

Mandelaism in Newspaper Advertising that “Pays Tribute” to Mandela after his Death

Shepherd Mpofu and Colin Chasi

Summary

Former South African President, Nelson Mandela's death in 2013 saw an extraordinary outpouring of local and global grief. This reflected the worldwide iconisation of Mandela as a popular cultural and political symbol for human rights, political messiah-hood, sainthood, dignity, peace and forgiveness. Noting that in his lifetime, even, Mandela attempted to deflect and qualify this iconisation, we present critical views of what we call “Mandelaism” to describe the cultural practices and sign systems that surround and mythologise Mandela. Mandelaism is intermeshed with, feeds into and draws on patriotic sentiments, often invoking notions of magical powers to reconcile racial divisions, to right wrongs of the past and to nation-build. Mandelaism, we notice, is sometimes hijacked by self-serving machinations. Located in the context of the news-event that was Mandela's death and funeral, this aims to recognize self-serving corporate communications which invoke or play on Mandelaism. We do this with reference to selected corporate advertisements that were published in selected national English-language newspapers in the two weeks following his death. Our aim is to thereby address the concern that such corporates endanger democracy as they work to occupy and manipulate, for their own narrow and limited gains, social imaginaries in which nationhood is constructed.

Opsomming

Die dood in 2013 van die voormalige Suid-Afrikaanse President, Nelson Mandela, het gelei tot 'n buitengewone uitstorting van droefheid, nie net plaaslik nie maar wêreldwyd. Dit was 'n weerspieëling van die globale ikonisering van Mandela as simbool vir menseregte, waardigheid, vrede en vergifnis, wat hom tot 'n soort kulturele en politieke heilige en messias verhef het. Ons wys daarop dat Mandela tydens sy leeftyd van hierdie ikonisering probeer wegstroom het en dit probeer kwalifiseer het, en bied kritiese beskouings aan van wat ons "Mandelaïsme" noem om die kultuurgebruik en tekenstelsels wat Mandela omring en mitologiseer, te beskryf. Mandelaïsme is verweef met, sluit aan by en benut patriotiese sentiment en beroep hom dikwels op nosies van magiese krag om rasseverdelings te heel, die wandade van die verlede reg te stel, en die nasie te bou. Mandelaïsme word egter soms gekaap deur masjinasies wat slegs in eie belang optree. In die konteks van die nuusgebeure van Mandela se dood en begrafnis identifiseer ons die egosentriese korporatiewe kommunikasies wat hulle op Mandelaïsme beroep het of dit uitgebuit het. Ons doen dit met verwysing na 'n aantal korporatiewe advertensies wat in die twee weke ná Mandela se dood in geselekteerde Engelstalige koerante verskyn het. Ons doel is om te ondersoek of sodanige instansies ons demokrasie in gevaar stel deur in eie belang die sosiale denkbeeld waarbinne nasieskap gebou word, te manipuleer en uit te buit.

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Introduction

This article examines presentations of the late former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela as an icon or symbol of South African nationhood. Specifically, focusing on capitalist corporates' advertisements put out in the aftermath of Mandela's death, it attempts to see how what we call Mandelaism was used by some corporate bodies to manufacture their own legitimacy and belonging in the space of the imagined mythic South African nation. In so doing, we address the concern that such corporates endanger democracy by working to occupy and manipulate, for their own narrow and limited gains social imaginaries in which nationhood is constructed.

This article is therefore concerned with the symbolic representation of Mandela, with what we call Mandelaism, as it manifests in English language South African newspapers on the occasion in the ten days following this hero's death. Specifically it is interested in how these images are deployed by corporate entities which appear to pay homage to an iconic Mandela while failing to escape the accusation that they were simultaneously opportunisticly using their seemingly choreographed act of mourning to manufacture nationally sanctioned legitimations that favour their exploitation of the country's resources.

Before we proceed, it is important to map out the journey the article takes. First we briefly discuss key concepts (of nation, nationhood, national identity and national symbols), then we overview widely shared views by which Mandela is cast as a heroic icon. We will attempt to show how Mandelaism arises as Mandela is iconised. Our reading of Mandelaism and its iconography "pays attention to the context in which the image is produced and circulated, and to how and why cultural meanings and their visual expression come about historically" (Van Leeuwen 2001: 93). At the core of this analysis is the exploration of how commercial interests align themselves, as Msimang (2015) realises, to selected Mandela iconographies, using these to shield illegitimate privilege and gains that characterise unjust apartheid pasts and presents.

Before concluding, we critically reflect on how some corporate organisations attempted to communicate grief, loss, and sorrow on the occasion of Mandela's death and funeral. For this, we look at mainstream tabloid (*Daily Sun*, *Sunday World*, *Sunday Sun*, *Sowetan*) and broadsheet (*The Mail and Guardian*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Star*) English press advertisements that were posted by corporates. We purposively select adverts that reveal most elegantly how corporate advertising masked certain negativities they have sponsored in society and this, in a way, scandalises the Mandela legacy that the corporates claimed to be celebrating, recalling, upholding or advancing. In short, we pick out advertising that enables us to demonstrate how Mandelaism is deployed for the narrow gains of powerful and commercial elites. For the point is to advance a cautionary set of notes about how celebratory

iconisation of even the most admirable of people can yield communication practices that are easily taken up for narrow or selfish purposes of dominant corporate actors, something inimical to democratic principles in a society like South Africa.

Clearly, we tread where angels shudder to tread. For we share Lukhele’s (2012: 289) incredulity about how there has been “a respectful reluctance to countenance any scepticism with [Mandela’s] saintly stature” especially in relation to the way corporates and other sectors of society see Mandela and in this paper we look at how his death and life were celebrated and mourned. It is necessary to challenge the global stature and sainthood that has been thrust onto Mandela especially by “white” corporates, the West and some of those who benefitted from his transformation, especially in post-apartheid South Africa (Lukhele 2012; Gevisser 2009).

Nation, Nationhood, National Identity and National Symbols

Nation and national identity involve certain symbolic processes that are often taken for granted in communities they apply to. Nations are social and political constructs (Gellner 1983) based on narrativised constructions and on ideas of “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). National identity is variously defined by such scholars as Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1983) and Smith (1989) as dynamic and fluid capable of changing depending on a number of influential factors at play. Hutchinson and Smith (1994) view national identity as a phenomenon rooted in a past shared by individuals in a given community. Kang (2008) conceptualises national identity as something that arises in ways of “thinking and talking about nationhood” and Smith (1991: 9) reckons that national identity suggests the existence of a social space in which members claim belonging using the value of subjective and inter-subjective productive activities by which members contractually bind themselves to discursive orders that constitute the nation. This is to say that nationhood is set on and establishes imagined (Anderson 1991) spaces that are symbolically achieved using as symbolic such artefacts as flags, myths, styles of dress, currencies, heroes, sports etc.

Meanings of national symbols and identities as intimated above are not fixed. They polysemically bear multiple, contested, negotiated, enacted, given and manufactured meanings. National symbols tell stories by that imaginatively locate people in histories, presents and futures. After all, “In the beginning was the word or, more accurately, the logos. And in the beginning, ‘logos’ meant story, reason, rationale, conception, discourse, thought” (Fisher 1987: 5). This suggests that symbolic forms work to construct realities and in the upshot also to direct the practices that people engage in. After all, as Giddens (1985: 19) has observed, human interaction inescapably involves communication and its significations that produce acts and systems of

domination or power, using resources and permitting modes of sanctioning. The focus of this article therefore is to critique the meanings of Mandela as a national and global symbol with much focus on the South African public sphere where Mandela has been celebrated, questioned, loved and hated.

In established democracies the routinised form of everyday life is produced and reproduced *as though* tradition is marginal to the enactment of law and order. This illusion is shattered in events which threaten the ontological security of members, driving members turn to ideas of leadership that hark to historical orders (cf. Giddens 1985: 218-219). In African settings, where nations are still often in nascent stages of development amidst colonial boundaries that contain a rag-tag of disjointed national bodies, it is often still politically necessary for those who wield the legal monopoly of power to try to invent traditions within which belonging can be constructed. Hobsbawm's (1983: 1) definition of the invention of tradition is quite exact and attractive in how it reflects on how such traditions direct or seek to inform behaviours: "Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."

Mandela: Nation, Nationhood, National Identity and National Symbols

Heroes give nations a reference and connection to imagined ancestral roots. Anthony Smith (1999: 65) defines heroes as models "of virtuous conduct, (whose) deeds of valour inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants". South African nationalism is partly anchored in narratives of iconography and harks heroic, messianic and other mythic associations pertaining to "the founding father of the nation", and "son of the soil", Nelson Mandela.

The idea of Mandela as both the quintessential father and son of South Africa is quite profound. From both sides of the filial relationship, it locates him an extraordinary patrimonial set of bonds with South Africans. For Lodge (2014: 8), Mandela arises as a leading figure of a ruling political elite, the African National Congress (ANC), which has a patrimonial pedigree that originates in how historically power in the organisation was accrued: 1) through networks of "notables" whose relations centred on having gone to the same schools, churches or family ties; and 2) by means of "clientelistic expectations" developed in various relations with financially resourced partners and associations. These networks and expectations constitute the basis for a patrimonial system of exchange within which people assume father and son relationships that are pregnant with the obligations that, as Mauss (1990) rightly recognised, mark all instances of gifting and giving. What also bears

recognising in the way Mandela is canonised as both father and son is that it locates him in a nativist historiography that works to naturalise him as the leader South Africa had to have. In other words, this iconography invents a tradition within which Mandela is a given eminence.

It is indisputable that Mandela lived an extraordinary life as the following demonstrate:

- Rob Nixon thinks that from the outset Mandela seemed to possess “a talent for immortality” (1991: 42). One could think that Mandela came to the fore of the South African national imagination first as the mysterious figure, The Black Pimpernel, who eluded apartheid rule. He was, for this moment, the ideal honourable enemy of the state, who cleverly fought for freedom by flashily breaking the law and getting away with it. “South African newspapers dubbed him the ‘Black Pimpernel,’ an allusion to the Scarlet Pimpernel who rescued people from the guillotine during the French Revolution” (Crompton 2007: 7). Sublated, in this mythic narrative role, Mandela had a mystique and aura that accompanies brigands, pirates and other outlaw figures.¹
- At the Rivonia Trial Mandela dares death, and beats it, after telling his persecutors that freedom and equality are values he is prepared to die for.
- During 27 years of life imprisonment Mandela disappears. He is excommunicated. But he overcomes this too by being iconically amplified as champion of the forces against apartheid.
- Upon exiting prison, Mandela frees his people and his oppressors – mythically becoming the icon of what is called the rainbow nation. He gained wide praise for the reconciliatory symbolism of acts, such as those of drinking tea with the widow of the architect of apartheid and of wearing a rugby jersey embossed with the number of springbok captain – when rugby had been reputed to be the sport of the Afrikaner community who symbolically, politically and bureaucratically were associated and blamed for apartheid (Naidoo 2010: 246). For Bormman (2014), the image of Mandela in the Springbok jersey symbolises the birth of the South African nation after apartheid.
- Mandela is known for an inclusive rhetoric that is recognised by many as key to achievement of South Africa’s less bloody transition from apartheid than may otherwise have occurred.

(Lodge 2006: 208; Moriaty 2003)

The above list is an incomplete reduction of feats and observations around which Mandela is mythologised. In looking at it, it is worth thinking about myths as signifiers of beliefs held in common by a large group of people that give events and actions a particular meaning;

[they are] typically socially cued rather than empirically based” (Edelman 1971: 14). This suggests that mythical order of things is developed in

1. The South Africa black township *tsotsi* (thief or thug) of the apartheid era assumes greatness for the ways in which they contest, challenges and traverse boundaries of the oppressive state (Morris 2010, Hurst 2009).

accordance with social cognitions that variously stand in dissonance or consonance with other cognitions. (Edelman 1971: 14, 18)

South African myths that acclaim Mandela the agent of a transformative long walk to freedom that erased apartheid inequity and segregation are not consistent with the everyday cognitions of many who continue to witness and experience structural violence. In essence apartheid has not ended more than two decades into independence. From Cassirer's magisterial account of symbolic forms and myths, we learn that myths nevertheless construct spaces within which spaces are schematically constructed to not only appear as though they are geometrical and empirical in nature, but to functionally interrelate and mediate diverse elements (1955: 84) according to a logic that always goes back to an imagined original identity or essence (89). To imagine the nation-state, symbolic ideations are constructed to buttress discursive enactments into which utopian ideals are situated as foundational ground onto which present or "here and now" realities are insinuated – in a manner outlined in Manheim's (1998: 209-210) seminal *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*.

It ensures that the meanings, or patterned cognitions, that people mythically experience fundamentally contradict environmental informational disturbances which mark how South Africa remains violent, unequal and an alienating society. Thus while South African identity itself may appear meaningful and self-evident, the evidence of history and everyday experience impinges to disturbingly say that it is important to ask who South Africans are and that it is in fact reasonable to recognise that South Africanness as currently imagined is contested (Chipkin 2007). Where the myth of Mandela says he led South Africa through a reconciliation process that brought peace and harmony, evidence abounds that violence was ignored in the process and remains the order of the day. In fact Karl von Holdt argues that Mandela actually midwifed South Africa into a "violent democracy characterised by violent pluralism" (2013: 5910). After a particularly gruesome murder of a foreigner on South Africa's streets, Tromp, Oliphant Savides, (2015) was driven to say the country has a "Kill thy neighbour" culture where, due to structural violence in the form of poverty, unemployment and other resource constraints, mainly poor South Africans have attempted to find solutions through fighting foreigners as a way of getting rid of them so that they too enjoy the trappings of democracy. This structural violence which is a residue of the apartheid violence where black lives did not matter has continued to inculcate into most poor people's psyche that black lives do not matter as captured by Tromp et al. (2015) after observing the killing of a Mozambican national in South Africa's Alexandra squatter camp; "The brutality of South Africans turning on their neighbours was brought home yesterday morning as people stood by while a Mozambican man was stalked, stabbed and killed as he lay in township filth, pleading for his life ... some now held their hands to

their mouths in horror. Others stood seemingly detached, as if watching a movie.” The attacks on foreigners are also attempts at purifying the elusive democratic “Mandela” nation whose stubborn stains of apartheid never wore off. The suggestion here is that the Mandela is used in the articulation of the myth of a certain brand of national identity which he promised but never delivered. As such Mandela, to use Guibernau and Goldblatt’s (2000: 125) account of nationalism, is invoked for the establishment of an “emotive identification with a nation, (that is a community of named people who acknowledge a shared solidarity and identity by virtue of a shared culture, history and territorial homeland) and a political project to secure an independent nation-state for a nation”. This also speaks to insider-outsider dichotomies.

Knowingly or not, Mandela was instrumental in establishing a quiescence by which, after 1994, oppressed South Africans no longer fought for control of the political levers of power. Observing Mandela from close range, a minister in Mandela’s government, Naidoo (2010: 240), argues that Mandela had an imperious streak that, “while aimed at achieving desirable goals, led to him twisting arms to get his way so that under the moral pressure of Mandela business executives, for example, often acquiesced by funding his projects”. In this environment, Naidoo started to recognise an emerging climate in which the will of the people was being drowned out by “a now legitimate and democratic state” (Naidoo, 240) which increasingly served as a centre, while citizens were routinely and increasingly disempowered. Going further than Naidoo, Pilger (2006: 282) makes the pointed accusation that Mandela played a central role in inspiring new post-apartheid cronyism when “he formed close personal relations with powerful white businessmen regardless of whether they had profited during the apartheid years.”

Mangu (2014: 18) has written about Mandela as a contradictory man who could not be categorised with finality as having served one ideological position, in part because he bore an ill-fitting messianic characterisation that served those who still want to maintain the status quo reflected in the continuing “apartheid-like” injustices and inequities. Hence Slavoj Žižek (2013) advises those who have used Mandela and pretended to stand by his ideologies that

If we want to remain faithful to Mandela’s legacy, we should thus forget about celebratory crocodile tears and focus on the unfulfilled promises his leadership gave rise to. We can safely surmise that, on account of his doubtless moral and political greatness, he was at the end of his life also a bitter, old man, well aware how his very political triumph and his elevation into a universal hero was the mask of a bitter defeat. His universal glory is also a sign that he really didn’t disturb the global order of power.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that some radical scholars “accuse Mandela of being a sell-out who squandered the revolutionary potential of the ANC and ignored

the Freedom Charter as he compromised with white and global capital” (2014: 48). What is not in dispute is that the post-apartheid socio-economic environment, which emerged under Mandela’s rule, is characterised by extraordinary poverty among blacks amidst one of world’s largest rich-poor gaps. White capital continues to dominate post-apartheid South Africa at the expense of the majority who remain largely poor. Lukhele (2012: 293) subjects the project of nationalisation of resources to scrutiny when he says:

[it] worked for the Afrikaners during apartheid and that worked for the Germans, the British and the Japanese in the aftermath of a global conflict is ruled out when it concerns Africans victimised by white oppression for centuries. The economic interests of black South Africans are subordinated by the power brokers to the interests of globalisation. Exactly who is globalising and who is benefitting and who is losing? The road to African sovereignty has always been strewn with all sorts of obstacles. Initially they, (Africans) were not quite human; when that was on the verge of being settled and they were on their way to political liberation, they were made to understand that it was necessary to embrace multiracialism and communism as the only way to their liberty The Afrikaners were operating a nationalist economy with a significant nationalization of key industries all for the purpose of promoting Afrikaner economic welfare.

Lukhele (2012) argues that the sainted Mandela of today is a creation of global American capital which manufactures a lionised Mandela while driving observers to ignore the information about many things that he chose to do and not do that deferred many poor South Africans’ dreams of democracy. Something of this sceptical view of Mandela is captured by Gumede who argues that “by the time Mandela was sworn in as South Africa’s first black president in May 1994, the ANC had undergone a dramatic shift towards economic conservatism” (1997). In his last month in prison, Mandela had said “nationalisation of the mines, banks, and monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC, and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable” (2007: 79-80), but soon after coming out of prison he was forced to recant these words and by June 1998 Mandela was berating left leaning opponents who were criticising his liberal economic policies (Bond 2000: 84).

Mandelaism and its Uses

In this context we theorise Mandelaism as a constellation of political imaginations, behaviours, ideas, contradictions, denials, philosophical utterances, silences, messianic and other actions or behaviours that have coalesced and crystallised around the person, name, and images of Nelson Mandela. We are interested in thinking about how Mandelaism is used to and by, for example,

forming cognitive grounds that resound with myths of South African democracy imagined as harmony, peace, reconciliation and success, denying the significance of informational disturbances that contradict these narratives. Mandelaism thrives to the extent that there is intellectual reticence to rehumanise Mandela by situating his great feats within the extremely limiting conditions he acted in. We are concerned about how Mandelaism locks Mandela into a narrative order of forgetting which ignores apartheid oppression. It humanises Mandela by constraining him to a monotone set at the start of his presidency. Gevisser (2009: 265) identifies the root of this tone in “two extraordinary lines, delivered spontaneously in Afrikaans to the crowds at his 1994 inauguration: ‘Laat ons die verlede vergeet! Wat verby is verby!’ (Let us forget the past! What’s done is done!).” This is to say that Mandelaism erases the revolutionary heritage of a Mandela who famously dedicated his life to struggle against suffering and oppression. Mandela’s own most famous words capture this:

This then is what the ANC is fighting for. Our struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by our own suffering and our own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live. During my lifetime I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But, My Lord, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

(Mandela 1964: 60)

That Mandela, as already demonstrated, is not the grandfather and magician South Africans came to know after 1994 (Msimang 2015). Mandelaism favours the grandfather and magician iconography of Mandela, reducing his long and varied legacy, and denying his complex and varied history.

Among other “appearances” Mandela was a man who pragmatically and contingently acted as radical founder of the armed wing of the African National Congress, he underwent 27 years of prison – refusing on principle to be set free under unjust conditions, then he appeared as “the grandfather – the teddy bear, the man who was easy to caricature because he was embraced by all and sundry. He was the man – still a pragmatist but a deeply empathetic one – who was convinced that South Africa could not move forward without a process designed to forgive those who had perpetrated crimes against humanity, and those whose complicity had allowed those crimes to continue over a 50 year period.” (Msimang 2015) By staging and casting Mandela as an icon for saying forgive and forget, Mandelaism works, for example, to exonerate corporate and white South Africa from blame and from the responsibility pointed out by Žižek (2013) and Makhanya (2013) to work towards a genuinely new South Africa characterised by justice and equity.

In the same vein Makhanya elucidates by saying most whites and corporates were allowed, through Mandela, to explore

their potential without the guilt of being beneficiaries of apartheid. He gave them human worth But in the quest to celebrate the sweet and lovable Mandela, there is a risk of losing sight of overall agenda and the reason he went to jail in the first place. Mandela was jailed for wanting to transform South African society, to do away with racial inequality and build a non-racial society. So in appreciating Mandela, white South Africa has to ask itself how it will repay its debt to him by embracing that for which he sacrificed his life... Contrary to popular myth in this community, economic and other opportunities still overwhelmingly flow their way.

(Makhanya 2015)

An implication of the above is that Mandela is cast as an exceptional light in the darkness of Africa. Indeed, in the instance of Mandela's death, Barclays/ABSA bank advertisement celebrated and mourned Mandela using the imagery of a lit candle. The candle seemed undying and the accompanying text reads: "Lala Ngoxolo, Tata. You've left behind a nation inspired by hope. Rest peacefully Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela." The candle denotes the undying "hope" that Mandela has inspired Barclays' imagined "nation" of South Africa. There is no pictorial representation of Mandela in the advertisement but suffice it to say that the candle, in this instance, denotes Mandela. The idea that Mandela is this exceptional light is one that we have already indicated with references to Lukhele (2012) and Pilger (2007). It is also a line that is explored by Žižek (2013) when he argues that, the short of much praise of Mandela is that he was not Mugabe. This line of criticism against Mandelalism and how it casts Mandela as an exception is most strikingly linked to Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's successor. Mbeki biographer, Gevisser (2009: 264-265), writes:

Mbeki called this attitude "Mandela exceptionalism" when he was being polite; the "one good native" syndrome when he was not. The argument went like this: Africa was irredeemable, and Mandela was the only good leader ever to come out of it; once he left office, South Africa would sink like the rest of the continent into the mire of corruption and decay, as Nigeria had. It seemed to Mbeki that Mandela was actually colluding in the world's impression that he was the "one good native", the consequence of which was the perception that all other black leaders – Mbeki foremost – were incompetent. Mbeki believed that Mandela's complicity in this syndrome came from the way he sent the message to white South Africans that nothing was going to change: Mandela's mantra of "national reconciliation" had become debased into meaning nothing more than "maintaining the status quo."

The nub of the accusation is that Mandela is used to symbolically perpetuate a racist binary of colonial and apartheid yore. This accusation rests on noticing

how Mandela is used as a kind of metaphor for decisions made “to prioritise forgiveness and reconciliation over justice and redistribution in 1994” (Msimang 2015). Mandelaism denies the fact that apartheid was fought for by many who recognised its wide and deep effects as it casts Mandela as an exceptional figure who single-handedly ended apartheid which is thus reduced to a system which could be ended by one man’s miraculous symbolic acts of forgiveness and reconciliation. Something of this can be seen in how a South African Breweries (SAB) advertisement “infinite[s]” Mandela so that he represents and covers a whole history of struggle – as though many others were not active participants. The SAB advert uses a large infinity sign to demarcate Mandela’s historic moments from birth such as going to school, circumcision at age 16, getting married, being imprisoned, and writing to Albertina Sisulu on the occasion of her birthday etc. as a way of remembering and celebrating him. Concomitant to the infinite sign, the day of his death, 5 December 2013 is marked “Mandela lives on”. The infinity sign has four colours that demarcate Mandela’s political career, incarceration, personal life and education. At the bottom of the advertisement, spanning two full pages, is Mandela’s iconic image raising a clenched fist to the right and are the words:

Forever a legend, forever in our hearts. It is said that a legend is born every 100 years. A human being who changes the face of the earth with their courage, strength, beliefs and humanity. One who is hard to ignore, put down or turn a blind eye to. It is also said that a legend never dies. That his name echoes throughout the earth long after he is gone. That he works of his hands touches the lives of many even when he is no more. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, you are that legend. May your legacy live on forever. Lala ngoxolo, Tata. With love and respect from the South African Breweries.

At the core of this advertisement is the idea that Mandela is unending symbolic force which will forever impact South Africa. This is true for both those who benefitted from his legacy and those who believe let down by Mandela and subsequent ANC leadership which continues to stand in Mandela’s shadow. Couched in a language of love and in uncritical reflection of the full history of Mandela’s struggle, the SAB advert does not just silence and erase multitudes who fought against apartheid, it also uses the question: “What would Mandela do?” to, as Ferreira (2015) suggests, make out a Mandela who “was infallible, that he embodied the apex of moral conduct ... that we are incapable of adapting our own values to a changing society [and that] Mandela is a symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation. [All the while fooling us into forgetting] that before the forgiveness, there was anger”. The contradiction of Mandelaism is that, instead, it ushered a new Apartheid which currently informs the status quo.

Whereas “[t]he binary language of democratic communication is not an empirical description of real political action but a set of pre-existing and

prescriptive judgments” (Alexander 2010: 11), Mandelaism perpetuates colonial and apartheid Manichean logics:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces.

(Fanon 1963: 41)

In being constructed as the “reasonable exception”, the unexpectedly peaceful and undisruptive leader, Mandela is “sainted” for being supposedly different from other Africans who are thus re-inscribed into racist binaries. In this sense Mandela appears not just as a bridge between an apartheid past and one which is democratic but also as a bridge between dark Africans and their Western destinies.² So it is interesting that one of the retail corporates, Pick n Pay analogises being Mandela with being a bridge. Their advert paid tributes to Mandela by picturing the Nelson Mandela Bridge that links Braamfontein and New Town in downtown Johannesburg. The caption reads: “Rest in the peace you gave us: From the heart of South Africa to all corners of the land, your loss is felt. Our greatest tribute to you is to carry on in your memory by continuing to work for peace, understanding and freedom for all. By living up to your legacy, we promise that you will live on.” The representation of Mandela as a bridge profoundly captures the idea that Mandela is “a unifier” who brought everyone together. Elsewhere, against a symbolically poignant black background, a KFC advert triumphantly declared: *Hamba kahle Tata*: “You’ve made us all one family”. What we must note is that, as Msimang notes, all this triumphalism defies the fact that merely bringing down the formal barriers of apartheid removes the discrimination faced by millions of black South Africans. What is denied by proclaiming Mandela a unifier and declaring South Africa a family is that, as Biko (1987: 22) said: “The myth of integration as propounded under the banner of liberal ideology must be cracked and killed because it makes people believe that something is being done when in actual fact the artificial integrated circles are a soporific on the blacks and provide a vague satisfaction for the guilty-stricken whites.”

It is deeply significant and ironic that even though the adverts foreground the idea that black and white have come together harmoniously in South Africa, repeatedly blackness refers quite constantly to the negative and is backgrounded while whiteness is associated with what is meaningful, is foregrounded and is tied to what is good, alive and desirable. For example, in

2. Recall that Fanon (1967: 4) has said the destiny of the black is to be white. Then recall too that it has been argued that South African civilization is and can only be Western (Bernstein 2002).

full page advert, Nandos, just like KFC, uses a black background (denoting death, denoting that the light has gone off). On this background white text in a characteristically “Nandos” font reads “1918 – forever”.³ It is quite unmistakable how in this advert, the good, meaningful and desirable Nandos is white!

Many of the advertisements, while purportedly paying tribute to Mandela, demonstrate an appropriation of Mandela’s values. This appropriation is designed to create the appearance that what is sought by these corporates is in the interests of the country. In one instance, technology giant Samsung ran a full page and colour advertisement with a large picture of a smiling Mandela occupying the page anchored with Nelson Mandela’s statement that “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others” just to the left of the Samsung company logo. In other instances the appropriation of Mandela is cemented by how repeatedly these companies use the deictic “us, we, our” thus inviting readers to imagine that companies and the nation enjoy a fundamentally altruistic or “we-oriented” relationship. In other words the alignment is used to manufacture the consent of communities who are lulled into not contemplating angrily the extraordinary inequity that characterises South Africa. This is quite evident in an advert that Lonmin posted, in company colours, with the words: “Thank you for changing the world, Mandela. We’ll continue to be the catalyst for change.”

An advert from British American Tobacco (BAT) shows how many of the corporate adverts sought to create a bond of common purpose and identity between BAT and South Africa, using Mandela. In the advert this is quite plainly visible in the use of the first person plural, “we” and its possessive form, “our”. What is more, Mandela is referred to by the affectionate terms: Madiba and “Tata” (father). The BAT advert features a large image of Legacy Canvas, a series of hand-prints of famous world leaders, including Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which was put together and sold as part of the historic work of South Africa hosting the Soccer World Cup in 2010. The hand prints of the advert form, in outline, the colour scheme and arrangement of the South African national flag. With the use of this canvas for purposes of paying tribute to Mandela, BAT was “worming” its way into a brand association with FIFA Soccer World Cup and with Mandela when international and national pressures have driven away tobacco companies, using legal measures, because their products harm the health of consumers. The advert carries the words: “Every morning, we pass by your canvas. Every morning, we are inspired. To do better, to be better, to make our country what

3. The Nandos advertisement does not make reference to the advertiser (Nandos) nor does it make explicit references to Mandela. The only reference for the former is what is commonly known as the Nandos “font” and for the latter we draw inference to Mandela’s year of birth and the period (mourning) within which the advert is flighted to conclude that the advert refers to Mandela.

you dreamed it would be. Every morning you are with us.” It is signed off: “Rest in peace, Tata Madiba. From the employees at British American Tobacco South Africa.” The orchestrated tone of closeness and familiarity, of the advert enables BAT to push further into the background its history of producing and selling tobacco products that harm the health of many South Africans. Similarly, the brand association between FIFA and the soccer World Cup is only attractive as long as one forgets the corruption and abuse of national resources that accompany this global showcase. For example the Group 5 engineering firm, accused of colluding with other companies in the construction of 2010 soccer World Cup stadia, claims to have learnt how to make a difference in the lives that the company touches and yet corrupt practices not only benefitted the companies unfairly but robbed the government and the poor in the process. To many, Nelson Mandela sacrificially lived his life as an embodiment of suffering, triumph, selflessness, equality, human rights, democracy, justice and perseverance. Probably one of the most captivating moments was when, despite ailing health and having lost a granddaughter through a motor-accident, he braved a chilly evening to attend the opening ceremony of the 2010 World Cup which was hosted by South Africa. The hosting of the event was itself attributed to his magicality couched in the phrase “Madiba magic”.

Lonmin, which had recently been the key corporate actor in an industrial dispute that involved people losing their lives, also posted an advert that uses “we”, the first person plural. The advert does not offer a qualifying description or explanation of who is included in this “we”. It simply works with the assumption that there is a “we” that can be taken for granted. A clue to who is referred to by the “we” is found in that the advertisement is signed off “From all the workers at” Lonmin – where Lonmin is embossed, set apart or ensconced in the plain blue rectangular logo frame of the company. This makes it clear that the workers and Lonmin are somehow not together even though the company is defined and achieved through the efforts and sacrifices of the workers and the workers are in dialectical relations with the employer (Lonmin). Similarly, one cannot but notice how the “we” is simultaneously supported and contradicted by the use of English in the message when the wish for Mandela to “rest in peace” is translated into four other languages. All this is set against a blank white page, shorn of any images that could remind readers of events that took place about a year before Mandela’s death, on August 16, 2012, in which 34 workers were massacred at Lonmin’s Marikana mine while fighting against the company’s refusal to pay decent wages. Perhaps one could start thinking that the word “catalyst” is in this advertisement to mostly reference how the platinum mined at Lonmin mines is used in motor vehicle catalytic processes? Surely the advert does not infer that the company is labelling itself an agent for the kinds of paradigmatic social-political and anti-apartheid change that Mandela fought for? The absence of background imagery denies the reader any further clues. Lonmin, its workers

and Mandela are hence, in this ambiguous way, tied together. There are, hence, no images of mine workers in their mining gear. There are no images that recall the racialised facts of South Africa’s extractive exploitation system. Instead the advert presents an imagined homogeneous and mythic inclusive cohesion – which denies the memory of miners who in August of 2012 died fighting the company for change.

It is important that we think about the appropriation of political icons. This is especially so because it is not just Mandela whose memory and values corporates seek to appropriate and use for their own purposes. Oil conglomerate, Total and Tata, an Indian car manufacturer’s advertisements also make use of Mandela’s images for different effects. In the former, an extreme close up of Mandela with a distant gaze in his face with the inscription “Only he whose eyes are fixed on the far horizon will find the right road”. The advertisement is anchored by the words “Nelson Mandela 1918-2013, our road ahead will ever more be defined by the freedoms you treasured and dedicated your life to accomplish, Rest in peace” and the Total logo adjacent to it. But the Tata advert also importantly uses a large water colour image of what appears to be Mahatma Gandhi, tying this with a smaller picture of a seemingly sleeping Mandela inserted just at the bottom. Just like in the Nedbank advertisement, Tata’s logo is at the top right corner of the page. The inscription plays around the word Tata (father and also reference to Tata cars) and reads thus: “Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Hamba kakuhle Tata”.

Concluding Remarks

From the foregoing, it is clear that big business appropriated Mandela’s death, imageries, philosophies selectively and selfishly to advance narrow corporate ends at the expense of the democracy that Mandela is lauded for having fought for.

We have seen that Mandela’s death is one episodic event that provided South Africa with another chance at buttressing and constructing the fragile and mythic South African national identity and imaginations of democracy. For Makhanya (2015) Mandela’s death presented a moment of re-imagining a fully democratic South Africa, a moment in which corporate organisations could explicitly spell out how they intend living and fulfilling the deferred ideals that constitute the idealised Mandela legacy. Yet corporations operating, presenting themselves as corporate citizens, using the language of what Koji Kobayashi (2012) calls “corporate nationalism” and using ideas of the nation as a “promotional strategies” (Silk, Andrews and Colc 2005: 7) used this moment to draw out their own gains. At the same time and as a consequence it is undoubtable that corporates play a crucial role in national identity debates and are worthy of scrutiny. Considering this, this article on how corporates used adverts to communicate for their own narrow interests,

does important work. It, as Koboyashi (2012: 44) suggests “enables a critical inquiry into a contemporary articulation of the nation as a site of symbolic negotiations and struggles by various interest groups seeking to capitalize on national sensibilities, identities and politics”.

In the form of what we call Mandelalism, perverted and abused legacy and ideals associated with Mandela are appropriated and instrumentalised to enable business to “go on” and exploitatively flourish at the expense of democracy. Other studies should investigate how this may have been predictable from the view that, beyond the idealisation of Mandela, as Pilger (2007) suggests above, during his presidency Mandela enjoyed a cosy relationship with business. It will be further interesting to investigate how corporates in their advertising during and after the “after-prison” life of Mandela, used their cosy and privileged relationships and associations with Mandela to perpetuate deeply problematic legacies of dominance, exploitation and oppression.

Tying Mandela to a legacy that “cleans out” histories and presents of race struggle and contention denies him his richer legacy as a fighter against oppression. Mandelalism confusedly and confusingly forms grounds on which myths harmony, peace, reconciliation and success cover up national problems that are yet to be addressed. Narrowly re-applying Hickel’s (2010) broader statement on the state of South Africa and on the legacy of Mandela, we think that:

By irresponsibly erasing the relations of power, exploitation, and domination that underpin structural racism like that which characterized apartheid, [the advertisements we have analysed] dole out cheap reassurances and unwittingly [justify] white [capital's] fantasies about racial reconciliation.

Our evidence is that Mandelalism has been used by corporates to establish, to protect and to secure a false “we”, an abusive “us” and a self-serving “our”. This is reason to explore further the fear that Mandelalism is used to propagate ideas of national belonging that advance corporate interests in ways that may stall and even threaten achievement of the democratic South Africa that Mandela fought for.

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Shepherd Mpofu

University of Johannesburg
mpofu.shepherd@gmail.com

Colin Chasi

University of Johannesburg
colinc@uj.ac.za