

Winnie crashes launch of book about her

★ THE who's who turned out for the launch of the University of Cape Town's Vice-Chancellor Njabulo Ndebele's book — including Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Her arrival was a bit of a surprise.

"I didn't have a clue [that she was coming]," said Exclusive Books' Jill van Zyl.

Ndebele said he, too, was a bit taken aback.

However, arriving unexpectedly and uninvited at a book launch isn't such a big deal. The invites are e-mailed, so they tend to get passed around a bit.

Besides, Mama had every right to be there. Ndebele's novel, you see, is titled *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, although it's not a factual account of her life but a novel in which the characters have imaginary conversations with her.

She took to the occasion with her usual stately aplomb. Despite arriving and leaving without any fanfare with her entourage of bodyguards, seemingly less obtrusive than usual, it's all in the attitude.

She looked majestic in a bright red suit with a floor-length skirt and beaded headband.

"She needs a new bag. That's a very old Chanel but it's a day bag and it's looking worse for wear," muttered the woman standing beside me. She begged me not to use her name. Suffice to say she's 20-something, has a fab marketing job and is clearly one to whom



GILLIAN ANSTEY'S PEOPLE

such style issues matter.

Despite this trivial bag faux pas, the older guard clamoured around Madikizela-Mandela and stood in line for her to autograph copies of the book.

One of the happiest to see her was Ndebele himself — he had never met her before. Describing her as one of the most important figures in contemporary South African history, Ndebele said Madikizela-Mandela might not recognise herself in his novel.

"It is an interpretation of a life and not a life itself," he said in his address. Afterwards he told me he hoped she would take the book in the spirit in which it was written.

Like Madikizela-Mandela, Ndebele's wife, Mpho, was also in red, but a far more relaxed outfit of a below-the-knee T-shirt adorned with a graphic.

She runs an events company in Cape Town with her eldest daughter, Nonikiwe, the only member of the family not present at the launch.

Her other daughter, attractive fine arts graduate Mamello, who has thin waist-length braids, is a freelance photographer who spent the evening clicking away.

And friendly actor son, Makhaola, a budding writer like his dad (he wrote many of the comedy sketches for SABC2's *Dube on Monday*), smiled and said he had "quite a nice role" in *Yizo Yizo 3* but didn't think it was right to say much more at this stage.

Actor Basil Appollis, in a flowing black robe, had no such qualms. He has ousted Tobie Cronje from his traditional role as the Dame in Janice Honeyman's annual pantomime and, with eight performances a week, said: "By the end of the year, at least I'll be thin!"

This year it's Cronje's turn to be the giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

Contrary to the stuffy image they might project, book launches — if not riotous — are often raucous affairs.

Fred Withers, managing direc-

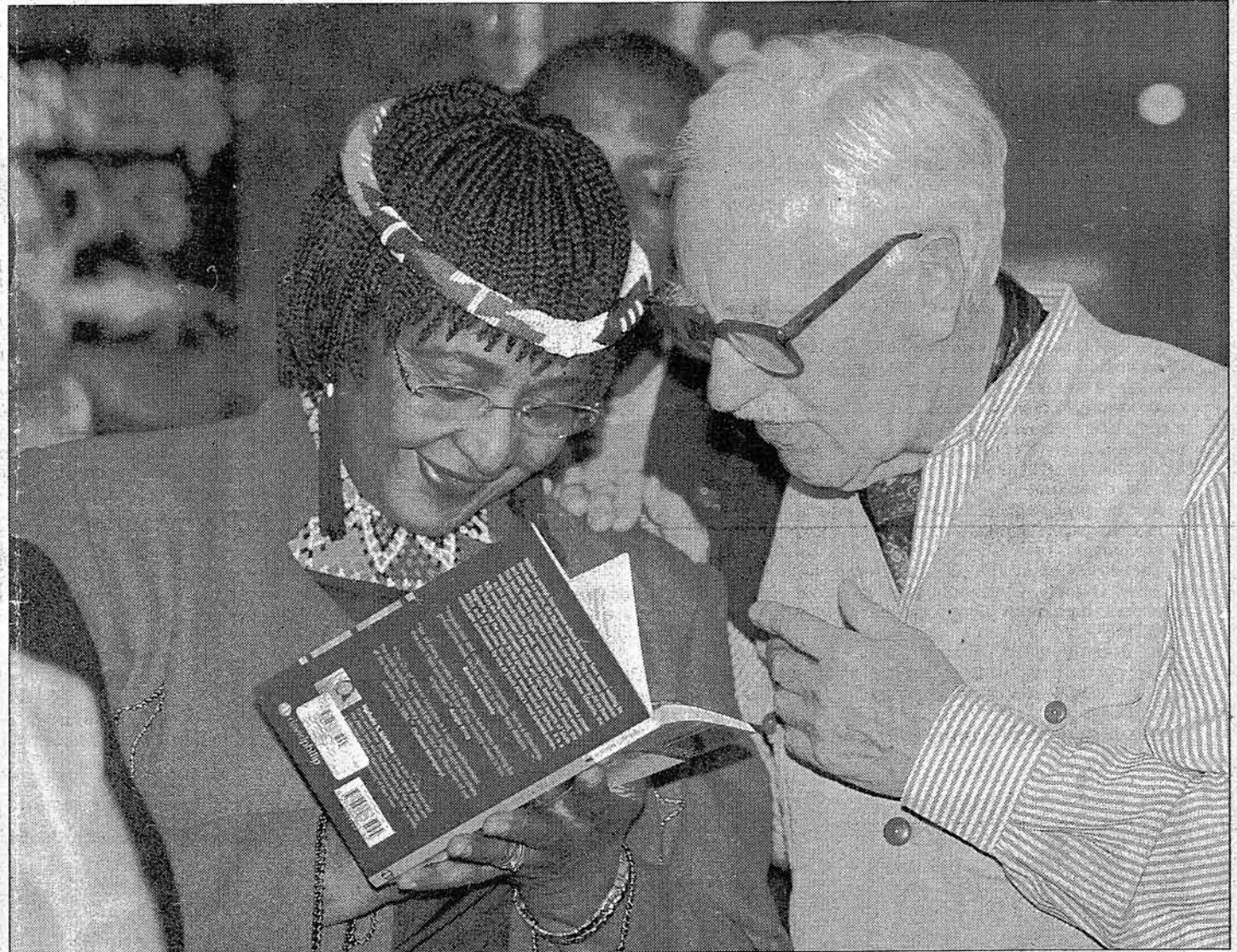
tor of Exclusive Books — still reeling from one customer questioning the political timing of the book's release — joked that he was trying to cultivate the concept that just keeping books beside one's bed was as good as actually reading them. He is convinced that books can be absorbed by osmosis.

The book's publisher Jeremy Boraine of New Africa Books (formerly David Philip), the quietly dishy son of the famous Alex, former politician and deputy chairman of the truth commission, could only agree.

Guests included Max and Eleanor Sisulu; Johncom chairman, Mashudu Ramano, in a black + mandarin-collared suit; loveLife's Mandla Sibeko, now sporting a goatee; Brigalia Bam, chairman of the electoral commission who was the guest speaker; project manager Anisa Mills with marketing exec Jerome Small; and actress Motshabi Tyelele, a family friend of the Ndebeles.

Another actress, and former grooming school boss, Tselane Tambo, all in black with maroon and white shoes (and was that a genuine Louis Vuitton bag?) laughed and said she had received loads of negative press in the past. "It's a good thing my self-esteem is intact," she added. Tambo was there with her friend, Viwe Mgudlwa, who has an unusual profession.

"I'm a trained analyst," he said in his US drawl — he lived in New York for 16 years.



NOVEL IDEA: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela signs Charles Ashby's copy of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, a novel which University of Cape Town's Vice-Chancellor Njabulo Ndebele has written about her life
Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA

"Oh, a psychologist?" I asked. "I am a trained analyst in fashion trends," I was informed.

That means that Mgudlwa is involved in what he called "the

hard lines" of accessories and footwear for a leading chain store.

Thought the crowd was ultra-prestigious, but Mpho Ndebele

wasn't convinced. She said she thought the turnout at the previous week's launch at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town was better.

The host of bigwigs there had

included parliamentary Speaker Frene Ginwala, Education Minister Kader Asmal and Communications Minister Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri.