless also comprises a construction of the Indian male in a manner that rendered him unsuitable for the "manly" tasks of government. It was often said that English boys should live in India no longer than the age of seven; otherwise they would become effeminate like the Indians or succumb to "tropical diseases".¹²³ As indicated, the interpellation/construction was not uniform, for some Indian peoples were treated as "warlike" and therefore manly.¹²⁴

That being the case, it may well be closer to the truth to regard the recovery of manhood as that and also a codeword for liberation from white or colonial overlordship, for it was that system of government that denied adulthood to African (and most Indian) people. General J.B.M. Hertzog, former Prime Minister, made this connection very clear in 1926:

118 Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 7

119 Erlank, "Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse"

120 See Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*

121 Connell, *Masculinities*, p 84; S M Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities* (Polity, Cambridge, 2002)

122 M Sinhal, *Colonial Masculinity. The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995); A Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005 [1980]); I Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History. Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998)

123 Personal communication with Harish Naraindas, New Delhi, October 2007

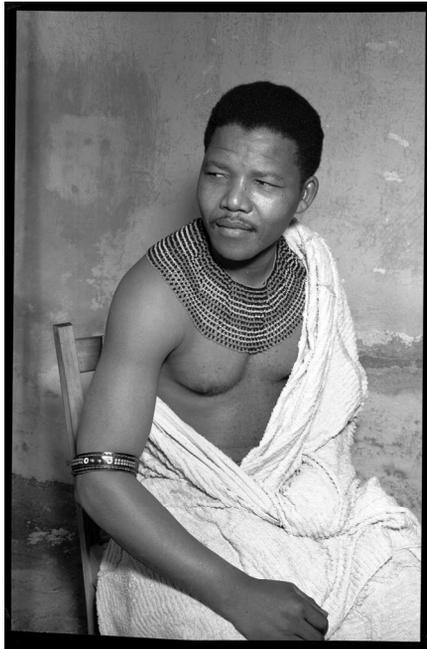
124 Ellinwood, "Two Masculine Worlds Compared"

Next to the European, the Native stands as an 8-year-old child to a man of great experience – a child in religion, a child in moral conviction; without art and without science; the most primitive needs. If ever a race had a need of guidance and protection from another people with which it is placed in contact, then it is the Native in his contact with the white man¹²⁵

Heroism and Modes of Self-Representation in the Court Room and Other Official Situations

Before discussing heroic masculinity more generally, let us pause a moment to discuss the court room and other official situations as sites for the assertion by men of their rights, in particular the court appearances of Nelson Mandela at the onset of illegal struggle and Chief Luthuli's earlier acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. There have been women trialists but none of them have been major figures or made major court statements which had the impact of Mandela or the late Communist leader Bram Fischer, who was sentenced in 1965 after being underground for almost a year.¹²⁶

In the first of Mandela's cases where he was charged with incitement, having been underground for almost a year, he appeared wearing abaThembu attire. This was



Mandela in abaThembu attire.

(Photograph: Eli Weinberg, UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives).

125 M Morris, *Every Step of the Way. The Journey to Freedom in South Africa* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2004), p 152

126 S Clingman, *Bram Fischer. Afrikaner Revolutionary* (David Philip, Cape Town; Mayibuye Books, Bellville; University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1998); M Benson (ed), *The Sun Will Rise. Statements from the Dock by Southern African Political Prisoners*, revised edition (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1981)

at once an assertion of his lineage, deriving from a long line of warrior-leaders, and a declaration of the alien character of the white man's (for it was almost exclusively male) judiciary. Dress is used to deny the power and authority of the alien court. In this sense and moment Mandela may in some respects have been closer to Gandhi – even closer than Nehru – than at any other political phase.

He tells the court of the bygone days when men were warriors fighting for their people and their land.¹²⁷ He asserts what often tends to be submerged by an overarching African nationalism, his identity as abaThembu. He shows that he was and is a person with multiple identities and in each or most of these cases there is a distinct way in which a man is dressed.

In accepting the Nobel Prize Luthuli wore chiefly attire of his community, a Zulu-speaking chieftom, part of the Christian converts, the amaKholwa. This included a headdress, necklace and other elements of the apparel of a chief. Luthuli was acting in line with what the ANC would do throughout its existence, joining the struggles of the day to its heritage, by wearing the insignia of chieftaincy. Luthuli explicitly asserts that he is a Christian, but also completely identifies with being a Zulu-speaker from the amaKholwa community, of the Umvoti Mission Reserve.¹²⁸ The ambiguities that this may have evoked were part of the ambiguities that the ANC always carried and in fact returned in force with the release of Mandela, Sisulu and others in the 1990s.



Luthuli about to receive the Nobel Prize.
(Photograph: Source unknown).

127 Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life*, pp 149-150, 161

128 Luthuli, *Let my People Go*, p 19 and generally.

This manifestation should also be read in relation to Pixley ka Isaka Seme's statement about the divisiveness of "tribal" animosities immediately prior to the formation of the ANC, which is often read as condemning distinct identities.¹²⁹ Seme was capturing one element of the ANC mission – to unite Africans as Africans, exemplified in his statement: "We are one people!" Mandela in abaThembu dress and Luthuli wearing amaKholwa chief emblems disaggregated the unity by showing the range of its component elements. This immediately indicates the limitations of using the term "hegemonic masculinity". If intended as a catch all way of characterising masculinities as if there is always one form that is dominant, it can in fact impoverish the complexity and multiplicity of such identities. In most of ANC history and certainly in the twenty-first century, there are a range of coexisting signifiers of masculinity, each manifesting the ways of a range of people who coexist with men representing other masculinities within the same organisation.

Significantly, what Luthuli is wearing around his neck when receiving the Nobel Prize appears to be iminqwamba, which is associated with medicinal powers¹³⁰ and is made of hawks' claws.¹³¹ The history of the association of medicinal powers with both curing individuals and preparing for war,¹³² and the hawk representing aggression increase the ambiguity around Luthuli's identity and potential associations which constitute that.

At the Rivonia trial when facing the death penalty, Mandela reveals that he had in fact prepared himself to die, unlike some who could not implement their political commitments because they were not psychologically ready to do so or had private reservations. In this sense, the similarity between Mandela and Gandhi (who would never urge others to do what he did not himself do) is striking:

I was prepared for the death penalty. To be truly prepared for something, one must actually expect it. One cannot be prepared for something while secretly believing it will not happen. We were all prepared, not because we were brave but because we were realistic.¹³³

At this moment, one of his most heroic before being sentenced, he directly relates the willingness to die to his manhood. In notes, he wrote: "If I must die, let me declare for all to know that I will meet my fate like a man."¹³⁴

We should, however, be cautious not to read "man" here in a univocal, literal sense, but in the overall context of apartheid subjugation which, as indicated earlier, made boys of men.

Heroic Masculine Project

The notion of a heroic masculine project derives from both mythological and real phenomena in the history of many countries. The notion of man, the hunter, going out into the wild and danger in order to provide for his family, has evoked a large

129 P k I Seme, "Native Union", in S Johns, *Protest and Hope, 1882-1934* (Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1972), p 72

130 Email message from John Wright, 4 August 2008

131 Personal communication with Nkululeko Luthuli, June 2008

132 See J Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2005)

133 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p 360

134 A Sampson, *Mandela. The Authorised Biography* (Harper Collins, London, 1999), p 196

literature and is part of the broader phenomenon of the public/private distinction or dichotomy with women being located primarily in the home. While men find themselves, and realise their potential capabilities outside of the home and return there primarily for succour before the next day's work or before embarking on the next adventure, this heroic activity was also conceived of as work or in fact the heroic man's primary work.¹³⁵ Women according to this notion are there to see their menfolk off on their journey and are ready to provide homely comfort when they return.¹³⁶

Many of those who embarked on heroic projects had such imagery in their minds, that they were doing the dangerous work and their wives had other tasks,¹³⁷ or that by embarking on this heroic dangerous work one forsook the comforts of home, provided by the wife/homemaker.¹³⁸ We have seen earlier that Gandhi worked on an approach which reconciled women's public political activity with domesticity.¹³⁹

Mandela personally reproaches himself for not being the protective shield within which this home could exist, unassailed by danger. He told Sampson that "it was not a nice feeling for a man to see his family struggling, without security, without the dignity of the head of the family around ...".¹⁴⁰ This resonates with John Iliffe's observations of a near universal concept of "honour" and "manliness", demanding "capacity to sustain and defend a household, to maintain personal autonomy, to avenge insult or violence".¹⁴¹

Heroism and Abuse

With the heroic project one enters the zone of danger and potentially virtuous conduct and it includes Hani, Mandela and also ANC President, Jacob Zuma (acquitted of rape in recent times and facing a range of corruption charges). It is a zone which, as we will see, provides opportunities for the highest virtues but also potentialities for abuse. Mandela's entry into this zone as a soldier, as with Chris Hani, is signified in the image of Mandela on a television station shortly before his arrest in the early 1960s wearing clothes connoting military activity and also in photographs taken in Algeria, where he received training. Hani is almost always associated with military uniform. Zuma is known from various accounts to have engaged in dangerous activities,¹⁴² leading to his imprisonment. While seldom pictured in MK military uniform, Zuma often adopts dress of his Zulu-speaking chiefdom or clan and its emblems, which may be intended to evoke imagery of the Zulu warrior tradition.

A security zone, an underground unit and similar places are ones in which one is generally shielded from scrutiny. Secrecy generally demands invisibility. This presents opportunities for abuse of power over others in a range of ways. Were such

135 Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation", p 163ff

136 Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities*, pp 114-115, Chapter 5 generally; Unterhalter, "The Work of the Nation"; Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 6

137 B Turok, *Nothing But the Truth. Behind the ANC's Struggle Politics* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2003), pp 130, 139

138 Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life*, p 157

139 Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p 22 and generally

140 Sampson, *Mandela*, p 510

141 J Iliffe, *Honour in African Society* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, 2005), p 3

142 For example, episodes recounted in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa II (1970-1980)* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2007)

abuse to occur among members of an underground unit, to report this would of course “blow” the whole unit. This would then be a substantial constraint on seeking an immediate remedy or stopping the abuse. Even for the victim, reporting it to the then South African Police would probably have led to another form of abuse.

Furthermore, strengthening the danger within the liberation army and beyond the specific locality of its unity, the very traditions from which all soldiers draw inspiration include practices of warfare, which entailed the taking of booty or trophies, and these were very often women.¹⁴³ The culture of the army, including MK, by its nature provided or included spaces and a cultural heritage that were not therefore immune to tolerating rape and other abuses of women.¹⁴⁴ That intolerance of such gender violence is not entrenched even in contemporary South Africa is illustrated by the conduct of the Zuma rape trial, where the defence was a mode of military attack on the complainant and the behaviour of the crowds that assembled treated the laying of a charge by the complainant as tantamount to a criminal act.¹⁴⁵ Recent stripping of women allegedly wearing clothing that is offensive to the customs of certain categories of African men, illustrates the lack of rooting of gender equality and tolerance of gender violence that still prevails.

The ANC cadre and soldier grew up and lived in such communities, which included the widespread presence of gangsters with whom young people and sometimes members of the national liberation movement often had ambiguous relationships. Conscious reflection was required to reject a culture embracing the relatively high tolerance of gender violence.

That Zuma should sing a song during his rape trial entitled “Bring me my machine gun” is symptomatic of the potential for abuse, given that the gun is a phallic symbol and that bullets can symbolise ejaculation. The song is accompanied by bodily movements which simulate a sexual act, something common to warrior songs.¹⁴⁶

This is not to suggest that all or many MK soldiers abused women (as has been attributed to me in an MK Veteran Meeting). But entry into the zone where heroic acts are performed and also a place of secrecy where abuse could occur provides an environment which could include nurturing a potential climate of tolerance, among some, of gender violence.

Women as “Homemakers” and the Heroic Project

The heroic male project presupposed an Other who waved the man farewell, looked after the house and prepared for his return. We have noted that from the earliest days of the ANC and even from the earliest period of warfare, women have not been excluded from heroic or public activities, but they have either not had these adequately recorded or their activities have been recorded because they have demanded a presence or opened up a space in the man’s public world. This is not

143 Suttner, “The Jacob Zuma Rape Trial”

144 See Suttner, “The Jacob Zuma Rape Trial”; Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 6

145 N Gasa, “Dear Jacob, I Feel Pain”, *Mail and Guardian*, 2006 Accessed on 8 January 2007 at [http://www.mg.co.za/printPage.aspx?area=insight/insight comment and analysis/](http://www.mg.co.za/printPage.aspx?area=insight/insight%20comment%20and%20analysis/); Suttner, “The Jacob Zuma Rape Trial”

146 A A Mazrui, “Manhood, Warriorhood and Sex in Eastern Africa”, in A A Mazrui (ed), *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa* (E J Brill, Leiden, 1977), pp 69-81

qualified in the same way as in the Indian nationalist movement, with South African women tending to take the lead independently of the organised activity of their menfolk. They enter new terrain separately. It should be noted that Indian women almost contemporaneously marched and were jailed crossing borders and performing other illegal actions, but together with their menfolk – in South Africa in some cases teenagers became martyrs (see above).

In the case of many of the prominent ANC and Communist Party leaders it is clear that their womenfolk were not confined to the kitchen. The marriage of Walter and Albertina Sisulu is an affirmation of the notion of conventional family in its most powerful sense and of a relationship of equality with the extended family maintained, despite decades of separation while Walter was imprisoned. But they also play out the ANC notion of the “organisation as family” and Albertina Sisulu, in the absence of Walter, was not only a mother to her own children, but also embraced and communicated a heritage of struggle to a younger generation generally referred to as her children, in addition to her own children.¹⁴⁷ She herself was a founder figure of the reconstituted ANC underground after the Rivonia trial and has remained an organisational stalwart in her own right throughout her adult life.



Albertina Sisulu.

(Photograph: UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives).

Winnie Mandela, now Madikizela-Mandela, was also unwilling to be confined to the home and engaged in underground activity.¹⁴⁸ There is some difference between the activities of Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela. While

147 E Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu. In Our Lifetime* (David Philip, Claremont, 2002); Suttner, *The ANC-led Underground up to 1976*, Chapter 7; First, Speech paying tribute to Walter Sisulu

148 For example, G Houston, “The Post-Rivonia ANC/SACP Underground”, in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa I (1960-1970)* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004), p 644ff; Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu*



Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.
(Photograph: © Louise Gubb).

Albertina Sisulu operated clearly within organisational guidelines, much of Winnie Mandela's activity was self-initiated, outside of and unlinked to ongoing organisational structures and activities.¹⁴⁹ At one stage, the Mass Democratic Movement in the country cut off relations with Winnie Mandela because of her activities which they considered to be uncondusive to the liberation struggle. It is well

149 Partly based on personal experience, after first being released from prison in 1983, when various delegations were sent to Winnie to ask her not to do this or that, activities running counter to approaches of the emerging mass movement which was supported by the ANC

documented that these “aberrations” were later closely linked to abductions and deaths and she was ultimately convicted on a criminal charge of kidnapping.¹⁵⁰ The wives of both the leading Rivonia trialists, Mandela and Sisulu, therefore contest notions of a wife caring purely for the home while the husband performed heroic deeds or was jailed for these, but their ways of defying this notion were quite different.

A final but telling example of the complexity of the public/private relationship in the liberation struggle is that of the marriage of leading theorist Professor Jack Simons, who later mentored young MK cadres in the camps in Angola, and his wife Ray Alexander, famous trade unionist. The roles of the conventional husband/wife were often reversed, for Simons would have to drive Alexander to her union negotiations and sit in the car with his flask, sandwiches and books, waiting for his wife’s return from her heroic deeds.¹⁵¹

ANC Masculinities Today

Unterhalter unconvincingly suggests that contemporary heroic masculinity in the ANC may be represented by government ministers, civil servants and the directors of corporations.¹⁵² It is not clear whether South Africans have generally bought in to the “BEE [Black Economic Empowerment] dream”, as an aspiration, above all others. It is also not necessary that there be manifestations of heroism in every phase of ANC and South African history and it is clear that the big African businessmen, even if their wealth is envied, are not viewed as heroic. Heroism arises in specific situations. Even for those with a heroic past, some have maintained this reputation and others have committed acts which have besmirched their own past and brought shame on the movement they served. Leaders of the ANC and Communist Youth League invoke “defence of the revolution”, in which they had no part (by virtue of their age), in order to perform acts that further endanger the democratic gains and a culture of debate. This has evoked a measure of cynicism about “struggle credentials” in certain quarters, especially in my experience among those who were themselves uninvolved and see these malpractices as vindication of their having been inactive.

There has been a substantial return to the representation of the ANC leader as a man in suit, Mandela’s initial garb before becoming president of the country, also worn by Hani at the initial CODESA negotiations. This represents a return to Berger’s initial depiction of the suit as being associated with talking at a table. While this alternates with African shirts and Madiba (Indonesian casual) shirts, there is a measure of return to the suit as a signifier of ANC male leadership, partly for reasons relating to Berger’s depiction of the origins of the style of dress and the work that many of the ANC leadership and bureaucrats now do.

150 E Gilbey, *The Lady. The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1993); M Meredith, *Nelson Mandela. A Biography* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1997), pp 290ff, 375ff, 434ff, 458ff

151 R Alexander Simons, *All My Life and All My Strength* (STE Publishers, Johannesburg, 2004)

152 Unterhalter, “The Work of the Nation”, p 174



Hani and Slovo.
(Photograph: © D.G. Williams).

Former State President Thabo Mbeki, before his removal from office, had been depicted by Zuma supporters as not being a “real man”.¹⁵³ Mbeki wears a suit, as does Zuma most of the time, but his masculinity has also been constructed in a non-militaristic way, as a “giant intellectual”, in the manner of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral and similar figures. In Mbeki one finds combined the dress for discussion at conferences and also the confirmation of major strategising and thinking being associated in the ANC with men. Mbeki continued a tradition where, despite there being major female intellectuals in the ANC, the imagery and representation of ANC strategic thinking remains that of the male. Where a commission reported on strategy or where a major intervention was made, it was almost invariably through a man and exemplified primarily by Mbeki himself. This is likely to continue under the leadership of ANC President Jacob Zuma.

Since the 1950s there has been an oral tradition, transmitted within the ANC, about how individuals should conduct themselves, and this tradition tends to draw on “exemplary comrades”, in particular Moses Kotane and Walter Sisulu. Obviously Nelson Mandela and Bram Fischer are also drawn on, but in the case of Mandela it is often not purely for showing the “correct” direction, but also for acting with indiscretion in his youth, as indicated by his statements on violence, breaking organisational discipline. What is significant is that the stories that cadres are told, as far as my experience goes over some decades of involvement and observation of the ANC from direct participation to more loose links, indicate that the “exemplary comrades” tend to be male. One hears that Kotane never used to open his door to see

153 V Reddy and C Potgieter, “‘Real Men Stand Up for the Truth’: Discursive Meanings in the Jacob Zuma Rape Trial”, *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 24, 4, 2006, pp 511-521

anyone until he had read the headlines of the newspaper because that might well be the reason for his first visitor. Even Walter Sisulu, in an interview, prefaced his emphasis on discipline by saying “like Kotane” he believed that an organisation could not operate through anger, but required discipline.¹⁵⁴

However, disrupting this imagery of the exemplary being inevitably male, there is a photograph of Lilian Ngoyi speaking at a funeral, with two men sitting on either side. It is through such imagery that one derives a sense that in practice, the written and oral literature may have been selective and omitted some important factors indicating certain women standing as exemplary. Further oral work as well as rereading written literature and examining photographs that exist may complexify the understanding we now have.



Lilian Ngoyi.
(Photograph: UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives).

This article has attempted to move tentatively towards certain ways of identifying distinct masculinities within the ANC, changing over time. It indicates that many manifestations of a diverse kind may coexist at any one time, without any single form necessarily being “hegemonic”, or even many contestations within any

154 Interview with Walter Sisulu, Johannesburg, 1993

hegemonic project. It “reads” such masculinities from actions, dress, words, gestures and a range of other modes of representation. If one uses an array of such signifiers it also blurs the conventional periodisation of ANC history, with the 1950s being less distinct from the 1940s and the 1960s or having elements of convergence that have tended to be overlooked. This work is described as tentative because it does not draw on substantial experience with some of the tools that are deployed, such as clothing, gestures, songs and dances. But it indicates that there is a need to revisit previous periodisations and paradigms, which may have been formulated while neglecting factors mentioned here and others which still have to be identified and their importance assessed.¹⁵⁵

Abstract

This article attempts to address the development of the ANC nationalist struggle and accompanying gender issues, especially concepts of manhood, through cultural factors, in particular dress. It argues that what is worn by people constitutes a historical archive distinct from the written and spoken word that can enrich our interpretation of historical periods and often adds complexity to the way we read these. In particular, the adoption of suits by early ANC delegations is argued to signify more than conforming to imperialist dictates and “begging”, it means wearing the attire of the “ruling class”. It revisits Chief Albert Luthuli and in his dress reads ambiguities in his stance towards potential militarisation. Likewise, the article considers the development of specific gestures, the use of the clenched fist in various ways, the development of the *toyi-toyi* as signifying different periods and meanings of the struggle, often having gender implications. Much that is advanced is not presented as an authoritative reinterpretation, but is intended to indicate the multiplicity of meanings that may be read into the same events or lives of people. This is a challenge to expand the range of sources which are drawn on for our historiography and related studies.

Opsomming

Periodisering, Kulturele Konstruksie en Voorstelling van ANC Manlikhede deur Kleredrag, Gebare en die Indiese Nasionalistiese Invloed

Hierdie artikel spreek die ontwikkeling van die ANC se nasionalistiese stryd en meegaande gender kwessies (veral konsepte van manlikheid) deur kulturele faktore soos spesifiek kleredrag, aan. Dit betoog dat dit wat deur mense gedra word, 'n historiese argief uitmaak wat los staan van die geskrewe en gesproke woord, en wat ons interpretasie van historiese tydperke kan verryk. Dit kan tegelykertyd ook die manier waarop ons dit interpreteer, meer kompleks maak. In die besonder word aangevoer dat die gebruik van pakke klere deur vroeë ANC-afvaardigings meer beteken het as bloot die konformering aan imperiale voorskrifte en “bedelary” – dit het naamlik beteken dat die kleding van die “heersende klas” aangeneem is. Daar

155 At the time of writing, early February 2009, much that has been said here relates to a past from which many draw sustenance and inspiration. Regrettably the ANC today (and the leadership of its Communist and COSATU allies) is in disarray and in danger of descending into a position where it loses its considerable moral authority. How this has arisen and possible, long-term ways of recovery require another article. (But see the debates in *Business Day*, www.bday.co.za, 8, 9, 10 July 2008 where some of the issues have been raised)

word ook weer gekyk na hoofman Albert Luthuli en uit sy kleredrag word dubbelsinnighede in sy houding jeens moontlike militarisasie afgelei. Op soortgelyke wyse skenk die artikel oorweging aan die ontwikkeling van die gebruik van spesifieke gebare, byvoorbeeld die gebalde vuus op verskillende maniere, en die ontwikkeling van toyi-toyi deur verskillende tydperke en betekenisse van die bevrydingstryd, dikwels met gender betekenisse. Baie van wat voorgehou word, word nie as 'n outoritêre herinterpretasie voorgestel nie, maar word gebruik om te illustreer dat 'n wye verskeidenheid van betekenisse uit dieselfde gebeure en lewens van mense afgelei kan word. Die uitdaging waarvoor dit ons stel, is om die omvang van bronne waarop ons vir ons historiografiese en verwante studies staatmaak, uit te brei.

Key words

ANC; cultures of liberation struggle; dress; gender; gestures; Indian; liberation struggle; masculinity; nationalist movements.

Sleutelwoorde

ANC; bevrydingstryd; bevrydingstrydkulture; gebare; gender; Indies; kleredrag; manlikheid; nasionalistiese bewegings.