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THE BANISHMENT OF NOMZAMO MANDELA. by Hilda Bernstein

Last month a force of twenty police in camouflage uniforms descended on the home of Winnie Mandela, packed her furniture and belongings onto a lorry and removed her bodily to a remote black township in the Orange Free State - a place so insignificant that it has no official name, although local blacks call it 'Phatakahle', which means 'handle with care.'

I last saw Nomzamo Winnie Mandela thirteen years ago as she walked down the steps of the Palace of Justice in Pretoria. Her husband, Nelson Mandela and seven others had just been sentenced to life imprisonment. (The ninth defendant, my own husband, had been found not guilty the previous day.)

The crowd outside the court were waiting, as they had waited for the weeks and months of the Rivonia Trial. Winnie raised her arm in salute and called 'Life!', and the people burst out singing and unfurled banners they had been concealing from the police.

We had sat on separate benches in the courtroom for eight months. Our husbands sat together in the dock, but we were divided, blacks on one side, whites on the other. We had passed, looked but never greeted each other although we were old friends, for we were both banned, and banned people are prohibited from communicating with each other. Even a smile, a whispered greeting, has been interpreted by the courts as 'communication.' We could not risk it under the unremitting gaze of so many police.

Nomzamo Winnie Mandela was born and brought up in rural Pondoland. Her father was Minister of Agriculture and Forestry in Kaiser Matanzima's Transkei Bantustan. "He was a political man," Winnie said. "I was political in another way."

She matriculated, came to Johannesburg, obtained a social science diploma and became a social worker. In 1958 she married Nelson Mandela, one of South Africa's first black lawyers, a leading member of the African National Congress (then still ~~x~~ legal); and at the time of their marriage, one of 156 accused in a four-year-long treason trial that ended with the acquittal of all defendants.

When the African National Congress was declared an illegal organisation in 1961, Nelson Mandela went underground. From that time on the life of Winnie Mandela and her two small daughters Zenani and Zenziswa became one of police raids and unceasing Special Branch vigilance and harassment.

She was banned for the first time in 1962, then arrested for breaking her banning order, allegedly by attending a party. She was also arrested in 1967, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1976 and 1977.

Nelson was arrested in 1962 and sentenced to five years in jail, but subsequently sentenced again at the Rivonia Trial to life imprisonment, and has been imprisoned on Robben Island ever since.

Soweto is in the Transvaal and Robben Island is off Cape Town. *a thousand miles away*
After the trial Winnie had to get special permission to leave her home to visit her husband, and stringent conditions were always attached. Her banning orders were renewed in 1965 for five years, with additional orders restricting her so severely that she lost her job as a social worker - she was no longer allowed to visit social welfare cases in other townships, she was prohibited from having visitors in her own home, and she was precluded from attending study courses she had undertaken under a scholarship from London University.

When she had a permit to visit Robben Island in 1966 she was required to travel by train, but as the train was full she caught a plane to Cape Town to see her husband before her permit expired. For this, she was charged with breaking the exemption to her banning orders: twelve months imprisonment, all but four days suspended. On returning to Johannesburg after the trial in Cape Town, she was again arrested, charged with attempting to resist arrest. She was found not guilty (she accused the police of improper behaviour.)

In May, 1969, she was arrested at 2 a.m., and thereafter remained in prison for 491 days, most of it in solitary confinement. At first, with many others arrested at the same time, she was kept in solitary confinement broken only by prolonged periods of interrogation. Perhaps because world attention centred on the name of Mandela, or perhaps because the police knew she suffered from a

heart condition, she was allowed to remain seated during five days and five nights of continuous interrogation (others arrested at the same time were less 'fortunate'; three died in detention, one became mentally unbalanced). On the third day, when she showed the police her blue and swollen hands and feet, Major Swanepoel said "For God's sake, leave us some ~~information~~ inheritance when you decide to pop it; you cannot go with all that information."

On the third day she had black-outs, her whole body became blue and swollen. The police banged, clapped and made other noises to revive her. On the fifth day "my clothes were soaking wet from excessive night sweating . . . I was trembling badly and could not control the muscles . . . The pain under the left breast was acute and I had difficulty in breathing."

In the early hours of the sixth morning, Swanepoel stopped the interrogation, and then they continued only day by day, with the prison floor to lie on at night. "I used to wake up screaming and found myself talking aloud and suffered from nightmares."

Yet in February, 1970, despite all that had happened to them, the case collapsed and the accused found not guilty and discharged. They were immediately re-arrested, and put back into solitary confinement. (While on trial they had at least been treated as ordinary prisoners.) Six months later, after a second trial on the same charges, they were again found not guilty.

It was now two years since Winnie had visited Nelson. But she was served with an even more stringent banning order, confining her to a small area of Soweto and keeping her under house arrest every evening and week-end. The application to leave her home to visit Robben Island was refused. Police came to her home three or four times a day to 'check up' and harass her.

Her brother-in-law came to her house one day after 6 (the house arrest time) to collect a list of groceries. Winnie was arrested and charged with having visitors after 6 p.m. His presence, together with her sister and two small children, constituted a 'gathering.'

Another arrest and charge followed in July 1971: contravening her banning orders by receiving one of her sisters. In September of that year she was again arrested and accused of breaking her

banning orders, this time by communicating with Peter Magubane, a friend and well-known photographer, in a Johannesburg street. For this infringement she served six months in prison.

In September, 1975, the bans expired and were not immediately renewed. After 13 years of restrictions, harassment, imprisonment, constant searches of her house, burglary and attempted assault, Nomzamo Winnie Mandela was free for a very short while to move around to speak openly, to be interviewed. Perhaps the Government were giving her a chance to keep quiet, to 'be good.'

Journalists who interviewed her described her as a woman of 'charm, beauty and compassion . . . unafraid' (the Johannesburg Star, 4/10/75) and 'dignified and poised, a serene and lovely woman; but underneath her calm beauty lies a dedicated woman of steely strength' (the Johannesburg Sunday Times 19/10/75).

To write of Winnie's personal appearance is not being sexist. Undoubtedly her poise, her sophistication and her beauty has been a factor in the attention she has received from the authorities. They want black women to be humble, semi-literate and obedient; not educated, independent, proud. The Special Branch were often bemused by her; over months during the Rivonia trial, I observed their eyes, their expressions, when they looked at her.

She now spoke bitterly about the untold hardships of the years that had left scars which nothing could remove. She was bitter that while her daughters grew up she could not properly fulfil her role as mother. She could not even take them to school or meet their teachers. Yet "I am even more opposed to this violent system now than I was in 1962. . . I will express my views . . . I am aware of the risks I will have to face." She said she could not be a spectator to the cause of her people. "As long as our people are imprisoned and as long as Whites continue to do what they are doing, my life will remain unchanged." She dismissed detente as playing for time. "Is it possible that Whites are not aware of the agony of the Black people? Can they be unaware of how explosive the situation is in South Africa?"

She spoke contemptuously of the Bantustans, declaring South Africa would never accept such a future, only that of a multi-racial South

Africa.

Only eight months later, the explosive situation of which she spoke erupted in the Soweto uprising, and Winnie Mandela was one of dozens of leading Blacks who were arbitrarily arrested and put into 'preventative detention' under the Internal Security Act. She was released six months later and once more banned, restricted to her district in Soweto.

Until last month, when she was forcibly removed to the place without a name, called officially the 'Brandfort Bantu residential area', outside the small Free State town of Brandfort.

Like the 725 identical houses in the township, Winnie Mandela's three-roomed house is without electricity, running water, a bath or stove. It has no water-borne sewerage and a door that locks only from the outside. She is house arrested every night and week-end, but allowed to go into Brandfort during the week.

Her youngest daughter, 16-year-old Zendzi, who went with her mother to Phatakahle, spoke with bitterness and anger. The people of Phatakahle speak Sotho and Afrikaans. "We are Xhosa-speaking," said Zendzi, "We do not speak Afrikaans." She is concerned for herself and her mother. There are no libraries, no cinemas; the location has one primary school, one general store. "No one can survive in these conditions. It is soul-destroying. . . . The Security Police visit us three or four times a day, they won't leave us alone." Every half hour a police van drives through the location streets, sending up clouds of dust. When mother and daughter went into Brandfort to shop for groceries, they were escorted everywhere by both black and white Security police.

Zendzi had visitors at the cement box where her mother has been dumped. Immediately Winnie Mandela was again arrested and charged, with 'receiving guests.'

"She can leave the country if she wishes," said Vorster. She would then, of course, never see her husband again.

The Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger, said she would be paid R100 a month and would get all basic amenities. R15 would go in rent for the house. (She had been earning R350 a month in Soweto). She would get all the basic amenities she would require, said Mr

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Kruger, "And we are giving her R100 for free. What more does she want?"

Yes, indeed. What more?

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