

## Opinion: Criticism of Nelson Mandela unjust

Winnie Mandela blames her ex-husband for letting down black South Africans, but is he guilty?



By Marian Tupy — Special to GlobalPost  
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WASHINGTON — In an interview published by London's Evening Standard earlier this week, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela accused her former husband of betraying black South Africans.

The sensational interview with Nadira Naipaul, wife of author V.S. Naipaul, echoed around the world, but then Winnie issued a statement denying the interview. Naipaul said she stands by her story.

Whether true or not, the controversy deserves scrutiny. After all, few have enjoyed Nelson Mandela's saintly reputation while still alive. Of course, no one should be above criticism. Those who lived in South Africa in the 1990s remember Mandela as a man of peace who strove for reconciliation between the races. But this same Mandela also refused to stop and to condemn atrocities committed in the name of the African National Congress (ANC) against other black organizations — the Inkatha Freedom Party in particular.

Thousands of black South Africans died between Mandela's release from jail in 1990 and his assumption of the presidency in 1994. As John Kane-Berman of the South African Institute of Race Relations explains in his "Political Violence in South Africa," South Africa's descent into a low-scale civil war and the ANC's nonchalant use of increasing violence to obtain political concessions from F.W. De Klerk's government must partly be laid at Mandela's door.

That, of course, is precisely the kind of criticism that Winnie would never dream of making. Winnie, after all, was never shy about sacrificing other people to accomplish her political aims.

"With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country," she famously quipped in 1985, referring to the grisly township practice of looping burning tires around the necks of suspected apartheid agents. Indeed, many alleged government informers (none ever formally accused or tried) perished that way. And when the time came for Winnie herself to get dirty — she was implicated in the torture and death of a 14-year old boy — she did that, too.

Instead, Winnie's broadside against her former husband had to do with money. According to the Evening Standard interview, she opined that "[Nelson] Mandela let us down. He agreed to a bad deal for the blacks. Economically, we are still on the outside. The economy is very much 'white.' It has a few token blacks, but so many who gave their life in the struggle have died unrewarded ... Look what they make him do. The great Mandela ... They put that huge statue of him right in the middle of the most affluent 'white' area of Johannesburg. Not here where we spilled our blood and where it all started. Mandela is now like a corporate foundation. He is wheeled out globally to collect the money and he is content doing that."

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Let us start by ignoring Winnie's monumental hypocrisy. Winnie — always expensively dressed, riding in limousines and surrounded by scores of body guards — has not felt the pangs of poverty in a very long time. Let us also ignore that her rise to riches — including a conviction for fraud and theft in 2002 — was not without controversy. Let us, instead, turn to her claim that the 1994 constitutional settlement was “a bad deal for the blacks.”

There can be no doubt that had the insane and immoral apartheid legislation never seen the light of day, the average black South African would be richer today. Unfortunately, the labor legislation that was first instituted in the 1920s as a result of political pressure from communist-dominated white trade unions preserved many of the good jobs for the whites. That said, a minority of whites opposed apartheid and the corporate bosses, whose labor costs were kept artificially high, tried to undermine it — something that was recognized and resented by apartheid prime ministers from D.F. Malan to B.J. Vorster. Winnie's attempt to divide the economy (and the country) into, well, black and white, ignores many whites who succeeded through business acumen and hard work — not political favoritism.

A more serious problem is that Winnie, a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee, appears to be challenging the 1994 constitutional settlement that allowed for a peaceful transfer of power from the minority to the majority in exchange for strong property rights enforced by a relatively independent judiciary. Like all negotiated settlements, the South African one was full of compromises that made a lot of people uneasy. But, in the absence of a highly unlikely military victory of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, over the white regime, compromise was the only game in town. It is that security of property rights — however imperfectly arrived at — that allows the South African economy to enjoy investment and growth.

Winnie's views as portrayed in the Naipaul interview are indicative of the increasing radicalization of the South African political scene. Most commentators agree that South Africa's president Jacob Zuma has taken the government in a more left-wing direction, with top members of the tripartite alliance — composed of the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions — speaking out in favor of nationalization of farms and of the mining sector.

It would be a terrible tragedy — not least for the black people of South Africa — if Africa's biggest economy went the way of Zimbabwe.

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