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Cryptic Rhetoric: The ANC and Anti-Americanization

Ian Glenn

South Africans live in a country that is rich in political contradictions, paradoxes and ambivalences. We have a communist party in government; yet a bitter public service sector strike lasted for almost the whole month of June 2007. Avowed socialists and social democrats, in government with the Communists, have embraced neoliberal economic orthodoxy and the disciplines of the market. A former ANC Communist Party leader and candidate for the ANC chair, Tokyo Sexwale, is a billionaire and took the Donald Trump role in a local version of the television show “The Apprentice.” When a leading media house decided to aim a new publication at Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) shop stewards, it found not only that most of the shop stewards were regular church-goers, but that a sizable number of them were office-bearers in their churches. We have a state broadcasting service that draws almost all of its income from advertizing. And so on.

Nowhere is our complex contradiction more evident than in our attitude toward the United States. While in terms of high culture and sports we may still have anglophile tendencies, with Afrikaners casting an occasional covetous glance at France or Holland, our popular culture, as James Campbell and others have noted, is strongly American.¹ Look around you at Coke and KFC, Levi’s and Nike, or the latest technological or intellectual fashions. The favorite show of white Afrikaners in the last days of apartheid was the *Cosby Show*. Oprah is a South African icon, too, and a steady stream of African-American actors star in movies made in South Africa. Black and white South Africans see affinities between the situation in South Africa and in the United States, and draw on it as example—good and bad.

Politically, our recent attitude and behavior towards the United States, in its occupation of Iraq and in its war on terror, has been and remains complex. The government handed over Pakistani citizen, Khalid Rashid, a terror suspect, for rendition, from Estcourt in Natal, and denied it had done it. During the Iraq War,

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¹ Campbell. “The Americanization of South Africa.”

the state broadcaster—in English at least—was far less hostile to the US–British coalition than the private broadcaster e-tv.² Yet the ANC attitude towards the Iraq War has been ambivalent,³ with increasing hostility shown, for example, in planned legislation that, as Stephen Fidler of the *Financial Times* noted, would “effectively bar South African nationals from working for the US or UK military in Iraq but give them leave to take part in the anti-American insurgency there.”

Given this complex ambivalence towards the United States, how does the ANC understand, portray, and react towards Bush’s America? Two speeches by leading ANC figures suggest intriguing rhetorical and intellectual strategies. South African speech in our new democracy is more than reconciliation and racism, founding fathers and forgiveness—in part because earlier modes of cryptic revolutionary or insurrectionary double-speak may still influence speech habits.⁴ In the past few years, I have found myself at two speeches by major ANC figures that left me puzzled, uncertain as to the political gist of what the speakers were saying, feeling that they were producing complex and subtle anti-American critiques based on the Iraq War and invasion, but not being sure on either case that I had a full grasp of what was being said—and then beginning to suspect that this uncertainty was a consequence of a deliberately cryptic rhetorical strategy on the part of the speakers.

The easiest, shorter speech was given on 16 June 2006, the thirtieth anniversary of the start of the Soweto uprising, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel gave the opening address at the first Cape Town Book Fair. In his speech, he turned to History:

So we believe that amongst the great contributors to global civilization were the Romans—there are books and an entire Latin language to prove that. Yet, there is the following account of Julius Caesar at Alexandria: It is often said that the Romans were civilized, but their most famous general was responsible for the greatest acts of vandalism during antiquity. Julius Caesar was attacking Alexandria in pursuit of his archrival Pompey when he found himself about to be cut off by the Egyptian fleet. Realizing that this would leave him in a desperate predicament, he took decisive action and sent fire ships into the harbor. His plan was a success and the enemy fleet was quickly aflame. But the fire did not stop there and jumped onto the dockside, which was laden with flammable materials ready for export. Next it spread inland and before anyone could stop it, the Great Library itself was blazing brightly as 400,000 priceless scrolls were reduced to ashes. As for Caesar himself, he did not think it important enough to mention in his memoirs. There is no link between this account and the fact that the New York Times best-sellers advice section is headed by a book entitled “Cesar’s Way” [sic].⁵

² See De Beer et al., “South Africa and Iraq.”

³ For a left-wing critique of the South African government’s ambivalence towards the United States during the Iraq War, see Patrick Bond, “South Africans React to George Bush’s Petro-Military-Commerce Mission.”

⁴ Important and useful analyses of rhetoric in the new South Africa can be found in, inter alia, Salazar, *An African Athens*; Scheckels, “The Rhetoric of Nelson Mandela”; Moriarty, *Finding the Words*; and Zagacki & Boleyn-Fitzgerald, “Rhetoric and Anger.”

⁵ Manuel, “Address to the Opening of the Cape Town Book Fair,” 2.

As James Hannam, from whose web page the account of Caesar came, has noted in a fuller version of the paper which Manuel quoted:

In the modern world, the Library of Alexandria has been used as a parable against tyranny and religion as Caesar, Islam or Christianity were blamed for its loss. It is portrayed as the repository of all ancient wisdom but for whose loss the Dark Ages might never have happened and science could have progressed much more smoothly and quickly.⁶

Let me confess my interpretive leap. When I heard Manuel talk of Caesar's way, I did a Niall Ferguson-influenced guess that this was a book about Empire and Colossus and American destiny and George W. Bush—and my memory is that, as the audience laughed, Manuel made a quip about Bush that favored this reading.⁷ What I read as the stable irony (to invoke Wayne Booth) of Manuel's "There is no link" certainly suggested that the willful destruction of the past had a present parallel.⁸ Manuel's parable seemed to be directed against the blindness and ethnocentricity of a power, Roman or American, that neglected what it was heedlessly destroying.

I subsequently checked, and *Cesar's Way* is, in fact, a best-selling guide to dog training, not an account of the strategy and vision of Bush at war. So my confidence in a "stable irony" was ruined by interpretive ignorance. Was the point then simply to contrast the indifference of Roman destructiveness with an American domestic inwardness, with power and control over dogs their major obsession? While the pun might have been intended as a comic deflation of the present-day "Empire," Manuel continued his speech in a way that suggested that he was deliberately playing with the uncertainty of the reference, tacitly invoking the American occupation of Baghdad and their failure to stop the looting of museums and Rumsfeld's famously indifferent rejoinder that "Stuff happens."⁹ Manuel alluded to President Mbeki's pleas for an African scholarship and vision linked to the restoration of manuscripts at Timbuktu, a project in which the South African government had invested significantly:

Timbuktu was a confluence of ideas, languages and cultures. We are proud that today we are in a partnership with the government of Mali . . . to preserve and restore the thousands of manuscripts of Timbuktu which tell a story of a great civilization and a centre of learning. However, this period was also particularly a time of great expansion for Islamic empire which by the eight century included much of North Africa, parts of West Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, India and Indonesia. With Baghdad as its intellectual capital, this empire regarded information so highly that it offered traders a book's weight in gold for every book put on sale. Books, those threads that bind past, present and future are so exceedingly important.¹⁰

⁶ "The Foundation and Loss of the Royal and Serapeum Libraries of Alexandria," <http://www.bede.org.uk/Library2.htm> (accessed 12 November 2007).

⁷ See Ferguson, *Empire* and *Colossus*.

⁸ Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Part I, passim.

⁹ See, for example, Loughlin, "Rumsfeld on Looting."

¹⁰ Manuel, "Address to the Opening of the Cape Town Book Fair," 3.

At an African Book Fair, speaking to a multicultural and diverse audience, largely of South Africans and Europeans, Manuel, at least in my reading, drew on powerful stereotypes of Americans as modern Romans, blind to all but the need to exercise their own power, indifferent to other cultures, legacies and traditions. The defense of an Islamic tradition of respect for learning, whatever its provenance, stood in stark contrast to Caesar's indifference—or, indeed, to a culture where a best-seller was based on a macho model of dog training. Manuel was, surely, drawing a parallel between Caesar's alleged destruction of the library of Alexandria and the ransacking of the National Museum of Iraq which the New York Times on 13 April 2003, characterized as “one of the greatest cultural disasters in recent Middle-Eastern history”.

In contrast to the blind power of empire, South Africa's role, in the Mbeki-Manuel view, is to be a restorer, an alternative power, respectful of multiculturalism and various rich traditions—African, Third World, and Muslim—that we are heir to. The Timbuktu–Baghdad link evoked gave Mbeki's African Renaissance a greater political and cultural edge; as an alternative to, say, Huntington's clash of civilizations, Manuel offered an African cultural syncretism. Yet, I hear a critic remark, in Saul Bellow's famous warning: “Deep readers of the world, beware!” Where, one could object, is there a single word about Bush or the United States or modern Iraq? Is the Third World really producing this kind of suavely ironic anti-Americanism? Could somebody tipped to be a possible future head of the IMF be a closet Bush-basher? Nor did any of the press reports of Manuel's speech pick up on the Caesar parallel, or discuss what it meant. If Manuel had intended a historical barb or allegory to be evident to the audience or some in it, he also seems to have chosen a rhetoric that reporters simply could or would not interpret as hostile to the United States. So, if my reading is accepted, we get a further irony. Part of the point of Manuel's speech is to decry the media or, in Caesar's case, the self-promotion, that give only the victor's story, neglecting the defeated or marginalized of Empire. Yet the media themselves marginalized his attack by ignoring or misreading it and Manuel, one could argue, deliberately pitched his speech so as not to go onto an open offensive.

Now, I hope I have you warmed up to some of the rhetorical play and paradoxes and themes that intrigue me: the use of history as ironic lesson, a kind of double-speak that at once allows Manuel to flatter some of the audience into feeling they are in the know as to the attack, yet not to embarrass anybody or risk alienating the Superpower by forcing the suggested attack into outright opposition. The power of Empire produces a counter-power: the moving back from the history of the day into another time-scheme where empires fall and fail and end and come into the cold judgment of posterity, the place of Conrad at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness*, say, where the outsider Pole, in the person of Marlow, sits on the Thames and reminds his British auditors that the Roman Empire passed; and, he not so gently hints, so too will the British Empire.

To the second speech. On 10 September 2004, almost exactly three years after 9/11, former South African President Nelson Mandela gave the fifth annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture, at the University of Cape Town, a speech later

transmitted on the South African Broadcasting Company's African television service. Given that the ANC and Black Consciousness Movement that Biko exemplified had and have often been political foes, Mandela's acceptance of the invitation clearly marked a moment of rapprochement, though Mandela in fact spent far more time in the speech on the virtues of ANC stalwart Oliver Tambo than on Biko.

This occasion was in part remarkable for how strongly the actual speech deviated from published summaries and also for the almost complete media neglect of some of its major themes.¹¹ Nelson Mandela has, as Philippe Salazar has convincingly argued, become a political founding father, an originating figure, even a ceremonial king who may not have opinions.¹² There is thus a sense of *lèse-majesté*, an uneasiness that critics, myself included, feel when approaching Mandela's statements and status at all critically. More importantly, perhaps, there has been a tendency among reporters and commentators to assume that Mandela will utter grandfatherly generalities and goodwill and ramble through anecdotes rather than offer any sharp political commentary. Though the audience was a diverse one, composed of a racially diverse university staff and student body, invited guests, and politically aware members of the community who had taken up the occasion to attend the lecture, the speech was a rhetorical occasion on which Mandela repeatedly eschewed the non-partisan and inclusive. He abandoned what one might call the rainbow-nation commonplaces to mark his sense of solidarity with the "progressive", the "colonized", the "black"—against the "colonizer", the "master race", the "white." Repeatedly he invited those in the audience who shared the values advanced, or detested the values attacked, to join in partisan applause and amusement—and the success of this appeal was evident in the response of many if not most of the audience. This exclusiveness was a tactical stroke to indicate a rapprochement between the ANC and the Black Consciousness movement represented by Biko by stressing what both movements shared against a common oppressor. In doing this, Mandela certainly moved away from a role as non-partisan figurehead, though he returned to this role, at least partially, at the end of the speech.

There was another important way in which this speech differed from many of Mandela's other speeches. In an analysis of Mandela's speeches during his presidency, Scheckels notes that "Mandela's speeches rarely contained narratives, and the overarching narrative they used—that of South Africa's miraculously peaceful movement from apartheid to democracy—is not enough to explain the speeches' salutary effects, although it certainly played a role in achieving them."¹³ In this speech, Mandela, like Manuel was to do later, resorted to historical narrative to make a decisive and divisive political point.

¹¹ See Mandela, "5th Steve Biko Lecture" In Glenn, "Censoring Mandela," I analyze the media coverage of the speech and its significance. This article covers some of the same ground, but with a different focus. I have based my transcript on a televised record of the speech prepared for the University of Cape Town.

¹² Salazar, *An African Athens*, chapter 3.

¹³ Scheckels, "The Rhetoric of Nelson Mandela," 88.

To grasp the complexity of the speech as political occasion and event, it is necessary to sense how Mandela “prepared” his audience for a political lesson or allegory. Mandela departed from the fairly anodyne published version of his speech throughout, and one of the first diversions was to condemn leaders who do not lead by consulting their followers, but who act unilaterally. His speech ran:

And anybody who despises collective action is no real leader in the proper sense of the word [Applause]. Those leaders who decide to be the only one who is respected as a leader and who attacked viciously all those who may differ with him and even criticize him are not leaders in the proper sense of the word [Wild applause].¹⁴

This applause from a politically aware, largely pro-ANC audience was, it can surely be assumed, because they understood this to be a clear reference to George Bush—and, to a lesser extent, Tony Blair—and the disregard the invasion of Iraq showed for world opinion. Mandela had made his criticism of the war clear on previous occasions, so this was scarcely news.¹⁵

Toward the end of the speech, Mandela departed from the published version to tell a story from San history as an exemplary narrative of resistance to colonialism, introducing the story by attacking a narrow, Bantu reading of resistance to colonialism by arguing that resistance had been there from the outset:

They relate a story of how the Abatwa, many of you call them Bushmen—progressives don’t do that—[applause] or Abatwa, if we are speaking Tsonga. They put up a brave resistance and progressive historians have mentioned the battles in which the San, these so-called Bushmen, were involved. They relate a story, one of the famous historians in this country, a story of how the Basarwa, the San, according to the language of the master race, were stealing their stock, so they eventually decided to round up the Basarwa against a cliff.

The battle lasted for the whole day but the whites were using guns, the Basarwa were using poisoned spears. Because of the deadly fire from the whites, only one man remained and he continued fighting although his colleagues had all died. Then they said: “No, we can’t kill a brave man. Let us call him out and save him.” So they indicated, language was difficult those days [laughter], they indicated and picked up a white flag and waved it and asked him to come. That incident demonstrates how attached the Basarwa, the so-called Bushmen, were to one another.

This man then said, where have you ever seen a chief, when all his band have been slaughtered by the enemy, to try and save his personal life and he shot his last arrow and then jumped into the cliff and committed suicide. He couldn’t live when all his friends had been killed trying to defend their country.

Now young people must learn that, that to die fighting in order to defend what you possess is one of the greatest acts of heroism a person can display [Huge applause]. I hope the young people here, and even grey-heads—gryskoppe¹⁶ [laughter]—I hope you will learn this lesson and to teach young people, the value of national pride, that one wanted to live as long as possible but once

¹⁴ Mandela, “5th Steve Bikolecture,” my transcript of a televised record of the speech prepared for the University of Cape Town.

¹⁵ See, for example, Mandela, “Courageous Leadership.”

¹⁶ “Gryskoppe” is the Afrikaans word for grey-heads. Mandela pointed to his own head in making the comment.

their country is threatened even the life of an individual is not more important than defending your country. I hope the young people here—if there are none, then when we go out you can go out and tell them—that the greatest pride we have is that our youth should be able to defend their country and their people, even if it is going to mean that in battle, he is going to end his life in that battle and will not live again. Thank you very much.

The University of Cape Town has many leading experts on the San, and I confidently expected they would track this story down for me; but I drew only blanks until I asked our African Studies Library. Ah, yes, they said, we have tracked the origins of this story down once before—for President Mandela. The story, which I have third hand, is that Mandela told former UCT Vice Chancellor Mamphela Ramphele at a dinner that he had read this story in an ANC member's library while on the run from security police in the 1960s, and that he had always remembered it. A researcher duly helped track down the original of the story in nineteenth-century historian George Stow:

The tragic fate of the last clan of all the numerous tribes which once inhabited the extensive range of the Sneeuwberg will give an apt demonstration of this, and will vividly illustrate the relentless manner in which they were followed up to the bitter end . . .

He stated that after committing some depredations, the clan was surrounded by a commando which had pursued them and succeeded in cutting them off among the rocks of a projecting shoulder of a great precipice. Here the retreating Bushmen turned for the last time at bay. Their untiring enemies were on one side, a yawning gulf without any chance of escape on the other. A dire but hopeless struggle for life commenced. One after another they fell under the storm of bullets with which their adversaries assailed them. The dead and dying were heaped upon the dizzy projecting ledge, many in their death struggle rolled and fell over among the crags and fissures in the depths which environed them. Still they resisted, and still they fell, until one only remained; and yet, with the bloody heap of dead around him and the mangled bodies of his comrades on the rocks below, he seemed as undaunted as when surrounded by the entire band of his brave companions. Posting himself on the very outermost point of the projecting rocks, with sheer precipices of nearly a couple of hundred feet on either side of him, a spot where no man would have dared to follow him, he defied his pursuers, and amid the bullets which showered around him he appeared to have a charmed life and plied his arrows with unerring aim whenever his enemies incautiously exposed themselves. His last arrow was on the string. A slight feeling of compassion seemed at last to animate the hostile multitude that hemmed him in; they called to him that his life should be spared if he would surrender. He let fly his last arrow in scorn at the speaker, as he replied that "a chief knew how to die, but never to surrender to the race who had despoiled him!" Then, with a wild shout of bitter defiance he turned around, and leaping headlong into the deep abyss was dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Thus died, with a Spartan-like intrepidity, the last of the clan, and with his death his tribe ceased to exist.¹⁷

¹⁷ Stow and McCall Theal, *The Native Races of South Africa*, 218-19.

Mandela alters Stow's account subtly by turning the chief into a hero of ubuntu. The complexity of the motivation Mandela imputes is suggested by the simply "personal" life as opposed to the full social life of community—without his fellows, life has no meaning for the chief. In Stow, the man is motivated less by solidarity than by his anger against the robbing invaders with whom he refuses to compromise. For Mandela, it seems the story mattered because of the ethos of heroic solidarity, till death, something surely appealing to the leader of a revolutionary movement where all faced death if any weakened. Mandela did not sentimentalize or personalize the story by saying that he had remembered it, so the example must stand unaided by the value Mandela drew from it. The story is resolutely not about the twenty-first-century hero who survived, but about the eighteenth-century hero who died and who, perhaps, stands in a line in which Steve Biko is the pre-eminent twentieth-century South African figure—a line of resistance to the death.

But why tell this story of San suicide now without making a link to Biko or recounting its personal value as example to Mandela himself? Does this refusal to link the story to his own circumstances suggest some guilt that he was taken alive, condemned to captivity, refused martyrdom? That may take us to intriguing readings of Mandela's own political persona,¹⁸ but there is another reading of this story, the reading for those who had entered into the polemical fray of the speech, and had been alerted to the global issues by the allusion to Bush and Blair. Was Mandela not commenting, through almost allegorical parallel, on heroic if futile resistance to an overwhelmingly powerful and well-armed colonial invasion—not only in South Africa, but also in the United States or in Iraq and the Middle East?¹⁹

In his story, he gives a meaning to what we might call "positive suicide"—a suicide that marks a solidarity with the group, a suicide that is an act of resistance, of refusal to surrender, to take peace on the invader's terms, a suicide that combines the last shot at the invader with his own death.²⁰ The pathos of the chief's plight and his heroic resolve is set in contrast to the arrogant individualism of the Bush or Blair figure excoriated earlier. Mandela had invoked the value of suicide in one of his most famous speeches, the State of the Nation address in Parliament in Cape Town in 1994, where he read a poem by the Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker, who committed suicide.²¹ Mandela's cryptic words deserve close attention:

In the dark days when all seemed hopeless in our country, when many refused to hear her resonant voice, she took her own life. To her and others like her, we owe a debt to life itself.

We owe a debt to life to value it more because of what the moral example of those who sacrificed it shows us. Their example lays a burden of responsibility to life on us.

¹⁸ I owe this line of thinking to Philippe Salazar.

¹⁹ On Mandela's attitudes to the United States after the invasion of Iraq, see Chidester, "Atlantic Community."

²⁰ In "Censoring Mandela," I examined particularly whether Mandela might be justifying 9/11 or suicide bombings. I argue that he is not defending the former, and only sees a justification for the latter when it is essentially a defensive measure.

²¹ The speech is reprinted in *An African Athens*, 171–80.

The San chief's suicide shows us that life has meaning and value only when it is social and when one has value and meaning in the eyes of others.

One of the key ambiguities of Mandela's speech lay in the rather cryptic sentence: "They relate... a story of how the Basarwa, the San, according to the language of the master race, were stealing their stock." The terminology "San" is usually taken as politically correct and modern, so it is the "stealing their stock" that is the ideological construction of the "master race". Here, Mandela points to one of the enduring arguments about colonial history in South Africa and elsewhere—how to see the relentless incursion of European settlers into the American, Australian or African interiors—from the view of the settlers or from the view of indigenous peoples. From the point of view of the colonized, the San were reacting to invaders who had hunted and driven away their normal source of food. When we read of the history of the Eastern Frontier in South Africa, the battle about cattle was absolutely formative in the hostile relationships between settler and indigenous peoples—and many early European writers, notably François Le Vaillant, took the side of the indigenous people. Mandela's phrase can thus be seen as reminding an audience that the settler version of history itself needs to be challenged.

We have, in other words, a story which suggests that one profound difference between South Africa and the United States is that here the revaluation of the settlers' heroic view of their past has become, for Mandela, not only a powerful reading of the past, but a way of interpreting the present. The Americans, victors in their process of internal colonization, may think they can visit this process on the rest of the world and enjoy support, but countries where the colonized have emerged politically victorious will resent them and their presumption.

What, then, of the ending of Mandela's speech? With its call for heroic self-sacrifice over prudent self-interest, it could be constructed either as a memory of a time of more self-sacrificial communal spirit, perhaps evident elsewhere in continuing opposition to the invasion of Iraq, or simply as a patriotic moment in line with the South African national anthem that closes with the exhortation to live and strive for freedom. But even here, I suggest, there was a political sting. It may be difficult to see Mandela in his appeal to the young, seriously imagining that this "country is threatened" and that there is a danger of a foreign power invading South Africa. Yet this is not as bizarre as it sounds, because at the time there were several strands of anti-American sentiment in the press on the lines of: if they invade Iraq for their oil, will they invade us for our minerals and invent some pretext?

Most notoriously, there had been an incident recounted by *Guardian* journalist Roy Carroll:

At a cocktail party in 2002 I asked the health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, a close Mbeki ally, why the government preferred to buy new German-made submarines instead of AIDS drugs. "Look at what Bush is doing," she replied. "He could invade." Even for a gaffe-prone minister, citing a US threat seemed extraordinary. My slack jaw prevented follow-up questions, so I filed just a short story using that quote. The article caused an uproar which briefly overshadowed an

African National Congress conference. The health minister denied the comment and at a press conference the foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said it was a lie.²²

In March 2003, *The Economist* reported on the fierce opposition of Thabo Mbeki to American action, and added, “Kgalema Motlanthe, the ruling party’s secretary-general, predicted that because South Africa has minerals, ‘if we don’t stop this unilateral action against Iraq today, tomorrow [America] will come after us’”.²³ In Mandela’s own comments on the American invasion of Iraq, he had quite openly stated his view that America was more concerned with Iraqi oil than with other issues.

Let me then make Mandela’s cryptic rhetoric crudely explicit. Mandela says: “We, the formerly colonized, in South Africa resisted colonial tyranny by attacking the enemy and risking our lives, and we understand why Iraqis and Palestinians do so even if it means giving up their own lives. We are the aborigines, the Native Americans, the San—you are the colonizers. No worthwhile leader goes over to the colonizer’s side or collaborates. If you invade here, expect to meet what you meet in Iraq.”

Why, though, did Mandela, like Manuel, resort to cryptic allusion rather than denounce openly? Though Mandela was sharply and openly critical of George W. Bush in his “Courageous Leadership” speech and rehearsed what seems like old Cold War lines about the American motivation for using nuclear weapons on Japan, he surely sensed that anything seeming like a defense of Saddam Hussein or anything smacking of openly justifying suicide bombing would have been regarded as unforgivable by Western media. And so, it seems, his speech found ways to provoke his audience into thinking about the unthinkable, into sketching a colonized’s view of an invasion undertaken by the powers of white colonization. Through narrative and leaving analogical possibilities open, he can refuse to be drawn into the specifics of Hussein’s relationship to the Iraqis, or the ethos of Al-Qaeda or of suicide bombers, yet maintain a critical and questioning stance against the dominant US view of the “War on Terror”.

The parallels between the speeches show that Mandela’s cryptic attack is similar to Manuel’s. Both share a political space of sophisticated left-wing colonial critique of the American invasion of Iraq; both find similar ways to tell stories, draw on parallels, undermine the short with the *longue durée*, offer moral alternatives. Under the shadow of the American Empire, however, they, like Conrad’s Marlow in the shadow of the British Empire before them, have to speak with the strength and weakness of an irony that suggests cryptically, but does not denounce fully.

²² Carroll, “How I Never Quite Fell for South Africa.”

²³“Feeling America’s Fly-Whisk.”

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