

The Media's Hypocritical Oath - Mandela And Economic Apartheid

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[Media Lens](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

What does it mean when a notoriously profit-driven, warmongering, climate-killing media system mourns, with one impassioned voice, the death of a principled freedom fighter like Nelson Mandela?

Does it mean that the corporate system has a heart, that it cares? Or does it mean that Mandela's politics, and the mythology surrounding them, are somehow serviceable to power?

Consider, first, that this is what is *supposed* to be true of professional journalism:

'Gavin Hewitt, John Simpson, Andrew Marr and the rest are employed to be studiously neutral, expressing little emotion and certainly no opinion; millions of people would say that news is the conveying of fact, and nothing more.' (Andrew Marr, *My Trade - A Short History of British Journalism*, Macmillan, 2004, p.279)

Thus, Andrew Marr, then BBC political editor, offering professional journalism's version of the medical maxim, 'First, do no harm'. First, do no bias.

The reality is indicated by Peter Osborne's [comment](#) in the Telegraph:

'There are very few human beings who can be compared to Jesus Christ. Nelson Mandela is one... It is hard to envisage a wiser ruler.'

Responding to 850 viewers who had complained that the BBC 'had devoted too much airtime' to Mandela's death, James Harding, the BBC's director of news, also expressed little emotion and certainly no opinion when he [declared](#) Mandela 'the most significant statesman of the last 100 years, a man who defined freedom, justice, reconciliation, forgiveness'.

In other words, the corporate media had once again abandoned its famed Hypocritical Oath in affirming a trans-spectrum consensus. As ever, a proposition is advanced as indisputably true, the evidence so overwhelming that journalists simply *have* to ditch 'balance' to declare the obvious.

The motive is always said to be some pressing moral cause: national solidarity and security at home, opposition to tyranny and genocide abroad. In these moments, the state-corporate system persuades the public of its fundamental humanity, rationality and compassion. But in fact this 'compassion' is *always* driven by realpolitik and groupthink.

'Emotionally Potent Over-Simplifications'

Because it is an integral part of a system whose actual goals and methods would not be acceptable to the public, the corporate media *cannot* make sense of the world; it must deal in what US foreign affairs advisor Reinhold Niebuhr [called](#) 'emotionally potent oversimplifications'.

Thus we find the endlessly recurring theme of the archetypal Bad Guy. When bin Laden is executed, Saddam Hussein lynched and Gaddafi bombed, beaten and shot, it is the same Enemy regenerating year after year, [Doctor Who](#)-like, to be 'taken down' by the same Good Guy archetype. This is the benevolent father figure who forever sets corporate hearts aflutter with hope and devotion.

In 1997, the Guardian declared the election of Tony Blair 'one of the great turning-points of British political history... the moment when Britain at last gave itself the chance to construct a modern liberal socialist order'. (Leader, 'A political earthquake,' The Guardian, May 2, 1997)

The editors cited historian AJP Taylor's stirring words: 'Few now sang England Arise, but England had risen all the same.'

In October 2002, the Guardian's editors were ravished by a speech by former president Bill Clinton:

'If one were reviewing it, five stars would not be enough... What a speech. What a pro. And what a loss to the leadership of America and the world.' (Leader, 'What a pro - Clinton shows what a loss he is to the US,' The Guardian, October 3, 2002)

Of Barack Obama's first great triumph, the same editors [gushed](#):

'They did it. They really did it... Today is for celebration, for happiness and for reflected human glory. Savour those words: President Barack Obama, America's hope and, in no small way, ours too.'

Impartiality? Nowhere in sight. Why? Because these are obviously *good* men, benign causes of great hope. The media are so passionate *because* they are good men. From this we know who to support and we know that these media are fundamentally virtuous.

In identical fashion, the media have covered themselves in reflected moral glory by hailing Nelson Mandela as a political saint. The Daily Mirror declared: 'He was the greatest of all leaders,' (Daily Mirror, December 7, 2013). He 'showed a forgiveness and generosity of spirit that made him a guiding star for humanity', an 'icon', 'a colossus'.

Forgiveness was not a major theme in the title of the Mirror's October 21, 2011 editorial, following the torture and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi: 'Mad Dog's Not A Loss.' The editors commented: 'Libya is undoubtedly better off without Mad Dog on the loose.'

Krishnan Guru-Murthy of Channel 4 News agreed that Mandela was a 'colussus [sic], hero and rare soul'. (Snowmail, December 6, 2013)

For the [Telegraph](#), Mandela was 'regal'. Indeed, 'his life had a Churchillian aura of destiny'. He was 'the kind of man who comes upon this earth but rarely.'

For the equally impartial [Guardian](#), Mandela was, 'A leader above all others... The secret of [his] leadership lay in the almost unique mixture of wisdom and innocence'.

The paper managed to hint at a darker truth to which we will return; as president, Mandela had 'discarded his once radical views on the economy'.

For the Gandhians at The Times, Mandela was a near-mythological figure: 'a man of unyielding courage and breathtaking magnanimity, who defied the armed enforcers of a white supremacist state, made friends of his jailers and could wear a mask of calm on a plane that seemed about to crash'. (Leading article, 'True Valour,' The Times, December 6, 2013)

Although: 'Critics point to his consistent support for Fidel Castro and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi as proof that his judgment was not infallible.'

Indeed, it ought to be surprising that the media would so readily forgive a man who had [supported armed violence](#), and who was close to some of the West's foremost enemies. In March 1998, as South African president, with US president Bill Clinton at his side, Mandela said:

'I have also invited Brother Leader Gaddafi to this country [South Africa]. And I do that because our moral authority dictates that we should not abandon those who helped us in the darkest hour in the history of this country. Not only did they [Libya] support us in return, they gave us the resources for us to conduct our struggle, and to win. And those South Africans who have berated me, for being loyal to our friends, literally they can go and throw themselves into a pool.'

The capitalist, Russian oligarch-owned Independent on Sunday helped explain media enthusiasm for Mandela when it [hailed](#) his views on big business:

'For all his left-wing rhetoric, he recognised that capitalism is the most important anti-poverty policy.'

As for Africa's environmental problems, 'Ultimately, as with human poverty, economic growth is the solution.'

It is of course profoundly impressive that Mandela could emerge from 27 years of imprisonment with apparently no desire for revenge. And as Peter Osborne [commented](#):

'It took just two or three years to sweep away white rule and install a new kind of government. Most revolutions of this sort are unbelievably violent and horrible. They feature mass executions, torture, expropriation and massacres... let's imagine that Nelson Mandela had been a different sort of man. Let's imagine that he emerged from his 27 years of incarceration bent on revenge against the white fascists and thugs who had locked him up for so long.'

Osborne compared the results of Mandela's strategy with those of the West's Official Enemies: 'Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein. The list goes on and on.' Although not so far as to include Western leaders, by doctrinal fiat.

Osborne noted that Mandela and Gandhi 'embraced humanity, rather than excluded it. They sought moral rather than physical power'.

Unlike Osborne's own newspaper, which [wrote](#) of Nato's devastating and illegal assault on Libya in 2011:

'As the net tightens round Muammar Gaddafi and his family, Nato deserves congratulations on having provided the platform for rebel success.'

In March 2003, the same paper [declared](#):

'Any fair-minded person who listened to yesterday's [parliamentary] debate, having been genuinely unable to make up his mind about military action against Saddam Hussein, must surely have concluded that Mr Blair was right, and his opponents were wrong.'

Economic Apartheid

As discussed, many journalists have rightly praised Mandela's forgiveness. But the state-corporate system also has a generous capacity for excusing torturers, dictators, terrorists, and even former enemies like Mandela – anyone who serves the deep interests of power and profit in some way.

John Pilger [noted](#) of Mandela:

'The sheer grace and charm of the man made you feel good. He chuckled about his elevation to sainthood. "That's not the job I applied for," he said dryly.'

But Mandela 'was well used to deferential interviews and I was ticked off several times – "you completely forgot what I said" and "I have already explained that matter to you". In brooking no criticism of the African National Congress (ANC), he revealed something of why millions of South Africans will mourn his passing but not his "legacy".'

Once in power, Pilger explained, the ANC's official policy to end the impoverishment of most South Africans was abandoned, with one of his ministers boasting that the ANC's politics were Thatcherite:

'Few ordinary South Africans were aware that this "process" had begun in high secrecy more than two years before Mandela's release when the ANC in exile had, in effect, done a deal with prominent members of the Afrikaaner elite at meetings in a stately home, Mells Park House, near Bath. The prime movers were the corporations that had underpinned apartheid...

'With democratic elections in 1994, racial apartheid was ended, and economic apartheid had a new face.' (See Pilger's 1998 film, [Apartheid Did Not Die](#), for further analysis)

In 2001, George Soros told the Davos Economic Forum: 'South Africa is in the hands of international capital.'

Patrick Bond, director of the centre for civil society and a professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, [commented](#):

'I happened to work in his office twice, '94 and '96, and saw these policies being pushed on Mandela by international finance and domestic business and a neoliberal

conservative faction within his own party.'

Bond paraphrased the view of former minister of intelligence and minister of water Ronnie Kasrils, 'probably the country's greatest white revolutionary ever', who described how 'as a ruler Mandela gave in way too much to rich people. So he replaced racial apartheid with class apartheid'.

Bond argues that 'big business basically said, we will get out of our relationship with the Afrikaner rulers if you let us keep, basically, our wealth intact and indeed to take the wealth abroad'.

In the Independent, Andrew Buncombe [reported](#) that 'for many in Alexandra, and in countless similar places across the country, the situation in some respects is today little different' from before Mandela began his liberation struggle:

'Figures released last year following a census showed that while the incomes of black households had increased by an average of 169 per cent over the past ten years, they still represented a sixth of those of white households.'

Former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook also [recognised](#) Mandela's 'huge achievement in helping to bring down South African apartheid'. But:

'Mandela was rehabilitated into an "elder statesman" in return for South Africa being rapidly transformed into an outpost of neoliberalism, prioritising the kind of economic apartheid most of us in the west are getting a strong dose of now.'

And Mandela was used:

'After finally being allowed to join the western "club", he could be regularly paraded as proof of the club's democratic credentials and its ethical sensibility... He was forced to become a kind of Princess Diana, someone we could be allowed to love because he rarely said anything too threatening to the interests of the corporate elite who run the planet.'

This helps explain why Mandela is feted as a political saint, while late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who profoundly challenged economic apartheid in Latin America, was a 'controversial', 'anti-American bogeyman', a 'people's hero and villain' who had 'pissed away' his country's wealth, for the [BBC](#). Chavez was a peddler of 'strutting and narcissistic populism' for the [Guardian](#). Rory Carroll, the paper's lead reporter on Venezuela between 2006-2012, [commented](#):

'To the millions who detested him as a thug and charlatan, it will be occasion to bid, vocally or discreetly, good riddance.'

For the Independent, Chavez was 'egotistical, bombastic and polarising', 'no run-of-the-mill dictator'. He was 'divisive' for the Guardian, Independent and Telegraph, and 'reckless' for the Economist.

Chavez's real crime was that he presented a serious threat to the state-corporate system of which these media are an integral part.

The point is a simple one. State-corporate expressions of moral outrage and approval are

never – not ever – to be taken at face value. While of course there may be some truth in what is being said, the systemic motivation will always be found in the self-interested head rather than the altruistic heart.

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