

## **Masculinities and Femininities within the ANC-Led Liberation Movement\***

**By Raymond Suttner, University of South Africa, Pretoria and Centre for Policy  
Studies, Johannesburg\*\***

### **INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVES**

This paper aims to uncover elements of the formation and manifestations of masculinities and to do so in relation to the expression of femininities within the ANC. While notions of masculinity or masculinities in existing literature have been examined in other works, the paper tries to specify the precise character of a distinct process and phenomenon. This bears resemblances to that found in other situations, but has specificities that need to be brought into the foreground.

While by no means exhaustive it tries by the range of enquiry to locate masculinity formation in situations and complexities that have not previously emerged. In certain respects it will be shown, these relate to a past that is in some respects a warrior tradition. In part ANC masculinities also interface with belief systems that precede and coexist with the organisation's existence, for example the relationship between initiation and other *rites of passage* to manhood. In considering phases of ANC development, the paper relates primarily to the early ANC and the later period of illegality, both of which require interpretations that are not provided by existing literature on the ANC, (Erlank, 2003 Unterhalter, 2000) nor by more general textbooks (e.g. Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002).<sup>1</sup>

It is argued that in reading ANC texts outside of their full context, the significance of women entering 'male terrain' is underplayed. Furthermore, the emphasis on the text leads to a fetishisation of certain words emphasising manhood and an automatic and incorrect reading of this as necessarily downplaying women. This interpretation is not substantially strengthened by the mainly privately expressed views of certain ANC leaders on relationships with their wives and other women, (as in Erlank, 2003). But it is primarily flawed in its failure to give weight to the significance of the reality of denial of manhood.

In the later period, Unterhalter (2000) has deployed concepts like heroic masculinity in relation to autobiographies and while the scope is apparently limited, lack of qualification may sometimes lead readers to believe that the understandings provided,

---

\* I am indebted to Nomboniso Gasa, Cynthia Kros and Helen Bradford for encouragement and incisive comments. The responsibility for the final product remains with me.

\*\* *Draft 12 November 2004. Please do not quote without the author's permission*

**E mail: [rsuttner@worldonline.co.za](mailto:rsuttner@worldonline.co.za)**

<sup>1</sup> In examining the period of illegality, the way underground organisation is understood is to include not only acts performed within the country, but where training and preparation occurred outside, to include what is conventionally separated as part of the 'exile experience'. A considerable period of time may have passed between training and execution of armed or other illegal activity. The preparation is nevertheless part of the same underground phenomenon.

as with Erlank (2003), go further than the area of enquiry.<sup>2</sup> This paper challenges the application of such concepts and understandings, arguing that there were both male and female heroic projects, subject to extensive qualification and conditionality, in both cases.

Moving away from what is covered by these writings, the paper unpacks often-unacknowledged elements of the revolutionary experience, in particular the impact on the personal and the emotional. These practices and notions of commitment can be interpreted as feeding into ideas of the male relating to 'the rational' and female expressing 'the emotional'. But there are again extensive qualifications found through showing different models of manhood within the organisation.

In general, the paper indicates a range of sites and modes of masculinity formation in the ANC, again subject in their interpretation to extensive qualification and conditionality.

*The need for African men to assert their manhood*

Major textbooks on masculinity primarily if not exclusively concern situations different from that of South Africa. (E.g. Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002). When they speak of masculinity or masculinities they are not relating to a situation where manhood has been denied in the sense that it has been in the history of apartheid or colonialism generally. When they refer to hegemonic masculinities or gender orders they do not purport to cover the layers within these layers that also give meaning to attempts to reclaim manhood in the context of apartheid and colonialism. (Cf Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002. See Lindsay and Miescher, 2003, 6ff for a more elaborated qualification than that made here).

These works sometimes relate to claims of a denial of masculinity or crisis of masculinity on the part of men who feel that claims to gender equality assault their sense of manhood. (Connell, 1995, 84, Beynon, 2002, ch 4, Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, pp 125ff, Whitehead, 2002, e.g. at 3-4,6,47-51, 139-40). They do not purport to address a situation where manhood is *actually assaulted*, that is, where men are called boys, no matter what their age, where many whites never bothered to even know their actual names. (See also Fanon, 1963, 36-7)

It was also a situation where colonialism and apartheid consciously set about subduing the military power and perceived sexual threat of the African male. The latter finds repeated expression in nineteenth century colonial commissions, with reference made to African men leading lives of 'indolent sensuality'. Because they batted in ease on the labour of their wives they did not fulfil their 'proper destiny' and work for the white man. (See Simons, 1968, 15).

It seems necessary therefore that we should distinguish in a limited, but not absolute way between the concept of masculinity and that of manhood. In general this paper uses notions of masculinity to refer to socially constructed conceptions of what is meant by being a man, whereas the notion of manhood is more limited and is

---

<sup>2</sup> While it is dealt with more fully later, put briefly, the notion of heroic masculinity refer to men being the representatives of heroic projects, whose success is contingent on woman being at home, often waving the men goodbye as they depart to face danger.

primarily related to notions of adulthood. It is used essentially in contrast with being a boy. In this regard, Lindsay and Miescher are helpful, referring to masculinity as a

cluster of norms, values and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Ideologies of masculinity-like those of femininity –are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations....(2003,4)

In regard to manhood they write that

'Boy' has been an important social category in many African contexts, implying biological maleness, social (but not necessarily physical) immaturity, and in colonial situations, racialised inferiority in relation to 'men'....(2003,4-5)

[W]e distinguish between manhood and masculinity ....*Manhood* refers to indigenous notions of male explicitly related to men's physiology, often recognised in terms of male adulthood....*Masculinity* is broader, more abstract, and often implicit....(2003,5)

What is captured in the second extract is that colonial and apartheid oppression did not treat Africans as boys for all purposes in the sense that they recognised the reality that processes of transition to manhood were taking place within African societies and they generally did not intervene in these. It was only in their relations with African males, in the context of the colonial encounter, that men were treated as boys.

This non-intervention itself requires further study, explaining why it happened. We know that the culture of the Other was treated as exotic and that it was marginalised in relation to the culture of the coloniser. Even where some colonisers purported to value local culture it tended to be treated purely as an anthropological curiosity. Western music, art and other practices constituted culture of universal validity. African culture fell within the realm of anthropology. (I borrow here from Needham, 1969,13).

Returning to non-intervention of colonisers in the African rites of passage to manhood, it was allowed, but not recognised as constituting manhood for purposes of coloniser/native relations, the validity of the transition within the society of the local people was not recognised. In the colonial encounter it was as if it had not occurred at all.<sup>3</sup>

That most of the accoutrements normally associated with citizenship were denied to men and women under apartheid was undoubtedly not a denial of manhood alone. But an assertion of manhood in this situation has a meaning that needs to be located in the context of liberation from white overlordship and humiliation and these contexts need to be given full weight.

If one traces a documentary history whose discourse refers to emasculation and the need to restore manhood and a virile nation (Erlank, 2003), unless it is also related to *the reality of denial of manhood*, it is historical in the sense of chronology, but ahistorical in failing to locate these assertions fully. If full weight is not given to the denial of manhood, one cannot give meaning to a claim of manhood. This is also, of

---

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Helen Bradford and Nomboniso Gasa for alerting me to these dynamics.

course, the male dominated language of the time, not only within African discourse. But it has a specificity in the case of Africans relating to denial of what it meant to be a man, by virtue of the humiliations heaped on men (and women), which meant that manhood (and adulthood) was denied.

We need also to reflect on what it means for there to be silence on women's voices on the question of manhood. It is my impression that this would reveal a rich and complex 'manhood narrative', often with expectations on the side of women of a specific role to be played by men, their menfolk being scorned if they were not in the leadership and in the forefront. It is also my belief that the evidence is likely to show that the restoration of manhood and a 'virile nation' far from being regarded as a threat to women, was seen as one of the conditions for the freedom of all. The argument presented here is that one cannot read off gender relations or a negative relationship to women from the assertion of manhood in itself. At the same time, it is not being argued that the assertion of manhood being seen as a claim for liberation means that gender questions are resolved. What characterises what Connell calls the 'gender order' needs to be analysed by relying on data beyond such words.<sup>4</sup> The object here is purely to argue that the assertion of manhood has no self-evident and timeless meaning, nor does it have the meaning attributed to it in such writings, which purport from such usage to read off notions of gender relations and even broader strategies.

Thus Erlank writes of such *discourse* as 'fundamental to understanding the political strategies of the ANC and other nationalist groups from the 1920s through the 1950s.' (2003, at 653.). Furthermore, such *discourse* 'explains' some of the gendered currents that motivated nationalist activity during this period as well as some of the reasons why African male leaders were disinclined to involve African women in political activity undertaken as part of opposition policies to the white South African state. (ibid). A careful reading of her text does not appear to provide evidence that such causal connections necessarily existed.

The failure to include women in these claims cannot be used to deny the reality that notions of a race that were children, infantilised men and that their manhood was denied, even if that also applied to women. The assertion of a need to restore manhood was a legitimate claim, a legitimate part of a struggle for liberation. That no mention is made of women has no inherent meaning for the relations between men and women and the conception of these relations. That issue must be separately analysed and argued and as will be shown, even where the concept of the nation was defined in terms of manhood, it coexisted with extensive political and public activity of women.

The struggle to be a man meant the struggle for dignity and reclaiming of rights and to be treated as an adult human being. This is something that needs to be read into any analysis of ANC masculinities.

### **ANC masculinities**

---

<sup>4</sup> The concept of the gender order was first developed by Jill Matthews (1984). I refer to Connell here because of the paper's focus on masculinities and femininities.

What makes ANC masculinities and what is their character? What are the factors that impact on manhood within the ANC? This paper argues that these are very diverse and impact differently on different people, depending on their own specific identities within the organisation as well as prior to or alongside of their membership of the ANC.

There is a substantial literature on feminism or women's struggle for gender equality within or about the ANC-led liberation movement (e.g. Walker, 1991, Bernstein, 1985, Hassim, unpub, 2002, Wells, 1993, Ginwala, 1990). But the flourishing of masculinity studies on other continents has only recently impacted on South African literature and scholarship relating to the liberation movement. (Cock, 1991 makes an important earlier contribution). As far as I am aware, there are only two articles dealing directly with the question in regard to the ANC (Erlank, 2003, Unterhalter, 2000) and only indirect reference is made in one chapter of a more general and pioneering collection on South African masculinities. (Morrell, 2001).

This paper argues that the liberation struggle has thrown up distinct models of manhood. But these notions are as always contingent on conceptions and practices of the feminine. Notions of masculinity are essentially conditional, contested, ambiguous or contradictory and have varied over time and at any particular moment and within any particular experience. The key factors impacting on such notions in South Africa have been the political conditions prevailing both on the side of the apartheid regime and that of resistance forces, and the roles assigned to and assumed by women. This paper hopes to prove these claims of diversity and conditionality by a broad overview, but focusing mainly on the two periods indicated.

Methodologically, the contribution rests on the assumption that any attempted characterisation of masculinities within the ANC must be grounded in both formal/constitutional pronouncements as well as practices, the latter often qualifying or diverging from the formal. Furthermore documentary evidence needs to be supplemented with oral evidence, where practice can more easily be uncovered. Obviously this is more easily done for later periods, although practice is by no means impossible to uncover from the documentation of early phases. Finally, the notion of manhood must be read not just as a word out of a dictionary connoting the quality of being a male, but in a particular context where *manhood was definitely denied in very specific ways*.

Location cannot be total, but characterisations of masculinities must be situated within the contradictory character of phases of struggle, specific conditions within which these are manifested or realised as well as extensive qualifications that may be found within the experiences of both men and women.

### **Early ANC**

The ANC was formed in 1912 in the face of the establishment of the Union of South Africa two years earlier. Raising the notion of a 'native union', the ANC was in fact advancing the idea of an alternative or counter-nation, at first only comprising black men. The organisation did not at its inception envisage nonracialism, nor did it include women as members. Implicitly then, the notion of the national with which the

ANC initially worked was one comprising African men only. (Suttner, 2004, Jordan, 1988, Seme, 1973)

Taken at that level of official and constitutional politics the matter is clear and straightforward. But the politics of the time and as it unfolded was by no means unambiguous. Within one year women were in the streets of Bloemfontein under the banner 'We have done with pleading. We now demand!' (Wells, 1993) In other words, they entered the public domain, supposedly the preserve of men. (See Whitehead, 2002, 114, 117ff).

At this early stage women engaged in a parallel politics that was within modalities quite different to that pursued by the men, who were then embarking on a process of engagement of the British and Union authorities through petitions and deputations. It is not intended to suggest anything inappropriate in these tactics of the time, deriving from a period of transition to a new terrain, from the spear to the book. (See the work of Limb, including, 2002,2003).

Women entered the public domain but also in a more radical, popular form - on the streets of one of the most conservative cities of South Africa. One year after the establishment of the ANC, women stepped into this terrain as self-empowered actors. Yet writers, including the leading scholar on this episode, Julia Wells, appear to qualify the importance of this intervention by saying that through entering primarily as mothers, the activities of the women were definitely 'not feminist' (Wells, unpub, 1991). An alternative reading of Wells's statement that has been suggested to me is that its importance lies in a desire to withhold the characterisation feminist, a term which may not have then enjoyed support in the ANC. That seems doubtful, given that in the 1990s it was already in wide currency.

But even if there may have been discomfort with this word 'feminist', what would the label actually mean in the context of the women's march in 1913? What would it have actually signified to those women or in explaining their actions in the streets of Bloemfontein then? But its significance as part of a long history of women as political actors and subjects, constantly claiming the public space as theirs remains.

Irrespective of the discourse in use at the time, it is surely of considerable feminist significance that women, whether as mothers or not entered this space supposedly reserved for men? Secondly, if becoming feminist is a long road, which women have to traverse, of which the early phase or even a continuing manifestation is 'motherism', surely the self-empowering, political subjectivity of women is of considerable political importance and of significance to the long-term development of African feminisms.

These either/or dichotomies do not allow for the existence of *different feminisms* including a feminism, which may *include one based on being a mother or the centrality of motherhood.*

In the entire history of apartheid the character of women's lives, as always, conditioned the processes whereby they entered politics. Patriarchal power was very often a relatively distant phenomenon (given the separation of women from their menfolk and the growing phenomenon of female headed households). Or if a senior

male relative was present it was in many cases a less serious danger to African women and their families in apartheid conditions than that presented by the state. This was a situation where houses were being demolished or mothers arrested and children being left without care. The emphasis on the relationship of women to patriarchal power as the primary criterion for assessing a feminist orientation is to focus on what may not have been the immediate or most pressing issue for many. It may in a sense entail imposing a category derived from other experiences without regard for the specifics of the concrete reality, from which feminist practice of African women has to be derived. That this is a perception amongst many African women, that their experiences have not been the basis on which theories have been grounded, may be one of the reasons, why feminism has sometimes been viewed with suspicion or scepticism.

But for our purposes, for considering the character and emergence of masculinities within the ANC, that women entered the political stage and in this way, has considerable importance for ANC masculinities, immediately qualifying the significance of the formal and constitutional statements that women were not members. It indicates that whatever status they were formally granted within the organisation, that could not dispose of the question whether or not they were political subjects, with a concrete role in a future nationhood.

Beyond that, it is clear that there were clear divergences from constitutional provisions of the ANC. Women were in fact voting in elections for the highest office in the period when they were not supposed to be members (cf Ginwala, 1990, 88). Such practices cannot be brushed aside nor are they cancelled out by statements or correspondence of leaders enunciating a specific ideal of manhood with a corresponding role for their womenfolk, (as in Erlank, 2003). These statements are part of the history, but an element that needs to be supplemented.

### **Joining the national liberation movement and the 'making of a man'**

Having said that, it is nevertheless true that the national liberation struggle is suffused with imagery relating to manhood, going back to the periods of early resistance to colonial conquest. There is also evidence that the national liberation movement connected in some cases with processes of *transition to manhood*.

Initiation to manhood, used loosely, is often found in the discourse and practices in various terrains of the liberation struggle. *The discourse of denial of manhood coexists with that of regaining manhood through the struggle or struggle-related activities*. Mongezi Radebe's political development was through reading, including banned literature:

I know, for instance, people in Heilbron whom I had never thought were politically aware, and I got friendly with one and he gave me *The Struggle is My Life* by Mandela, and he said it's a good book, *it'll make me a man*. A man selling coal... I had never thought that he had been to school, and I knew him not to be in a position to read anything or write his name, but he gave me that book. So it was like that in townships all over. (In Frederikse, 1990, 158. Emphasis inserted).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In the author's personal experience, a white political prisoner once remarked, while serving his sentence, that joining the Communist Party had 'made a man' out of him.

This is obviously regaining manhood as discourse, or the discourse of transition to manhood being associated with in some or other way joining the struggle, becoming part of the process that would end the infantilisation of men and their regaining their place as adults.

But the act of joining ANC or MK was associated in some situations with attaining manhood or *rites of passage*.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear that this idea of initiation is always used tightly or that it interfaces purely with 'traditional' notions of initiation nor necessarily giving new meanings or understandings to this process. What is entailed needs further research.

This is illustrated by moving to a much later phase, from the 1960s where we enter a period ripe for the emergence of notions of 'heroic masculinity'. This is because the banning of the ANC (and the earlier illegality of the Communist Party) created conditions where considerable danger attached to resistance. Yet the interface between masculinities and the struggle was extremely varied. In some ways it linked in the imagery it drew on, to earlier pre-Union notions and values of manhood connoting martial bravery. In other senses it linked to age-old practices, originally requiring specific *rites of passage* in order to achieve manhood. These in many but not all cases were also associated with martial traditions.

Peter Delius has suggested that Pedi initiation processes stressing a warrior tradition, facilitated recruitment to MK. (1996,129). In situations where the warrior notion of manhood was hegemonic, it certainly could be of assistance in recruitment for armed struggle. The late Zingiva Nkondo, when asked why he joined MK indicated that they (the Shangaan) were 'always ready'. He meant by this, that he was a descendant of Soshangane, one of the groupings that broke away from Shaka's Zulu empire and established the Gaza Empire in what is now Mozambique. As a descendant of this warrior tradition, Nkondo saw himself as having a predisposition towards entering a war situation, where required. (Interview 2002).

### *Dinokana*

Initiation arises in processes related to MK, in a more specific way than Delius reports, in the former Western Transvaal. Around the time of the Rivonia trial the community of Dinokana, a village forming part of Lehurutshe near Zeerust, in the former Western Transvaal (now the North-West Province), was emerging from intense battles with the government over the Bantu authorities system, attempts to depose their chief and later the extension of passes to women.<sup>7</sup> (Cf Manson, 1983,

---

<sup>6</sup> MK is the abbreviation commonly used to refer to Umkhonto we Sizwe (the Spear of the Nation), the armed wing of the ANC.

<sup>7</sup> Initially passes, that is, documentation required by African adults to control their movement, were generally only carried by men. Various attempts were made to extend this to all women, leading to widespread resistance, from the early years of the century (Wells, 1993). In the 1950s however more concerted efforts led to eventual implementation, although there are some women who never took out passes.

The Bantu Authorities system, introduced in the early 1950s by Dr H.F Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, was the predecessor of the bantustans or 'homeland' system, encouraging Africans to 'develop along their own lines' in their 'historical homelands'. In cases where hereditary chiefs would

1983a). Some of the chiefs in the community had sided with the women and also decided to throw their weight behind the ANC<sup>8</sup>. They had set up underground structures, which they linked, to MK and its recruitment machineries. Referring to the decision, Victor Moche says

But being chiefs they had then called village councils, *lekgotla* as it is called. ... After persuading the villagers that this was the right thing to do, they had then levied a 'head tax' on each household in terms of providing human power to join MK. So if you had a family of four young men, the eldest would be told, you will go to Gauteng to work for the family and you will send number two to school, number three is too young so he will stay at home and he will look after his parents and the cattle and number four will go to MK. So they allocated the family in this way. (Interview, Victor Moche, 2002)

This is referred to as the 'decision under the tree', a tree opposite the current offices of the chief's councillors. As with many physical objects to which ritual significance is attached, this tree has peculiar qualities in that its branches fall off at the slightest touch. According to Radilori John Moumakwa, who was one of between fifty and eighty boys<sup>9</sup> who were sent out, they were told that it was time to 'bolwa' or 'bolala', that is, it was no longer the responsibility of their fathers to provide trousers. (Interview, 2003). Certain informants claim the boys had just returned from initiation, (According to Zakes Tolo, who also comes from the area, but is of a much later generation, personal communication, 20 May 2003). According to other versions, such as Moumakwa, they were to be initiated, in this case, through joining MK. Dr P.M. Sebate of the University of South Africa, African languages department, provides his understanding of the meaning of the term 'bolala' in this specific context:

What 'go bolala' means here is that the boys had to go out to be initiated in the teachings of MK so that they could be men amongst men; men who would not be afraid to withstand the cold winter, the beating of the enemy, and the wrath of the forest. Having graduated as MK soldiers, these 'boys' would be able to protect their families, villages and above all their nation.

I do think 'the age of 14' [mentioned by Moumakwa in interview, 2003] tells you something, 'that boys who go out for initiation are between childhood and manhood.' Normally when 'bogwera bo bolola' (initiates go out) village boys from a number of sub-courts gather at the main court (kgotlakgolo) of the village where the chief resides. It is then that the chief of the village gives an instruction that 'bogwera bo bolole' (initiates should go out). These boys will be in the forest at an area selected or chosen by the village witchdoctor (traditional healer). They will be there for the three winter months, where they will be taught work songs, war songs and hunting songs; and, that a stick thrashing can only kill an ant.

Now back to our 'bolola'. In [this context] we learn that the boys were sent out at the age of fourteen, which is in line with the age at which boys go out on initiation. Secondly, it is said

---

not cooperate they were replaced by government nominees. One of these was Chief Moilwa of Dinokana. One of the allegations against him was that he was reported to have said, 'Who the hell is Verwoerd? He is just a minister and there will be other ministers after him. I am not afraid of him, and Dinokana will stand here forever.' (Fairbairn, 1958, 31).

<sup>8</sup> Obviously there are complex issues entailed in this alliance, which are not explored here, in particular whether the alliance between chiefs and the women was based on notions of gender equality or more likely, that they regarded the imposition of pass laws on 'their women' as an infringement of their proprietary rights.

<sup>9</sup> The approximation of the numbers relate to some of the original eighty being sent back by the then Bechuanaland authorities.

that fathers were no longer able to provide for these boys, so they had to 'bolola'. Remember, after initiation these boys will have qualified as 'men'. Thirdly, when boys from Dinokana went out to join MK, they were between childhood and manhood and were tasked to go out and learn 'war songs', to protect their nation, that the 'whipping they received from the white man could only kill an ant.' (E mail, 20 May 2003).<sup>10</sup>

That MK songs may have provided elements of what was required in their transition to manhood, in teaching war songs, can be seen in the words of the following song played on Radio Freedom:

*Abasakwazi Nokupumula (They cannot Rest)*

lead: Bayekeleni, sobabamba ngobunyama

chorus: Nangokuhlwa

lead: Abasalali, umkonto, mkonto wesizwe

chorus: Abasakwazi nokupumula

Umkonto uzobashaya, uzobaqeda

lead: Mabasati bayagalena

Sizofika sifuna, umkonto we sizwe

chorus: Ushona ngapha, ushona ngale,

Bayawazi

#### Translation:

Let them be. We will get them when it's dark./When night comes/They cannot sleep, due to the spear, the spear of the nation/They cannot rest/Our army will hit them, we will finish them/ When they try to do one thing or the other/The people's army will come/ Here now, then there-they learn of our elusive forces.) (From CD Radio Freedom, 1996)

Moumakwa refers to bolwa in this context being 'the opposite' of what it would normally be:

Initiation, that's a bolwa. Now that one was opposite, now you go to join MK.

Q: Had you not been initiated?

A: No.

Q: Oh, so this was instead of initiation?

A: It's a form of initiation.

Q: It's a way of becoming a man?.

---

<sup>10</sup> In the *Setswana English Setswana Dictionary*. Compiled by Z I Matumo. (1993), the following entries are found:

'*boloditse ...bolotsa*, has let out, as livestock from the kraal or initiates of an initiation rite and *bolodiswe...boloditse*, have been let out, as livestock from the kraal, or initiates of an initiation rite.' (at 22).

In the *Setswana Dictionary*, compiled by The Revd. J. Tom Brown. ( 1980), one finds:

*Bolola... bolotse*, go out of kraal of cattle, etc; set out on a journey; go on the war-path' (at 30)

A: It was a way of becoming a man.

Q: Oh, it wasn't after initiation, because your age group, age-set was going to get initiated through MK?

A: Through the MK. (Interview, 2003)

Clearly the rites of passage in these cases relate to preparation for warfare. In the case of the Dinokana situation, one sees the disruption of conventional rites of passage in a situation of societal stress. Similar processes have been recorded in the case of Palestinians, where experiences of youth clashing with the Israelis and being imprisoned are treated as displacing normal processes of attaining manhood. Generational hierarchies are disrupted and youth returning from prison are treated as men enjoying greater seniority than their own parents. (Cf Peteet, 2002).

In another situation, the element of secrecy attached to initiation ceremonies in the Matatiele area of former Transkei was an element involved in the recruitment of people to join an underground unit. Those recruited were restricted to those who had been part of the same initiation group, though not all were necessarily selected. The experience that had been shared enabled those selected to assess the suitability of others. But the secrecy, which they shared as an initiation group, was seen as a core basis for establishing themselves as an underground unit. (Interview Mzwandile Mandubu, 2004)

### **Transition to manhood on Robben Island.**

But in some cases, the ANC directly intervened in the process of transition to manhood, though there is no firm evidence of a specific decision mandating those who executed the tasks. Some ANC prisoners, especially the young people who arrived after the 1976 risings wanted and expected to perform initiation rituals while on the Island. Joseph Faniso Mati says:

...We realised that most of these youngsters were to stay in prison for a long time and that circumcision was necessary for them. It was all done clandestinely. We did not know when it would happen and the ANC pretended as if they did not know about it. There were no celebrations afterwards and we would only discover it that following day when we were going to play soccer and found that most of the youngsters were not there.

They had been circumcised by [Johnson Malcomess] Mgabela- in small groups together. They would stay in the cell the following day or two-no water, their wounds being dressed by Mgabela, sometimes suffering from severe pain. All of this was done with the connivance of the person in charge of the hospital. (Coetzee et al, 2002, at 52)

Mgabela describes his role:

When I first came to work in the hospital, I felt happy. I wanted for quite some time to work there, because I was an *Ingcibi* when I was outside. An *Ingcibi* is the person who performs circumcision- cuts the boys, dressed their wounds, helps them to become men. Long before I started to work in the hospital one boy came to me. He knew that I did that work outside and he wanted me to circumcise him. But I was afraid that if they discovered that I did it, they would put me away for an extra two or three years. After this boy, other youngsters also approached me: "We are getting old here inside. And there are still more years because we are doing fifteen,

seventeen, eighteen or twenty years. When we go home, we will be old and this thing must be done." (Coetzee et al, 2002, at 70)<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, some of the boys among us continued to demand: "You must cut us!" They even said: "You refuse to help!" I started to realise that these boys of the Western Cape, Transkei, Border and the Eastern Cape had a better chance now. And they would be old when they were released. After all, Schoeman [the head of the hospital] was not too negative and the prison chiefs took no steps after Fourie had left. [A white warder who had Mgabela circumcise him, only to have it discovered by the authorities]. So the next year I started to circumcise. It was April/May 1974 that I started, right up until July and then I stopped. Then I started again in December. So many! Do you know how many altogether? Three hundred and sixty one-total number!

You see, after 1976 all these school boys were arrested; they were flocking to the Island. They all said they wanted to go and be circumcised by me.... Later on, we accepted that the prison authorities would look the other way. They pulled up their shoulders and said that nobody should come and tell them that somebody else had cut him. (at 71)

Circumcision of PAC<sup>12</sup> and black consciousness youth, resisted by sections of their leadership, sometimes paved the way for their recruitment to ANC. (ibid)

More investigation will be required to understand what significance and meanings attach to the demand for initiation, in this context. Did it emanate mainly from people coming from certain parts of the country, in particular, rural areas and especially the Eastern Cape, as this evidence suggests? Insofar as ANC and MK was primarily an urban movement, to what extent does the existence of certain townships (e.g. Guguletu, Kwazakele) or pockets of townships (e.g. parts of Soweto) that are ethnically very homogeneous and sometimes more tenacious in holding onto older practices than people in the rural areas, explain this phenomenon?<sup>13</sup> What did resort to such rituals mean?

Is it to be interpreted purely as continuation of a 'traditional' practice, without which manhood could not be attained? Or did observance of these rituals also connote elements of resistance, as has been the case in other situations? (Spiegel and Boonzaier, 1988,52ff). Many writers have shown that the same phenomenon may have exactly the same form, but its social significance may vary under different conditions. (E.g. Spiegel and Boonzaier, 1988,53, Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983)

Some decades back, Philip Mayer, in a study of initiation practices in New Brighton township, showed how conditions in the city, in the absence of adequate infrastructure and broader social conditions, precluded observance in the same way as in the rural areas (1971).

As in the case of resort to diviners and healers, we may be dealing with coexistence and intersection of distinct forms of social knowledge and belief systems. (On access of MK to sangomas/inyangas in certain situations, see Suttner, 2003b, 2004b). While

---

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that the necessity of initiation to manhood is related to returning home, while indicated in the text, some people only felt on returning home from exile, that they could then be initiated.

<sup>12</sup> The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania was formed as a breakaway from the ANC in 1958, stressing Africanism and at first not admitting other black groups nor whites to membership.

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Nomboniso Gasa for pointing this out to me

Mayer reports that most Africans in his study placed great store on acquiring the knowledge and technical skills provided by 'Western' education, initiation schools were regarded as providing additional social knowledge and skills needed to acquire manhood (1971).

Obviously we need to interrogate these claims more closely, in particular, the degree of flexibility within this process or notions of manhood. Alternatively, in what way has it changed and to what extent is this reflected in expectations from initiation practices and the actual conduct of these and teachings by those officiating on the Island?

Obviously in carrying out initiation on Robben Island many of the features of 'traditional' initiation, in particular the extent of seclusion and the presence of elders to lecture initiates on the significance of transition to manhood, could not easily be fulfilled. In the account thus far, circumcision has been emphasised, though it comprised merely one element of a wider process of induction into manhood. What modalities were used to encompass these or were they not dealt with in the situation on the island? To what extent did an abridged form of initiation (if it was that), change its meaning or implications?

A recent discussion (in July 2004) with a former PAC prisoner on Robben Island, who was circumcised by Mgabela and wishes to remain anonymous, confirms that the process involved was not merely circumcision but initiation. The former prisoner indicated that he was sent to the Island at the age of 17 and considered it necessary to be initiated and while Mgabela conducted the circumcision, other older prisoners instructed the boys, becoming men, on the 'qualities attached to manhood', how they should conduct themselves as men.

It was not clear from the discussion whether such instruction entailed a specific conception of manhood *deriving from their being political prisoners*. From what was related to me, it appeared to conform to what are described as 'traditional' conceptions of such instruction. Further research will hopefully contribute towards clarification.

If the authorities turned a blind eye to the practice, why was this the case? Was it because they saw no harm, and in fact beneficial results deriving from what they identified as 'traditional' ritual, cementing notions of unchanging 'tribal' and ethnic identities? To what extent are we dealing with a phenomenon whose meaning was contested? What was the precise attitude of the ANC towards initiation practices, assuming they must have been aware of these being conducted, seeing that senior members were involved? What meaning did the organisation attach to these practices? (No former Islander with whom I have spoken appears to have been unaware of this practice).

### **Initiation in exile**

It is not clear to what extent initiation practices were implemented in exile. I have been told that many people, some as old as 40, were initiated on their return to South Africa. But in Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, established by the ANC in Tanzania, initiation was an issue. It is reported that it was not easy for a Sotho man to

have a relationship with a Xhosa woman. This was not because of ethnic animosity but that the Sotho students' might not have gone through initiation, and could be seen as amakhwenkwe, 'boys' –as males who have not yet undergone initiation are referred to in Xhosa society.' (Morrow, Maaba and Pulumani, 2004, 107).

For those who wished to be initiated there were South African *ingcibis* available. But Dr Siphokazi Sokupa, a medical practitioner at SOMAFSCO, is reported as saying that the boys were not taken to live in the bush for some time as the tradition required. It was feared that in tropical surroundings so different from the veld of the Eastern Cape, students would develop diseases like malaria. (ibid).

Such initiation, occurring under *de facto* ANC auspices, leaves unstated what precise notions of manhood were entailed. What meanings of manhood were commended to the initiates? That boys were circumcised signifies little, for that is an operation that can occur outside of initiation. What needs to be probed further is whether in the different conditions in which these youth found themselves, on Robben Island and in SOMAFSCO, the notions of masculinity took on connotations, which stressed martial or other values. It is by no means clear that notions of initiation within South Africa follow any one pattern. What traits are commended to boys as desirable for a man in the lectures they are given before and after the circumcision may vary considerably. It is also important to note the role of women in these processes, that men do not become men without the substantial (and generally unacknowledged) role of women, something that has always been there, but may have increased in the current period. (Personal communication from Nomboniso Gasa, on the basis of research in Ntshingeni village, June 2004. Discussion with Dr W Serote, Maputo, January 2004).

## **Manhood and the early martial tradition as inspiration to later generations**

### *Earlier warriors*

When Nelson Mandela made his two speeches from the dock in court cases in 1962 and at the Rivonia trial in 1964, he referred to the impact that tales about earlier warriors made on him. There is a depiction of the tranquil existence that prevailed much of the time prior to colonial warfare, then the defence of their land (See below where this tranquil environment appears to be related in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to men being able to protect their homes and families):

Many years ago, when I was a boy brought up in my village in the Transkei, I listened to the elders of the tribe telling stories about the good old days, before the arrival of the white man. Then our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings and their amapakati,<sup>14</sup> and moved freely and confidently up and down the country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours, in our name and right. We occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral wealth beneath the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours, in our own name and right. We occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral wealth beneath the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country. We set up and operated our own government, we controlled our own armies and we organised our own trade and commerce. The elders would tell tales of the wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland, as well as the acts of valour performed by generals

---

<sup>14</sup> 'insiders', those of highest rank next to the king. Footnote in the work from which this is drawn. The word also refers more conventionally to councillors.

and soldiers during those epic days. The names of Dingane and Bambata, among the Zulus, of Hintsa, Makana, Ndlambe of the Amaxhosa, of Sekhukhuni and others in the north, were mentioned as the pride and glory of the entire African nation.

I hoped and vowed then that, among the treasures that life might offer me, would be the opportunity to serve my people and make my own humble contribution to their freedom struggles. (Mandela, 1990, 149-15. See his almost identical statement in the Rivonia trial, at 161. See also Delius, 1996, 128-9 regarding similar upbringing of boys in Sekhukhuneland. In interview Walter Sisulu describes similar veneration of these heroic figures in his childhood. See: 2001, 18, 214. And dealing with the way he taught history classes on Robben Island, at 164).

This was or was to become an important part of liberation discourse over the years that followed. All broadcasts of the ANC's illegal radio station, *Radio Freedom* would begin with references to earlier warriors of various peoples of South Africa. Illegal pamphlets would refer to this heritage. Even to this day, it is conventional in ANC celebrations, such as the presentation of the January 8 statement on the organisation's anniversary, to refer to these past heroes.

This established a notion of the male warrior as hero in ANC self-identity or as a model to be emulated. This remained part of Mandela's thinking in 1990, when he is quoted as referring to his military training in Algeria as having 'made me a man.' (Quoted, Cock, 1991, 169).

In conducting the armed struggle, cadres were encouraged to see themselves as 'picking up the spear', that had been dropped when Bambata and others had been killed after the last armed rebellion before Union, in 1906, continuing a tradition of martial heroism and resistance.

The heroes, it will be noticed are all male. Certainly there were women warriors like MaNthatisi, who as the mother of the heir to the Tlokwa led her people in war, though not against the colonists.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the Moorosi, as will be seen, women were prepared to fight the colonists. The exact role of women in these situations needs further examination.

One of the key figures in the heroic iconography, listed by Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, was Makana<sup>16</sup>, who led an attack on the garrison in Grahamstown in 1819, and was sent to Robben Island where he died trying to escape. (Roux, 1964, 8-17, Mostert, 1992, 426ff, 472ff, 480-1, Pringle, 1966, 216ff). There are many interesting features in Makana's life, but it also raises issues of manhood. At that time there was conflict between Ndlambe the regent of the Rarabe clan and his nephew, the heir Ngqika (called Gaika by the colonists) who was collaborating with the colonisers (and as often happened in these relationships was 'rewarded' in the end, with his own land also being seized). What is interesting for our purposes in defining the areas of difference between Ndlambe and Ngqika is repeated reference to the followers of Ndlambe *not regarding Ngqika as a man*.

---

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Weir has assembled a large number of other women warriors in an unpublished project outline.

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes referred to as Makhanda or Makanda or Nxele, which means the left-handed one.

When Makana surrendered to the British in order to end the warfare and plunder of Xhosa lands, a delegation of councillors approached the British and, according to the British record, used language suffused with masculinist imagery to justify their rights:

...Our fathers were MEN; they loved their cattle; their wives and children lived upon milk; they fought for their property. They began to hate the colonists, who coveted their all, and aimed at their destruction. (Emphasis in original)

Now, their kraals and our fathers' kraals were separate. The boors made commandoes on our fathers. Our fathers drove them out of the Zuurveld; and we dwelt there, because we had conquered it. There we were circumcised...

...  
We wish for peace; we wish to rest in our huts; we wish to get milk for our children; our wives wish to till the land. But your troops cover the plains, and swarm in the thickets, where they cannot distinguish the man from the woman, and shoot all

You want us to submit to Gaika [Ngqika]. That man's face is fair to you, but his heart is false. Leave him to himself. Make peace with us. Let him fight for himself-and *we* shall not call on you for help...But if you will still make war, you may indeed kill the last man of us-but *Gaika shall not rule over the followers of those who think him a woman*. (Pringle, 1966, 285-7, referred to by Pringle as a 'manly remonstrance', at 287. Spelling as in original. Emphasis in final sentence inserted).

This discourse illustrates an early theme of manhood being associated with willingness to resist, willingness to defend your land and your people, womenfolk especially who were not supposed to be targets in warfare. The depiction of Ngqika as a woman is a sign for cowardice and treachery. Morality and honour is associated with being a man. Similar association is found during the Moorosi rebellion against the British in 1879, when the British hold Chief Moorosi's son, Lehana, captive and he hesitates over rescuing him. Atmore reports:

Moorosi was under great psychological pressure to authorise the rescuing of the prisoners before it was too late. Lehana's mother is said to have upbraided him: 'I don't produce children for the white man. You take this skirt and give me your trousers [a very short Basuto garment].'....(Atmore, 1970, 23. Atmore's spelling).

Even in this process of women challenging gender roles, they accepted the notion –by reference to wearing pants- that warfare was an attribute of manhood.

Clearly, then, when Radio Freedom invoked the memory of Makana and others it was appealing to a martial and primarily masculinist tradition. But within that martial tradition, as it evolved, there were variations, with the full extent of women's role still to be uncovered and acknowledged. This paper will argue that later periods disclose many variations in manifestations of masculinity and femininity, some diverging from notions of 'heroic masculinity', including what may be called 'heroic femininity' and others conforming to these.

## **(S)Heroic projects**

Notions of 'heroic masculinity' have been drawn from masculinity theories and applied to the South African situation. (Cf Unterhalter, 2000. See also Whitehead, 2002, below.) While there is definitely something useful and suggestive in this

approach, we need to be extremely wary of casting notions of heroism within a monolithic model. Even where someone may well be correctly designated as a male hero, by the definitions of the struggle concerned or by other forms of characterisation, we may well find, as the evidence to be presented shows, that these heroic figures have quite varied ways of playing out their masculinity and heroism or conduct themselves in a manner that requires modification of this notion. This is not to necessarily contest the way in which some literature does depict male heroism, as in Unterhalter's work. But that is not the only model of manhood and heroism found within the ANC-led national liberation movement. Also, as indicated, the 'heroic project' was never confined to men.

### **Underground work and 'Revolutionary masculinity'.**

Underground work may have been mainly the work of men, leaving behind women to look after children and other household responsibilities. In this respect it conforms to or is depicted as conforming to a pattern of 'heroic masculinity', where the man is assumed to 'make history' and the woman's domain is the private sphere. (See Whitehead, 2002, 114, 117ff and ch 5 generally). Thus Ben Turok writes after he had placed a bomb at the Rissik Street post office:

Mary[his wife] asked me what the matter was and I was not able to tell her, but she knew that I was on edge. When she read the newspaper the next day, everything became clear. She was rather resentful at not having known about my MK role and we discussed this. *Certainly, she had to pay as high a price as I did. She had previously been left with the children while I was in hiding and she had to face the police when I was away. But our security demanded this kind of balance and she was bound to accept the arrangement.* (2003, 130. *Emphasis inserted*)

And again:

Deeply steeped in these [revolutionary] texts, I now saw myself as a typical communist revolutionary. I held senior posts in the ANC<sup>17</sup>, SACP and MK. My personal life was now overtaken by my being swamped with work; I was constantly in meetings. Mary had also become fully integrated into the work of the COD<sup>18</sup> as chair of the Johannesburg branch *while trying hard not to neglect the boys...*(2003, 139. *Italics inserted*).

In other words, Ben Turok's job was to concentrate on revolutionary texts. Mary could be involved, but without neglecting the children. The assumptions, which need to be problematised, appear to be in line with the masculinist view that man has been assumed to 'make history'. (O'Brien, 1983).

This consigning of women to the private domain relates to a heroic male mythology. (Whitehead, 2002, 117ff). Stephen Whitehead writes:

Despite its inherent flaws, the image and mythology of man leaving home to engage in a heroic project maintains a resounding presence in most societies. We see the mythology at work in the

---

<sup>17</sup> For the record, whites could not be members of the ANC until the 1969 Morogoro conference allowed membership to those based outside the country.

<sup>18</sup> This is the abbreviation for the Congress of Democrats, an organisation formed for whites within what became the Congress Alliance, comprising the ANC, South African Indian Congress, Coloured Peoples' Congress, COD and later SACTU, which was formed in 1955.

notion of 'man as hunter'; the adult male subjecting himself to the rigours and dangers of the wild, far removed from the comfort of (female) home.... Yet despite their absence from the main scene, which such notions suggest, women play a key role in the imagery of 'man in his world'... Woman is the Other that necessarily exists in order to allow man to assume his central role. Indeed, at a practical level, women are usually the ones who make the necessary sacrifices of time and energy in order to supply the means and space for men to exercise their heroic project. (2002, 119).

...In the 'real world', the dilemmas of the heroic male project, together with their irresistible character, are caught in the timeless images of men trudging resolutely off to war, waved off by their womenfolk. (2002, 120).<sup>19</sup>

Elaine Unterhalter, in a study mainly comprising South African 'struggle autobiographies' identifies a common construction of masculinity in texts across race, class and generation

The work of heroic masculinity ...is work where men cross boundaries of race, class, ethnicity and age, trusting different men (and some women) with their lives, generally despite the effects of socialisation, and the strictures of the state which warn against such a course....

Heroism and adventure is work lived exclusively in the public realm, which must be supported unquestioningly by the private sphere (mothers, wives, girlfriends, children). ...In men's autobiographical writing the support provided by a feminised portrayal of 'home' is always complemented by male camaraderie, deep bonds of friendship formed in adversity. Side by side with heroic autonomy, is deep loyalty generally to other men. If there is a choice between the private (feminine) world and the public sphere of heroism and adventure, the choice is always made by the author for the public world, backed up by reference to history. The sacrifice of 'the soft world' of feminised relationships is justified in terms of the 'hard achievements' of heroism and male camaraderie. (2000, 166-167).

It may be that this is what is accurately conveyed from reading these works. But further evidence, from outside of such writings, creates complexity in applying this picture to South Africa. There were women, like Ray Alexander, who joined the Communist underground, while her husband Jack Simons refused, to some extent reversing conventional domestic responsibilities. (Cf Alexander Simons, 2004, Suttner, 2004 a). This replicated a pattern in their marriage, where Jack, a leading theorist, would drive Ray to her trade union negotiations and wait in the car having to content himself with his books, flask and sandwiches. (Alexander Simons, 2004). It is also a characterisation that is immediately qualified by different conceptions of manhood, some of which are referred to below as well as by the reality of women not always conforming to these conceptions of their role. There were women as well as men in MK and the broader underground, as we will see. In some cases these women had men under their command. (See below and interview, Faith Radebe, 2004. There are many such women. Amongst those that I know of are Dipuo Mvelase and Thenjiwe Mtintso, who I have not interviewed).

### **Diverse models of manhood**

It is interesting to investigate and interrogate the models of manhood within the ANC. There were many people who may have represented, through their conduct, models that were commended to others, much like the Cubans say 'be like Che'. It may be

---

<sup>19</sup> What characterised the South African situation is that there was generally no 'goodbyes' to loved ones, apart from it also being a heroic female project, as indicated. See below

that many of these conform to macho militaristic images. Military activities themselves may encourage traditional notions of manhood.

But one of these individuals, who was one of the most famous revolutionary models, did not conform to 'traditional' or contemporary 'hegemonic' notions of manhood. This was Vuyisile Mini. He was the composer of revolutionary songs, including the famous one *Nants' indod' emnyama.../Watch out Verwoerd/Vorster here comes the black man.*'

Mini was a South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) unionist, early MK soldier and Communist. He died on the gallows, convicted on false evidence. Cadres used to be told stories about Mini being offered his freedom on death row, in exchange for supplying information about his comrades, and refusing. In the tradition of freedom fighters 'holding their heads high', Mini is said to have walked his last steps to the gallows singing some of the many freedom songs he had composed. (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980, 177-8, who refer to Mini as a 'musician and poet of exceptional quality'. See also 'Vuyisile Mini'.n.d. and Vuyisile Mini. Worker, Poet and Martyr for Freedom'n.d.).

These are the qualities often associated with being a revolutionary and in particular with 'revolutionary masculinity', found especially in someone like Che' Guevara or Chris Hani (MK and Communist Party leader, assassinated in 1993). The oral and written tradition amongst the members of a liberation movement tends to create a model of what is revolutionary conduct and which people are exemplars of such conduct. Clearly Mini has been projected as representing such a model.

But there was also a side to Mini that is not so easily assimilated into this convention (just as there are elements of Chris Hani's *persona*, which it will be shown, raise similar ambiguities in accommodating such a label). Insofar as it is a masculinist tradition, there are elements of his conduct that disrupt what is the supposed conduct expected of male heroes.

Sobizana Mngqikana, as a member of the Border Regional Command Secretariat was instructed, after the formation of MK in 1961, to write to comrades in Port Elizabeth demanding a report back on the ANC conference that had been held in Lobatse in 1962. In some ways this mode of operating was a hangover from the earlier period of constitutionalism, demanding normal forms of accountability, without sensitivity to the changed conditions demanded by illegality. (See discussion in Suttner 2003,139). Sobizana Mngqikana reports:

In response to our demand a delegation comprising Vuyisile Mini and [Caleb] Mayekiso<sup>20</sup> came to East London. The meeting lasted from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. the following day. The four-room house in which we held the meeting was discreetly guarded and secured by MK cadres. Before we could delve into the main part of the meeting, Mini, in tears, expressed dismay at the uncomradely letter we had written. 'Did we know the implications of the resort to armed struggle', he asked? 'Did we appreciate that blood is going to flow and that lives are going to be lost'? At some stage he couldn't continue as tears rolled down his cheeks. Mayekiso, I remember, mildly reproached him: 'Vuyisile, Vuyisile stop this, stop this!' After a while he

---

<sup>20</sup> He was also to die after torture in police detention.

cooled down and proceeded to give a report of the Lobatse conference and the expectations that the leadership had of us.... (Interview, 2001).

What this account shows is a revolutionary hero conducting himself in a manner that does not conform to conventional notions of manhood, where men are not supposed to shed tears, that being the role of wives and widows. It contradicts the idea found in much masculinist discourse that the rational is the prerogative of males and the emotional that of females. (See Whitehead, 2002, ch 5, esp at 179, Connell, 1995, 39, 164-5, 187). In other words, MK soldiers, and members of ANC are provided here with a model of manhood that may disrupt conventional military expectations of what manhood entails.

The model presented by Chris Hani is especially important because in some ways he has attained heroic status in some ways equivalent to that of Che' Guevara in the Cuban struggle. This is not to suggest that all who admire him emulate all elements of his personal conduct nor that Hani was a saint. But there is a complexity in Hani's life and a definite break from textbook notions of the male hero, that need to be factored into any account of masculinities within the ANC. This will be illustrated in the sections that follow.

At another level, the often-stereotypical notion of macho soldiers is qualified by Faith Radebe's account of male soldiers' longing to have children visit the camp in Angola. She reports how they continually asked that Angolan women be allowed to visit the camp with their children so that they could have children around them.

In the same camp men objected to women who were pregnant being sent to Tanzania to have their babies, because the facilities were only available there. They wanted the women to have babies in the camp and they wanted the facilities to be provided. They longed for elements of normality in their lives, represented in this case by the presence of babies. (Interview 2004).

### **Women in MK: The 'heroic female project'**

But the notion of a 'heroic male project' is also disrupted by women embarking on 'heroic projects', working underground and going to war with the apartheid regime. Although very much in the minority, there were substantial numbers of women in MK. 'We lived in the same camps. The women did exactly the same training as the men. Exactly the same. Drilling, handling weapons, topography...everything.' (Gwendoline Sello, in Bernstein, 1994, 149. See also Cock, 1991, esp ch 5, von den Steinen, unpub 1999, 179,190-191, Jacqueline Molefe in Cock, 1991, 164). The experience was by no means unambiguous and unproblematic. Impressions and reflections on this period convey more than one message and interpretation.

Some women felt their male comrades did not take them seriously. Katleho Moloji reported that the men did not take the women seriously or undermined them or considered them a threat. (In Bernstein, 1994, 183. See Thandi Modise, in Cock, 1991, 151 for a different statement of experience. Likewise, Jacqueline Molefe, now General Sedibe, claims that women earned, through their actions, the respect of men in the army and were treated as equals. See Cock, 1991, 163. Faith Radebe also did not experience men as undermining her or other female members of MK and in fact

considered them supportive and pleased to have women as leaders in particular situations. Interview, 2004).

Referring to 'male camaraderie', although not using those words, Moloi notes, 'And you could see some of the things that you're not involved in. It's only men, who stand there whispering. And then they're gone; and you start asking yourself, 'Why am I being left out?' (ibid. See also von den Steinen, unpub 1999, 191-2).

There were also problems in terms of intimate relations with men. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999, 187ff). Many women formed relationships with senior figures. It is sometimes suggested that this related to the capacity of these men to provide more of the good things of life in a harsh environment. It is also said to relate to the young women knowing only South Africa and meeting men who were conversant with many parts of the world and more mature than trainees of a similar age group to the young women. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999, 196-7).

The relatively small numbers of women were far outnumbered by the men. Insofar as the women had to relate in their training with the trainees and not the commanders with whom they may have formed relationships, this caused tensions and made it more difficult to relate amicably. Some commissars, while admitting the right of these women to form such relationships advised them to be discreet and treat the relationships as private. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999). It was considered desirable in order to respect the feelings of those not in relationships to conduct romantic affairs in semi-underground fashion. (Interview, Faith Radebe, 2004).

But Chris Hani took steps to prevent such relations leading to senior officials taking advantage of the vulnerability of new MK women.

There was a situation where in our army there were very few women and they come into the army, officers will jump for them, all of them and use, or misuse their powers and the authority that they have to get women. That led to some nasty situations. Comrade Chris established this Rule 25-it was a new rule -that no officer will have a relationship with a new recruit because it is an unfair relationship. A recruit needs to be given a chance to know our army so that they can make a decision about these things and understand ...things because when they come in people use their authority and the difficulties of training as a soldier, to start relationships with these women and the rule was a problem with officers. But not that they could defy Comrade Chris. though, I mean, people complained about it? But it was observed.

Dipuo Mvelase claimed that Chris Hani never 'left the camp without dealing with the gender issue'. There was no time that 'Comrade Chris left the camps without sensitising all of us about the issue and taking it up seriously, not only with the soldiers but with officers also, with the administration.' (Interview, 1993)  
At the same time women found it difficult to negotiate being soldiers while remaining women who wanted to wear clothes that distinguished them as women and not only combat fatigues where men and women could hardly be differentiated from one another. In these situations and especially when women sometimes performed better than men, their femininity was sometimes called into question. Yet when on weekends some of them wore clothes that were feminine, many men resented this as provocative. (von den Steinen, unpub.1999, 195-196). Cock refers to the SADF maintaining a hierarchical ideology of gender roles and cultivating a subordinate and decorative notion of femininity. On the other hand, 'the egalitarian ideology of MK

sometimes involved a denial of femininity' that she cites one informant as finding irksome. (Cock, 1991, 168).

There were also situations of sexual harassment or abuse or rape and these were sometimes hard to report or find adequate mechanisms for protection. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 198-200). The exact extent of this phenomenon does not appear to be quantifiable on the information currently available.

If sexual relations resulted in pregnancy it tended to lead to the woman's political activities being prejudiced much more severely than that of the man, with her generally being sent to Tanzania. (von den Steinen, 202ff). Because of the difficult conditions there, this may have been interpreted not only as a way of treating pregnancy, but punitive.

But women insisted on being able to continue as fighters or take part fully in other activities and appear to have won these rights, insofar as there were childcare facilities in Tanzania, able to house the children in the event of the mother being posted elsewhere. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 205ff).

Not all women left their children behind. Some were able to take them with on the assignments they embarked on, including sometimes when they worked underground inside the country. In some cases, having a child provided a better cover for such operations in that the mother/child relationship appeared less likely to lead to suspicion of being a trained MK soldier. (von den Steinen, unpub, 206).

#### *Deployment of women*

Some statements in reports to ANC conferences and authors suggest that women were not adequately deployed, that the organisation was reluctant to place them in dangerous situations, especially in combat. (von den Steinen, 1999, unpub, Cock, 1991, Lyons and Israel, 1999). The evidence by no means completely supports this view and may, instead, be based on a flawed conception of what is meant by 'combat' or dangerous work. In the first place, where von den Steinen refers to serving in the immediate front line states 'and at best as couriers or in communication inside the country', as apparently less dangerous, this is mistaken. Likewise, Lyons and Israel, although writing mainly of Zimbabwe in an article referring to Southern Africa in general, say:

In contrast to the glorification of women's role as combatants, some women have portrayed their role in a different manner. In several interviews with Tanya Lyons, women discussed how they mainly carried weapons and ammunition across the borders- 'an inglorious but necessary task'. For example, Maria stated that: 'One of the important roles that was played by female ex-combatants was in the transportation of ammunition between Mozambique and Zimbabwe.' (Lyons and Israel, 1999, 7)<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> I have only recently obtained Lyons (2004), a much more substantial work, which I have not been able to take into consideration in writing this paper.

But this *was* dangerous and indeed essential work and generally part of the important preparation prior to crucial operations. It may have been that in some situations people better suited to certain work in the sense of less likely to attract attention to what they were doing, would be male in some cases and female in others. But it is important that we do not fetishise a narrow conception of combat as meaning direct physical fighting. It needs to be understood as entailing a number of components, including planning, reconnaissance and a variety of other forms of preparation. Indeed, *sometimes where women performed a conventional role as mothers providing for 'sons' in feeding them, they were not merely perpetuating traditional female roles, but an essential element of the success of a military operation.* What Irene Staunton writes of the Zimbabwean liberation war has wider application:

These women, the mothers, were both victims and actors. Throughout the war, over and over again, they fed and protected the freedom fighters and they risked their lives to do so. This they know and it is a fact of which they are proud. 'The men were around, but they only used to say, "Hurry up [with the food] before the soldiers come and beat you up!"' They regarded the *vakomana* [the boys, i.e. the freedom fighters] as their children, everybody's children, with needs which they as women, as mothers, had a responsibility to meet. (Staunton, 1990, xi-xii).

In other words, the same phenomenon- a woman putting food on the table, as a mother, has more than one meaning. Are we to merely ascribe to all of these contexts the same meaning, that women are cast in a specific role where they serve the needs of their menfolk, or do we give a different meaning, where as in the quotation from Staunton, what the mothers do is an essential component of the war effort.

Totsie Memela's work in reconnaissance, which may be the type of activity described as less 'glorious', appears to have been just as dangerous as the actual infiltration of the *Vula* group for which she prepared, having to ensure that every point at which they entered, every place where they would stay was safe<sup>22</sup>. In so doing she tested the danger or otherwise of the various elements of the enterprise before the group entered. (Interview, 2003.) Earlier, people like Dorothy Nyembe in her assistance to MK soldiers in the late 1960s was as essential to their activities as the weapons they carried. (Houston, 2004).

In many of the Angolan campaigns women were in the forefront of combat. Wally Serote relates a situation where a group was ambushed and a woman soldier turned an anti-aircraft gun into an artillery weapon against UNITA<sup>23</sup> covering the retreat of her comrades, and sacrificing her own life (conversation with Serote, January 2004, Maputo).

This is not to suggest that the tendency to deploy women in traditional female roles, as typists and clerks was not prevalent. But there were important exceptions and there were a fairly substantial number of women engaged in dangerous work and combat, and not all sections of the predominantly male leadership accepted restrictions on

---

<sup>22</sup> Operation Vula was a fundamentally more daring underground operation than that previously attempted in the sense that it sought to connect external leadership and other operatives on a much more substantial scale with local operatives, within the country. It started in the mid-1980s.

<sup>23</sup> A movement competing with the ruling Angolan liberation movement, operating with the assistance of the apartheid regime

deployment to 'more dangerous work' (See below). Jacklyn Cock correctly questions the notion of combat that is often used in order to assess the involvement of women:

[W]omen have not generally been used in combat roles, as that is conventionally defined to mean direct, hand-to-hand fighting in confrontation with the enemy. As a guerrilla army, MK has not engaged in much of this kind of conventional combat, but the exclusion of women from combat may be significant given that the experience and tradition of actual combat with the enemy is an important ingredient in MK's prestige.

No women combatants are mentioned by name in the NEC's statement delivered by Tambo on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MK. .... The exclusion of women from traditional combat means that no woman participated directly in the famous MK actions that are now the subject of myth in the townships-actions such as the 1967 Wankie campaign.... Women were also generally excluded from combat roles in Angola, where MK soldiers gained battlefield experience and fought against Unita<sup>24</sup>. Nor were women directly involved in any of the really spectacular MK missions such as the attack on Sasol in June 1980, or the Goch Street shootout led by Solomon Mahlangu. The word 'directly' is important here, because women were extensively deployed as couriers and in surveillance and reconnaissance, so they contributed indirectly to these actions. Furthermore, if 'combat' is redefined to mean exposure to danger, then acts of arson and sabotage performed by women MK cadres are part of 'combat'. (at 165. See also at 166).

Chris Hani played an important role in challenging tendencies to confine the role of women:

In our army we had a situation, when we came in, women were deployed mainly in... communications, in the medi-corps or in the offices. Comrade Chris challenged that. We get the same training but we are deployed differently. It is unacceptable for the people's army. Women should be deployed anywhere they are trained for and he used to be the key person in trying to get women to come into the country [as guerrillas] because his view was we are all trained for combat duties but women tend to get involved in combat-related duties, not in combat itself though they get the same training as men. (Interview, Dipuo Mvelase, 1993).

Cock indicates problems in the notion of combat in itself:

This is true in a conventional war because of changes in military technology, and it is also true of a revolutionary war that does not involve direct confrontation and where the boundaries between 'front' and 'rear' cannot be sharply demarcated. There is no doubt that women have played an important and courageous part in MK activities. Undoubtedly the nature of the struggle and the breakdown of normal male-female roles encouraged *many women to discover new capacities within themselves*. They formed a complex web of support that sustained combatants in many ways; they provided much of the infrastructure of resistance-they acted as couriers, they provided intelligence and refuge.... (Cock, 1991, 167. Emphasis inserted).

Cock also refers to partly mythological images of female fighters, as well as actual cases of MK women guerrillas crossing the border for combat, which tends to indicate that the extent and nature of deployment needs further research. (ibid). It should be mentioned that mythology is often just as important in regard to MK as actual performance or in this case, the actual presence of a particular category of soldier. The inspiration of a popular army, its impact on popular imagination may have been

---

<sup>24</sup> Some of Cock's evidence qualifies this, as seen below. My evidence is that whether intended or not, women were involved in fighting UNITA, as indicated in Serote's experience cited above.

far greater than the actual scale of the attacks that it executed. That there was a belief that women were deployed in a particular place may well have inspired others to take action themselves.

## **Revolutionary morality and the suppression of the personal**

Involvement in a revolution, which is what motivated the ANC/SACP underground organisation, especially in the period of insurrection, raises under-researched questions concerning the impact of these activities on conceptions of the personal, negation of intimacy, with overriding demands for sacrifice and loyalty to something greater than oneself. It may be that many of these values also feed into conceptions of masculinity, already referred to, which may be dominant (though contested) in the ANC's self-conception, and in particular, in those activities of the organisation that are considered most heroic. (Unterhalter, 2000, Suttner, 2004b).

There is a substantial body of revolutionary literature, some of which used to be much sought after, which has a specific orientation towards the place of the personal. Liu ShaoQi, notes from whose work 'How to be a Good Communist' were found in Nelson Mandela's handwriting at Rivonia is one of these (Mandela, 1994). He writes very bluntly:

A PARTY MEMBER'S PERSONAL INTERESTS MUST BE UNCONDITIONALLY  
SUBORDINATED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE PARTY.

...

At all times and on all questions, a Party member should give first consideration to the interests of the Party as a whole, and put them in the forefront and place personal matters and interests second.... [E]very Party member must completely identify his personal interests with those of the Party both in his thinking and in his actions. He must be able to yield to the interests of the Party without any hesitation or reluctance and sacrifice his personal interests whenever the two are at variance....(Liu Shao Qi, 1984 [1939] at 136-7. Capitals in original. See also Turok, 2003 and Suttner, 2004b).

In essence, the idea of a revolutionary is an individual who expects nothing personally, who is prepared to sacrifice all personal needs in order to ensure success of the struggle. (Cf Hermet, 1971, pp 148ff, writing on the Spanish Communist Party underground experience). Consequently, there is no sacrifice too great that can be offered or expected and there is no situation where personal needs can supplant that of the organisation. The heroic legacy of Party cadres is constantly communicated to members. (Hermet, 1971, 149). The French Communist Party, during the period of resistance to Nazism was known as the 'Party of the executed' because it suffered so many deaths in the resistance. (Palme Dutt, 1964,271). The exemplary revolutionary life of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the famous Argentinean-born, Cuban revolutionary, inspired generations of revolutionaries throughout the world. Yet his ideas also contain a specific notion of the personal and the political that we are in a position to interrogate more closely now. (Cf Guevara, 1997).

Earlier, such examination or discussion may not have been possible for many who were in the thick of the liberation struggle, given the conditions of operation. Furthermore, whatever the dangers or negative legacies in this perspective, to which I will draw attention, Guevara's position and that of Liu, just quoted, may have been

one of the conditions necessary for success in revolutionary ventures. Single-mindedness may have been required for successful conduct of the tasks of a revolutionary and also helped blot out some of the pain entailed. (Cf Suttner, 2001, e.g. ch 1).

The argument will not be that some harmonisation between personal and political needs was always impossible. There are cases where it was achieved, despite the great stresses. It may be that Albertina and Walter Sisulu achieved this in their marriage (Sisulu, 2002, Suttner, 2003a). Walter and Albertina Sisulu's responsibilities to the 'ANC as family' do not seem to have impaired their conventional role and exercise of responsibilities to children and grandchildren. In fact, Walter Sisulu was constantly consulted on Robben Island about the naming of children or his advice was sought on family issues. In the case of Albertina Sisulu, her role as mother cannot be narrowly confined to that of a caregiver or whatever other conventional notions attach to motherhood. As a mother, she also saw herself as a politiciser of her own children and a wide range of others who came to be embraced in the notion of 'sons and daughters'. (See Marx, 1992, 100, Strasburg, DVD, 2004, statement of Lindiwe Sisulu).

But it may nevertheless be true that the denial of the personal was *generally* one of the conditions for successful prosecution of revolutionary activities, in many situations. The reason for probing is that there are consequences and scars that have been left through these sacrifices and they need to be recognised, acknowledged and if possible remedied. (See interviews in Bernstein, 1994). Yeats in his profound but ambivalent poem commemorating the martyrs of the Irish Easter 1916 rising, writes:

'Too long a sacrifice  
Can make a stone of the heart.' (Yeats, 1973, 204)

This numbing of emotions may be part of the legacy of ANC/SACP underground organisation; for it may well be that these conceptions of revolutionary morality were more thoroughly absorbed in the underground situation than any other site of struggle.<sup>25</sup> There are sacrifices beyond those that are known that remain with many people, unacknowledged as part of their contribution.

Underground work and its secrecy forced choices, with enduring pain and guilt on many cadres. Many had to leave their homes and families and loved ones, usually without informing them of their departure. (E.g Duka, 1974, 58ff, Thomas Nkobi in Bernstein, 1994, 16-17, Ruth Mompati in Bernstein, 1994, 18-20, 21-22). At the time, the expectation was that they would soon return, instead of being away for decades. Many left children as babies only to see them again three decades later. (Interview Ike Maphotho, 2004<sup>26</sup>). When explaining that the underground group to which he belonged (after release from the first of two terms of imprisonment) used to

---

<sup>25</sup> This numbing of the emotions was also very necessary in prison, where prisoners sometimes felt that allowing themselves to hope for release and a satisfying personal life would weaken their resolve. (Cf Suttner, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Maphotho was one of a number of South Africans who spent more than ten years in Rhodesian jails after being captured in the Wankie or Sipolilo campaigns – a part of resistance history that still needs to be adequately documented.

tell young people that the time had come to leave to join MK, Anton Qaba was clear that there was no opportunity to say farewells. There was no such thing as 'I have left this or that at home.' Allowing people to return to their homes could compromise the security of everyone involved in the operation. (Interview with Anton Qaba, 2004).

Hilda Bernstein captures the pain

Exile exacts its price not only from those who leave, but also from those who are left: parents and siblings; and wives and children left by husbands who fled across the border, often without a word of farewell and leaving behind no money for material needs. The women went to work and brought up families alone and in loneliness, shouldering the total burden of responsibility and care, often through silent years without any communication from the one who had left....

Many who left concealed their intention to depart from those closest to them—parents, wives (mostly; few women left husbands), brothers and sisters—both for self-protection and to protect those left behind from reprisals and allegations of complicity. Then their lives were haunted by the unresolved departure—not having said goodbye. For years there could be no communication by letter or by phone with any member of the family.... Without the rites of farewell the one who had departed was already within the realm of the dead.

Abrupt and secret departure added a sense of guilt to the exiles' pain of unresolved separation from the closest members of the family. Some mothers left babies, believing they would be reunited within a short time—only to meet them again when they were strangely grown...The years of loss and suffering of the mothers are only one part of the picture; the other is the alienation, the resentment and feelings of rejection suffered by the children who were left behind. (Bernstein, 1994, xiv)

Ruth Mompoti was sent out for political training in 1962. She was not able to return because it was believed she would face arrest. This forced her separation from her children. 'But I still wanted to go back, because I'd left a baby of two and a half years, and a child of six years. And I just couldn't think of not going home.... (In Bernstein, 1994, 20). When they did reconnect in 1972, they did not know one another. 'I was not their mother...I was a stranger...I think I suffered more, because they had substitutes. I hadn't had any substitute babies. I now had grown-up children, who became my children as years went on....' (Bernstein, 1994, 21-22). Thandi Modise, in the post 1976 generation also had to leave her small child behind. (Curnow, 2000. See also interview with Thuso Mashaba, in Bernstein, 1994, 67, 70, 71).

Eric Mtshali left to join MK in 1962 without being able to inform or say goodbye to his wife or children. Eight years later, without having had any contact, his wife died.

Q: So you have no idea of what your wife thought about your just disappearing?

A: Absolutely

Q: Did it pain you a lot?

A: Yes it did, but I took it like a man....(Interview, Eric Mtshali, 2003).

Faith Radebe fully accepts the need in a revolution for operational considerations to take precedence. But this placed intolerable strain on her marriage. Husband and wife were not able to spend time together or sufficient time together at important

moments of personal crisis or illness. She is clear that this did not feed into already existing weaknesses in her marriage, but literally the demands of the national liberation movement made it impossible to relate in a manner that could sustain it. But that is not intended to put blame on or repudiate the revolution or the liberation movement. It is a reality that Radebe sees as regrettable but one of the necessary or inevitable fall outs from a revolution. (Interview, 2004).<sup>27</sup>

This type of severance of relationships was not peculiar to underground organisation in that imprisonment often ruptured relationships irreparably. (Cf Kathrada interview, 2003). Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Communist who died in Mussolini's prison, never saw his wife or children after his arrest. (Fiori, 1970).

Success in underground work meant that operatives had to harden themselves and repress basic needs to communicate with others. The work meant concealing important parts of their lives and fears and anxieties. Often this created misunderstandings in not meeting social expectations from people or simply failing to explain adequately why one or other thing was done or not done. (Cf Jeremy Cronin quotation, in Frederikse, 1990, 126-7). Underground life sets serious limits on social and emotional life and safeguarding what is done below the surface, limits what can be done above ground. One cannot stand out, one cannot associate oneself with activities that might draw attention to one. In the darkest periods, underground workers had to resist public identification with causes they supported in order to safeguard what they were doing below the surface.

#### *Love for the people versus inter-personal love*

Paradoxically, both Liu and Guevara do not deny the importance of love. But in the revolutionary context, they do not conceive of or acknowledge love as an inter-personal phenomenon. Personal love is supplanted by 'love for the people'.<sup>28</sup> Guevara writes:

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality....*Our vanguard revolutionaries must make an ideal of this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible....*

The leaders of the revolution have children just beginning to talk, who are not learning to say 'daddy.' *They have wives who must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives in order to take the revolution to its destiny.* The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside of it.

....We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.

---

<sup>27</sup> Obviously when one is outside of such a struggle and does not make the choices Radebe makes one can adopt various moral positions towards the break up of a marriage. But Radebe had made these choices and she recognises this very unfortunate price that resulted from her choices.

<sup>28</sup> Though the testimony of Guevara's daughter, Aleida, in an article on his Motor Cycle Diaries, says there was in fact an atmosphere of love in the family environment

...There is also the danger of the weakness we can fall into. If a man thinks that dedicating his entire life to the revolution means that in return he should not be distracted by such worries as that one's child lacks some necessity, then with this reasoning one's mind is open to infection by the germs of future corruption.

*In our case we have maintained that our children should have or should go without those things that the children of the common man have or go without, and that our families should understand this and struggle for it to be that way....(Guevara, 1997 [1965], 211-212. Emphasis inserted)*

Liu relates the question of love to 'communist morality', the need to 'show loyalty to and love for all comrades, all revolutionaries and working people...' (Liu Shao Qi, 1984, 137)

Ray Alexander Simons describes how she was unwilling to return to Latvia from where she had emigrated as a teenager, in order to be with her fiancé. '[A]lthough I was not in love with any other man, *I was indeed 'in love' with the people here*, the country and the struggle against race discrimination...(2004, 81. Italics inserted).

Writing of the Spanish Communist Underground, Guy Hermet refers to the Party as 'a sort of extended family in which memories and hopes are shared and to which [the member] is tied both emotionally and materially. In a letter to his wife from prison Julian Grimian uses just the word -family- when he refers to the Party, saying that it was sending him too many parcels, considering the financial difficulties it was in.' The USSR also formed an over-arching family figure. (Hermet, 1971, 149.)

In South Africa, Communists sometimes used the word 'family' as a metaphor or code word to refer to the Party. But this was also true of the ANC. One woman cadre, in explaining to her children that she has to leave them behind in Tanzania in order to execute an ANC assignment, tells them, 'although I may be your mother, your real mother and father are the ANC. The ANC will look after you, feed you and clothe you.' (In Majodina, 1995, 29). This conception is found earlier, in recollections of the role of volunteers in the Congress of the People campaign, which led to the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Mrs Sibanda, an old volunteer from Cradock, reported, 'Whenever we went to people's houses, and they were in trouble, or had problems, we would become mothers of that family, and men volunteers should be fathers.' (Suttner and Cronin, 1986,12)

Dealing with the question of comrades marrying while in MK, von den Steinen refers to 'the common slogan that the ANC was each comrade's mother and father' (unpub, 1999, 207). Permission had to be sought from the ANC leadership before a couple could marry. Security considerations made contact with family back home difficult if not impossible, and placed strain on young couples who felt that taking such a step without the knowledge of their family was problematic. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 207-8). Baleka Mbete argues that the need for the organisation to approve was not a manifestation of authoritarianism but a responsible attitude, ensuring that adequate investigations were conducted to ensure that other parties were not prejudiced, for example, undisclosed spouses left behind in South Africa. There was also an overall need to care for young people who left in their teens and had no role

models, other than the mothers and fathers in the ANC. (Interview Baleka Mbete, 2003, Pallo Jordan, 2003).

But having received such permission, we have seen, the needs of the organisation sometimes placed inordinate strain on these relationships, with partners often being deployed far away from one another.

The question one may ask today is what are the consequences of wives or children not being consulted about the sacrifices that the (usually, but we have seen not always) husband/revolutionaries decided should be their lot.<sup>29</sup> We know this consultation usually did not take place and may well have endangered the activities of MK had it occurred. Obviously this left much 'unfinished business', which may still need to be resolved. It is also interesting that the designation 'revolutionary' in much of this literature appears to be assumed to apply almost exclusively to males.

These notions of love may also have resulted in specific conceptions of parental responsibility and relationships, as part of this vision of a broader love of the people that tends to supplant or downgrade the inter-personal, including responsibilities towards children. Freddy Reddy, a psychiatrist working in MK camps in Angola, from the 1970s, reports a consultation that he was involved in, concerning a young man who left the country to join MK, but mainly to meet his father. He had hardly known his father who had been in prison during his childhood and then joined MK outside. Reddy describes their meeting and the differing reactions of father and son:

The first time he saw his father was on the parade ground during inspection. He was very excited, but his father gave not the slightest sign of recognition, nor did he contact him later after the inspection. The boy was emotionally devastated. He felt that his father did not love him. It was not very long before he developed confusional psychosis. On asking his father why he ignored his son, he replied that *everyone in the camp was his children*: 'I could not give him special treatment'. (Reddy and Karterud, 1995, 226. Italics inserted).

How widespread was this attitude? To what extent is the embrace of this wider notion of parenting an adoption of wider responsibilities towards children in general, or to what extent was it primarily a mode for displacing or repressing the need for responsibility towards one's own children?

In fact, many young people missed their parents very much. Phumla Tshabalala speaks of missing her mother every night. But it was not only the young girls or women; she said there was no one who did not miss their mother. In fact, Gertrude Shope, head of the ANC Women's Section, was asked to visit camps for two days instead of one because there were so many young men who wanted to be with a motherly figure. (Interview Tshabalala, 2003, confirmed by Faith Radebe, 2004, Reddy and Karterud, 1995, 227).

Women in MK testify to Chris Hani departing from what may often have been the norm, making cadres feel that their personal fears and emotional make up was as much the concern of the army as strategy and tactics. Dipuo Mvelase, a female MK

---

<sup>29</sup> Apart from the earlier quotation regarding sacrifices that the revolution demanded from families of the leaders, one of the most famous revolutionary statements, Che' Guevara's farewell letter to Fidel Castro, in resigning from the Cuban government includes the remark: 'Wherever I am, I will feel the responsibility of being a Cuban revolutionary, and I shall behave as such. I am not ashamed that I leave nothing material to my children and my wife: I am happy it is that way. I ask nothing for them, as the state will provide them with enough to live on and have an education.' (Guevara, 1997 [1965], 354).

commander describes the way in which Hani raised issues that for many people were outside the bounds of revolutionary discourse:

He was ...a comrade to whom you felt you can say anything and not feel bad about it, whether it is personal or whether it is about the struggle.... Someone you could confide in, probably say certain things that I couldn't even say to my mum. .... Despite the fact that everybody needed his attention because he was the commander in that area [in Angola], we had about three hundred new recruits and he spent every single evening talking to us. And you felt wanted, you felt at home. You felt important you know.

Asking you about your family, how you feel, what is your experience, do you miss home? Questions that you thought you wouldn't be asked because we are in a revolution...., you as a person, you get lost.... But Comrade Chris made sure that you don't get lost ....[H]e humanised the struggle.... He made every one of us feel we count. This is something that one never experienced before, because there are those big expectations that revolutionaries have to do this- have to sacrifice that. That revolutionaries are ordinary people, one never felt that until I met Comrade Chris ....(Interview, 1993. Nomphumelo Setsubi reports similar impressions. Interview, 2004).

Hani also integrated this concern in the way cadres were briefed prior to being sent on missions into the country:

Comrade Chris's brief ...had more to do with you and your readiness than with the details of your mission. He would ask...: are you really ready and some people find they are not really ready to come into the county. But they are scared because they will be called cowards,... less revolutionary.

[He made] you feel that if you are not ready it doesn't mean you are less revolutionary. ... You can still make a contribution and to win the war it doesn't mean you have to be in the country. ... And Comrade Chris used to be more concerned about *you* succeeding, you fighting so that you can fight tomorrow. Not you fighting and making a sacrifice and be put in the heroes' book. The *life* of each and every soldier used to be very important to him. He used to ask: Do you think there are things that are personal that you need to sort out? His view was that if you go home with the baggage of certain personal problems that are not resolved, that are not addressed, you might not be very, very confident in fulfilling your mission- that you might *die* and that used to concern him *very, very much*.

We all joined the army because we were angry-, but once you are there...some people discover that they really don't want to go back home and fight, you know, and because of an army situation there isn't enough space to accommodate that... Comrade Chris managed to accommodate it because he used to deal with us individually and discuss with us and find out what troubles us, what makes us happy, you know, and that ...was very important, more important than the mission itself because these people-we have to implement these missions, and not some objects because they happen to have skills...(Interview, Dipuo Mvelase, 1993).

### **No easy route to characterising ANC masculinities**

This paper has tried to convey through a limited period of ANC history the essential conditionality of any assessment of masculinities within the organisation. The ANC carries a number of legacies within its organisational consciousness, practices and individual identities. Some of these are warrior traditions. Some are traditions that link the ANC to cultural systems preceding and coexisting with members joining the organisation. Some stress specific conditions of manhood that may presuppose limits on the role of women. Yet other elements of that legacy are conducive to realising gender equality. Notions of manhood within the ANC are diverse. It may be that the example of Hani is atypical of MK or MK leadership. It nevertheless represented a role model for many and complicates the picture and indicates the urgent need to go

beyond formal texts or other writings and uncover the variety of actual relationships that existed. Before more can be said, further research needs to be done in order to bring this legacy to the surface and unpack the extent to which it impacts on the present.

## References

- Atmore, Anthony. 1970. 'The Moorosi Rebellion: Lesotho, 1879', in Rotberg, Robert I and Mazrui, Ali A (eds) *Protest and Power in Black Africa*. Oxford University Press. New York, 3-36
- Bernstein, Hilda. 1985. *For Their Triumphs & For Their Tears. Women in Apartheid South Africa*. Revised edition. International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa. London.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *The Rift. The Exile Experience of South Africans*. Jonathan Cape. London
- Beynon, John. 2002. *Masculinities and Culture*. Open University Press. Buckingham. Philadelphia.
- Brown, The Revd. J. Tom. (compiler) 1980. *The Setswana Dictionary*. Pula Press, 3 ed. Johannesburg
- Cock, Jacklyn. 1991. *Colonels & Cadres. War & Gender in South Africa*. Oxford University Press. Cape Town.
- Coetzee, Jan K, Gilfillan, Lynda, Hulec, Otakar. 2002. *Fallen Walls. Voices from the cells that held Mandela and Havel*. Nakkadatelstvi Lidove Noviny. Robben Island Museum.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Polity. Cambridge
- Curnow, Robyn (2000) 'Interview. Thandi Modise, a woman at war' *Agenda*. 43, 36-40
- Duka, Norman. 1974. *From Shantytown to Forest. Story of Norman Duka*. Recorded and edited by Dennis and Ginger Mercer. LSM Information Centre. Richmond, BC. Canada
- Dutt, R. Palme. 1964. *The Internationale*. Lawrence & Wishart Ltd. London.
- Erlank, Natasha. 2003. 'Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912-1950', (29:3) *Feminist Studies*, 653-672.
- Fairbairn, James. 1958. 'Zeerust: A Profile of Resistance'. *Africa South*. 2(3). April- June 30-38
- Fanon, Franz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. Grove Press. New York.
- Frederikse, Julie. 1990. *The Unbreakable Thread. Non-Racialism in South Africa*. Ravan Press. Johannesburg. Anvil Press. Harare.

- Ginwala, Frene. 1990. 'Women and the African National Congress: 1912-1943.  
*Agenda*: 8: 77-93
- Guevara, Che'. 1997[1965] *Che' Guevara Reader. Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics & Revolution.* Ed David Deutschmann. Ocean Press. Melbourne and New York.
- Haywood, Chris and Mac an Ghaill, Ma'irti'n. 2003. *Men and Masculinities.* Open Universities Press. Buckingham. Philadelphia
- Hermet, Guy. 1971. *The Communists in Spain. Study of an Underground Political Movement.* Trans. S. Seago and H. Fox. Saxon House. Lexington Books. Westmeath, Hants.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, Ranger, Terence (eds). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge
- Houston, Gregory. 2004. 'The post-Rivonia ANC/SACP underground' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa.* Vol 1. (1960-1970) South African Democracy Education Trust. Zebra Press. Cape Town.
- Jordan, Pallo. 1988. 'The South African Liberation Movement and the Making of a New Nation', in Maria van Diepen (ed). *The National Question in South Africa.* Zed Books Ltd. London and New Jersey.
- Limb, Peter. 2002. 'Rethinking Sol Plaatje's Attitudes to Class, Empire and Gender', *Critical Arts* (16,1), 23-40
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2003 'Sol Plaatje Reconsidered' *African Studies*, 62:1, 33-52
- Lindsay, Lisa. A, Miescher, Stephan. F. 2003. 'Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History', *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa.* Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH
- Liu ShaoQi. 1984. *Selected Works of Liu ShaoQi .* vol. 1. Foreign Languages Press. Beijing.
- Lyons, Tanya and Israel, Mark. 1999. 'Women, Resistance and the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa', *African Studies Association of Australasia and The Pacific. Review and Newsletter* (21:2), 5-12
- Lyons, Tanya. 2004. *Guns and Guerilla Girls. Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle.* Africa World Press, Inc. Trenton, NJ. Asmara, Eritrea
- Luckhardt, Ken and Brenda Wall. 1980. *Organise or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions.* Lawrence and Wishart. London.
- Manson, Andrew. 1983. *The Troubles of Chief Abram Moilwa. The Hurutshe Resistance of 1954-1958.* South African Institute of Race Relations. Johannesburg.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1983. 'The Hurutshe Resistance in Zeerust 1954-1959', *Africa Perspective*, no 22, 62-79

- Majodina, Zonke. 1995 *Exiles and Homecoming, The Untold Stories*. Heinemann. Johannesburg
- Marx, Anthony W (1992) *Lessons of Struggle. South African Internal Opposition, 1960-1990*. Oxford University Press. Cape Town
- Matthews, Jill. (1984). *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia*, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.
- Matumo, Z.I. (Compiler). 1993. *The Setswana English Setswana Dictionary*. Macmillan. Gaborone, 4 ed.
- Mayer, Philip. 1971. "'Traditional' Manhood Initiation in an Industrial City: The African View," in E.J. De Jager (ed) *Man: Anthropological Essays Presented to O.F. Raum*. C Struik (Pty) Ltd. Cape Town, 7-18
- Morrell, Robert (ed) (2001) *Changing Men in South Africa*. University of Natal Press. Pietermaritzburg. Zed Books Ltd. London & New York
- Morrow, Sea'n, Maaba, Brown, Pulumani, Loyiso. 2004. *Education in Exile. SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992*. HSRC Press. Cape Town
- Mostert, Noel. 1992. *Frontiers. The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*. Pimlico. London
- Needham, Joseph. 1969. *Within the Four Seas. The Dialogue of East and West*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London
- O'Brien, M. 1983. *The Politics of Reproduction*. . Routledge Kegan Paul. London
- Peteet, Julia. 2002. 'Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada', in Rachel Adams and David Safran (eds) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Blackwell Publishers. Malden. Massachusetts and Oxford, chapter 18.
- Pringle, Thomas. 1966. *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*. C. Struik. Cape Town
- Reddy, Freddy G. and Karterud, Sigmund M. 1995. 'Must the Revolution Eat its Children? Working with the African National Congress (ANC) in Exile and Following Its Return', in Ettlin, Mark F, Fidler Jay W and Cohen, Bertram D (eds) *Group Process and Political Dynamics*, 217-238
- Seme, Pixley ka Isaka. (1972) [1911]. 'Native Union', in Karis, Thomas and Carter, Gwendolen M, *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964. vol 1. Protest And Hope* by Sheridan Johns III, 71-73
- Simons, H.J. 1968. *African Women: their legal status in South Africa*. C. Hurst. London
- Simons, Ray Alexander. 2004. *All My Life and All My Strength. Autobiography*. Ed Raymond Suttner. STE Publishers. Johannesburg.
- Sisulu, Elinor. 2002. *Walter & Albertina Sisulu. In Our Lifetime*. David Philip Publishers. Claremont
- Spiegel, Andrew and Emile Boonzaier (1988). 'Promoting tradition: Images of the South African past', in Emile Boonzaier and John Sharp (eds) *South African*

*Keywords.* The uses & abuses of political concepts. David Philip. Cape Town & Johannesburg.

Staunton, Irene (ed). 1990. *Mothers of the Revolution*. Baobab Books. Harare

Suttner, Raymond and Cronin, Jeremy. 1986. *30 Years of the Freedom Charter*. Ravan Press. Johannesburg

Suttner, Raymond. 2001. *Inside Apartheid's Prison. Notes and Letters of Struggle*. Ocean Press. Melbourne and New York. University of Natal Press. Pietermaritzburg.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2003 'Early history of the African National Congress (ANC) underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia.' *South African Historical Journal* 49 (Nov 2003), pp. 123-146.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2003a. 'A revolutionary love'. *Mail & Guardian*. 19 February 2003

\_\_\_\_\_ 2003b. 'Culture(s) of the ANC of South Africa: Imprint of exile experiences', in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21(2) May.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2004. 'Democratic transition and consolidation in South Africa: advice of 'the experts' *Current Sociology* 52:5, 755-773.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2004a 'The Reconstitution of the South African Communist Party as an underground Organisation' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, (22, 1, January), 43-68.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2004b. 'Being a revolutionary: reincarnation or carrying over previous identities? a review article' *Social Identities* 10:3, 415-431.

Turok, Ben. 2003. *Nothing But The Truth. Behind The ANC's Struggle Politics*. By Ben Turok. Jonathan Ball Publishers. Johannesburg. Cape Town.

Unterhalter, Elaine. 2000. "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: 157-78

'Vuyisile Mini.n.d. Worker, Poet and Martyr for Freedom',  
<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/misc/mini.html>

'Vuyisile Mini'. n.d.  
<http://disa.nu.ac.za/articledisplaypage.asp?filename=DAS186articletitle=Vuyisile+M>

'Vuyisile Mini' n.d c. 1986. <http://www.sacp.org.za/biographies/vmini.html>

Walker, Cheryl, (1991). *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. 2 ed. David Philip. Cape Town and Johannesburg. Monthly Review Press. New York

Wells, Julia. C. 1993. *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*. Witwatersrand University Press. Johannesburg.

Whitehead, Stephen, M. 2002. *Men and Masculinities*. Polity. Cambridge

Yeats, W.B. 1973. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Macmillan. London and Basingstoke

## **DVD**

Strasburg, Toni (Director). 2004. *A South African Love Story- Walter & Albertina Sisulu*. Quest Star Communications. Place of publication unstated.

## **Unpublished**

Hassim, Shireen. 2002. *Identities, Interests and Constituencies: The Politics of the Women's Movement in South Africa. 1980-1999*. Unpub. PhD thesis.

Von den Steinen, Lynda K. 1999. *Soldiers in the Struggle. Aspects of the Experiences of Umkhonto we Sizwe's Rank and File Soldiers-The Soweto Generation and After*. M. A thesis. University of Cape Town

Wells, Julia. 1991. 'The Rise and Fall Of Motherism as a Force in Black Women's Resistance Movements' *Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa*. Durban

## **Interviews**

Kathrada, Ahmed, 18 February 2003, Cape Town.

Jordan, Pallo, 20 February 2003, Cape Town.

Mandubu, Mzwandile, 29 July 2004, East London

Maphotho, Ike, 28 January 2004, Polokwane.

Mbete, Baleka, 19 February 2003, Cape Town.

Mngqikana, Sobizana, 2 February 2001, Stockholm.

Mtshali, Eric, 8 February 2003, Johannesburg.

Mvelase, Dipuo, 29 June 1993, Johannesburg.

Nkondo, Zingiva, 18 September, 2002, Johannesburg

Qaba, Anton, 2 March 2004, Pietermaritzburg

Radebe, Faith, 11 October 2004, Johannesburg.

Setsubi, Nomphumelelo, 20 August 2004, Pretoria.

Tshabalala, Phumla. 13 July 2003, Johannesburg.