



perspectives

POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

AFRICA

The (Un-) Making of Icons in Africa



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Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

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Editorial

Which African leaders qualify as an icon? Perhaps this is always a controversial question, but it was much easier to answer, say, 25 years ago, when the public memories of Pan-Africanist champions such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere were still fresh, Nelson Mandela had just walked out of prison, and Robert Mugabe was a widely respected leader. Today, lists like *New African's* 2004 "100 greatest Africans of all time" – in which these leaders took the top four places – seem somewhat stale. Beyond famous musicians, artists and authors, the time of easy consensus on who is an "African icon" seems past. The sands are shifting beneath the political icons of old.

Africa's youth feel betrayed. The 2015 #RhodesMustFall protests in South Africa are testimony to this. What began with a student throwing faeces at a statue of colonial icon and mining magnate Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town gave rise to nationwide calls for the "decolonisation" of universities and free higher education. As described by one of the university's aca-

demics, Zethu Matebeni, the student protests challenged an existing campus culture that many say still excludes and alienates black people. The students' anger, however, was not only directed at Rhodes as a symbol of colonial oppression. It also called into question the legacy of Nelson Mandela and the country's negotiated democratic settlement, which was based on national reconciliation and political transformation. Richard Poplak further unpacks this dynamic in the context of a deeply divided society where anger is growing about high income and wealth gaps that continue to run along racial lines.

The significance of former struggle icons is contested in other African countries as well. The portrayal of Robert Mugabe's legacy by Brian Raftopoulos shows how a once celebrated liberator turned into a deeply polarising dictator, able to invoke both admiration and contempt at the same time. In contrast, Henning Melber's essay on a Namibian struggle hero reflects on the popular desire for leaders who remain

truthful to their principles, and how people can use iconography to dissent against dominant narratives.

Takura Zhangazha notes the hegemonic influence of the Western mass media that has transferred young people's awareness of African political icons to new figureheads, mostly in music and sports. Away from the global gaze, however, contemporary African popular culture and politics continue to introduce and sustain a multitude of icons. Fatoumata Bintou Kandé highlights some of Senegal's national heroes and also some hidden female icons whose stories have been sidelined in the country's public memory. In his essay on writer, poet, ethnologist, numerologist and spiritual leader Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Abdourahman A. Waberi portrays another outstanding African figure who remains relatively unknown despite his historical significance.

Mary C. Curtis argues that, although the tendency to reduce countries to negative stereotypes and positive exceptions is global, this has been especially persistent

with regard to African countries. However, Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ sees hope in new, horizontal social movements that may bring to the fore a new iconography that transcends the individual and depoliticised "saviour". In reality, neither history nor culture is stagnant on the continent. As Ngũgĩ puts it: "We have to allow Africa to be many things, to claim old, new and growing cultural and political traditions as its own."

This edition of *Perspectives* seeks to critique the meaning of "African icon", to explore the changing readings of icons of the past, and the issues they may reveal or veil. In doing so, we invite the reader to take a fresh and more imaginative look at the continent.

Layla Al-Zubaidi

Regional Director

Jochen Luckscheiter

Programme Manager

Nancy Onyango

This is Africa

Beyond the Individual: Redefining Icons in Africa

Interview

A scholar and novelist of note, Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ is an important voice in the contemporary discourse in and about Africa. In this interview, he challenges conventional notions of what an African icon is and by whom they are determined. Noting the shift from vanguardist revolutions to people-powered and -led revolutions, he proposes a new iconography for our times.

Richard Oduor Oduku: What comes to mind when you think of the notion of icons in society?

Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ: I am taking issue with the very concept of icon. For one to become an icon, he or she has to be deracinated, cleaned up and depoliticised for our consumption. Mandela becomes an elderly affable man instead of a revolutionary. Martin Luther King Jr. becomes an emblem of love across races, forgetting his militant opposition to war and his class-based approach to social change. And those who cannot be cleaned up do not become icons; certainly, figures like Malcolm X and Castro or, closer to home, Thomas Sankara, are not allowed to become such because their names cannot be abstracted from their radical politics.

I also think most of the people we consider to be icons would not see themselves as such. They would see themselves as ordinary people who, against difficult odds, as in apartheid, colonialism and dictatorships, spoke up. They were not born icons, circumstances created them. The icon is what we choose to remember.



Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ is an Assistant Professor of English at Cornell University and the author of the novels *Mrs. Shaw* (2015) *Black Star Nairobi* (2013) *Nairobi Heat* (2011) and two books of poetry, *Hurling Words at Consciousness* (2006) and *Logotherapy* (2016). He is the co-founder of the Mabati-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature and co-director of the Global South Project - Cornell. *The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Politics and Ownership* is forthcoming from University of Michigan Press (March 2018).

Who are some of the African icons that you would choose to remember?

I often think of Ruth First, an anti-apartheid revolutionary assassinated by the apartheid government in 1982 as our very own Rosa Luxemburg, the Polish-German revolutionary assassinated in 1919 in Germany because of her political activism. I would also mention Malcolm X, because why shouldn't we claim him for Africa? After all, he claimed Africa for black Americans when he sought solidarity with Tanzanians, Kenyans and Ghanaians before his assassination. Or W.E.B. Dubois and Sol Plaatje, the pioneers of what would become the radical Pan-Africanism embraced by Kwame Nkrumah.

I mention these to challenge who can become an African icon – do they have to be black? Then what do you do with Ruth First, a white Jewish woman? Do they have to be African? Then what do you do with Randall Robinson, an African-American who actively fought against



apartheid? Why shouldn't we celebrate Sojourner Truth or Frederick Douglass for advancing the rights of black men and women? Or Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the Haitian revolution's defeat of French and British armies, making Haiti the first nation on earth to free all within its borders, regardless of race? If we take all these into consideration, then the notion of icons will always be smaller than the history they created. In fact, there is an argument to be made that icons bury the history they made.

Ruth First was a journalist, academic and gifted political activist.

© Derek Smith

Female icons are largely marginalised in our historical narratives. Why do you think this is the case?

Take Kenyan history, for example, and the legacy of the Mau Mau or the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army. The Kenyatta and Moi governments had vested interests in suppressing it in order to loot the country blind while cementing neo-colonialism. One could not do the work of recovering the role of women in the anti-colonial struggle without contradicting the dictatorship. For example, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the play by Ngũgĩ and Micere Mugo, which showed the centrality of women in the struggle, was banned. Ngũgĩ was later detained without trial and both were eventually forced into exile.



Organised religion has produced icons like Reverend Timothy Njoya in Kenya and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa through their support for just causes. What do you make of the televangelists that are iconised by many across the continent?

These televangelists are prosperity preachers – really, they are the worst kind of capitalists. Jesus drove them out of the temple. They are good for nothing. Instead, we should be embracing liberation theology – the kind preached by Bob Marley in “Get Up, Stand Up”. The God who stands up for the poor and the exploited, the God on the side of justice. I cannot say it better than Marley did:

Richard Oduor Oduku is a post-cynical humanist, a researcher, writer, editor and poet. He is a founding member of the pan-African writers' collective Jalada Africa. Richard was longlisted for the British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) Awards 2015 and shortlisted for the 2016 Brunel International African Poetry Prize as well as the 2017 Brittle Paper Award for Essays/Think Pieces.

We sick an' tired of-a your ism-schism game
 Dyin' 'n' goin' to heaven in-a Jesus' name, Lord.
 We know when we understand:
 Almighty God is a living man.
 You can fool some people sometimes,
 But you can't fool all the people all the time.
 So now we see the light (What you gonna do?),
 We gonna stand up for our rights! (Yeah, yeah, yeah!)

In other words, let us see all religions – the Torah, the Bible, the Koran, etc. – as being in the service of justice, of the exploited and the marginalised. Let us remove theology from the hands of the thieves, the “civilising” colonisers, the do-gooder NGOs, and instead read them as radical texts that speak against injustice.

To some extent, the televangelists are an expression of the era of globalisation and American cultural hegemony. Can this change?

The problem is that we have been following the same models set up by the colonisers – this is the essence of neo-colonialism. The social, political and economic structures set up by the coloniser continue to govern the newly independent African country. Globalisation is built on those same structures. Think of the havoc caused by the structural adjustment programmes from the IMF and World Bank in the 1980s. There is a model that we as Africans overlook, and that is the model exemplified by Cuba. Think of Che Guevara in the Congo, where Laurent Kabila's greed and political blindness made the Cuban mission of solidarity impossible. A little later, Cubans would fight and die in Angola. Indeed, Mandela would say that it was the Cuban intervention that broke apartheid's back. Cubans, as it has been said, are the only people to come to Africa and leave with nothing besides their dead.

Speaking of icons, shouldn't Castro and Che be read as part of our fabric? Watch the documentary *Cuba: An African Odyssey*, for example. Let me put it this way: during the Ebola outbreak, Western countries pulled out their doctors. Cuba sent 400 doctors to Sierra Leone. Let that sink in. Four hundred Cubans at a time when Western countries had closed their borders and mass hysteria took the place of understanding. This is the model we should be following and asking after. We need to know more about the revolutionary solidarity coming out of the global South.

Going back to the United States' position as the dominant maker of global culture: many young Africans exposed to mainstream media and the internet are first introduced to American cultural icons even before they know their own heroes from next door. Is there a way in which we could make us more visible to ourselves?

Africans have to be at the centre of their own cultural production. That means we should have thriving movie industries that compete with the best in the world. We need to make our own documentaries and have our equivalents of Motown and Hollywood. Nollywood is doing well in this regard, but we need to consider that we are a continent of close to a billion people in 55 countries. Each of the 55 countries could be a centre of its own cultural production.

Despite the hegemony of Western culture, the African diaspora has become an important part of the new wave of imagining the possibilities of what I would call “a new Africa”. New traditions are being fashioned and significant elements of African culture

are entering foreign geographies. What types of cultural exports, hybrids, are you witnessing around you?

We have to allow Africa to be many things, to claim old, new and growing cultural and political traditions as its own. Why is it that we do not read early slave narratives as part of African literature – that literature from the diaspora, created by tears, blood and resistance? Why don't we really claim, as Africans, the Haitian revolution that ushered in the first black nation, as our own? To declare independence, the Haitian revolutionaries, led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, defeated Napoleon! Why isn't this history part of our collective memory? I am not so sure we can recognise the diaspora without acknowledging the revolutionary diaspora of the past.

Having said that, because some of the literature from the diaspora is coming from first-generation Africans in America, the literature will have different thematic concerns than, let's say, the literature of the Makerere generation, the Achebe generation. For the Makerere generation, return was possible. For the first generation of Africans, the transnational generation, return is not possible.

Why is a return not possible? Is it because the transnational generation has an uneasy or a fractured relationship with the continent?

First-generation Africans in the United States are Americans and Africans. They are born and live in the United States, but they have an immediate connection to Africa. If they are lucky and they can afford it, their parents take them back to their country of origin once a year, where they meet extended relatives. Later, in college, they might travel on their own, take Africa-related courses in college, perhaps even learn an African language. But they are Americans. It is not a contradiction to be both American and African – it is just who they are. And if we understand it that way, then we should be able to think of them as producing their own distinct culture, whether it is music, art or literature. Instead of trying to box it into either African or American categories, we need to see it as different, something unique to them – culture produced by a group of people in unique circumstances.

Do you think that this uniqueness is what explains, for example, Barack Obama's rise to become the global icon he is today?

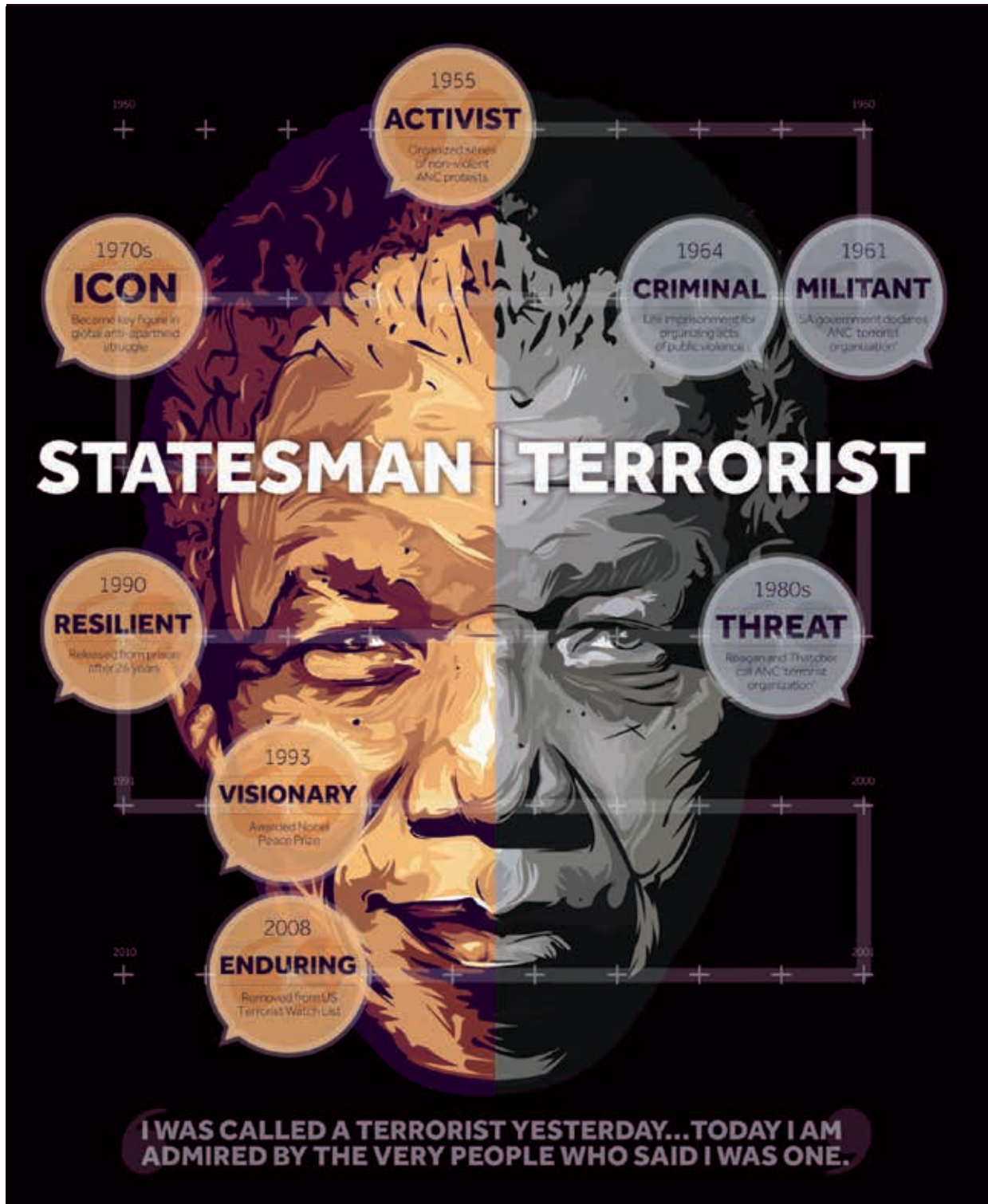
Certainly his uniqueness, a biracial yet black American with direct familial connections to Kenya, Harvard education and charisma contributed to his rise. As did the historical circumstance where after the collapse of global economies the world needed hope. But we, especially Africans should ask what he did with the opportunity to be a global icon – mass deportations of undocumented families from the US, militarisation of Africa-US relationships through the Africa Command Center, expansion of drone warfare, Libya and so on.

Is there anyone or anything that you would recognise as the African icons of today?

As mentioned before, an icon is one that we have abstracted from real, lived history. So, by definition, icons as we have known them – actually, reified them – are always lesser than what they were in real lived history.

Understanding that they would not want to be called icons but rather a "generation of revolution", I think the Rhodes/FeesMustFall movement in South Africa and the Black Lives Matter movement in the US give us the iconography of our times, rather than individual icons.

Rather than the vanguardist movements, led by an enlightenment few who hijacked and ushered us straight into the hands of neo-colonialism, I think the new movements are horizontal and understand political energy as the force, as opposed to individual leadership. Their long-lasting impact will be in redefining our approaches to social change and resistance, from vanguard revolutions to people-powered and people-led revolutions. ■■■



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Winter in South Africa: Mandela's Contested Legacy in a Divided Nation

Richard Poplak

I want someone who is going to
look at me
and love me the way white people
look at
and love
Mandela...
A TRC kind of love
You don't love until you have been
loved like Mandela.

– Koleka Putuma, “1994: A Love Poem”

On a spring evening in August of this year, a party was underway within the sedate corporate confines of Johannesburg's Nelson Mandela Foundation. Books are a very big deal in South Africa, and this high-end gathering served as a launch for the the sequel to the biggest book of them all: Mandela's quazillion-selling memoir *Long Walk to Freedom*. While the country's legendary first president passed away in 2013, we were now being introduced to a handsomely designed volume titled *Dare Not Linger*, featuring a stunning black and white portrait of Madiba captured by the photographer Jillian Edelstein.

Effectively a sequel to *Long Walk*, the new book offers something of a summary of Mandela's years in office. He had failed to complete the text before his death, and so its disparate parts were painstakingly knitted together by one of the country's preeminent novelists, the wise and stately Mandla Langa. Not so long ago, *Dare Not Linger*'s launch would have been Johannesburg's party of the year – a jazzed-up, jazzy celebration of Madiba's legacy. And yet, the function felt gloomy, funereal. Langa himself appeared wiped out, as if serving as Madiba's medium had exsanguinated him, emptying him of his own lifeforce. The faces perched on top of the fancy dresses were

long and drawn, perfect reflections of the nightmare that South Africa was staring down: economic recession; Mandela's ruling African National Congress (ANC) in terminal decline; a rogue president stealing the country into penury.

“What would Mandela have made of this mess?” is no longer a question South Africans seem interested in asking. Rather, it's “How much of this mess did Mandela make?” History has cast Mandela as the saviour, as the liberator – a single righteous man who, through his unwavering belief in the oneness of humanity, reconciled black and white in order build a nation on the ruins of apartheid.

But South Africa, 23 years after Mandela's inauguration, is not a nation, or not in any accurate sense of the term. It is a house divided – by race, by class, by ethnicity, by outlook. The country now finds itself at a volatile turning point. After more than two decades in power, the ANC has become a sclerotic monolith, run by a president who treats state coffers as his personal bank account. Meanwhile, a black intellectual movement has rejected Mandela's notions of forgiveness and reconciliation, with the #RhodesMustFall movement demanding the removal of all apartheid and colonial iconography from public spaces and #FeesMustFall calling for the elimination of impossibly high university fees and the decolonisation of the curriculum.

In the last year or two, a series of racist statements posted by white South Africans on social media sites has exploded the conversation about who “belongs”. The consensus position is that whites got a free pass after the fall of apartheid – they were absolved of their sins by the Truth and Rec-



Richard Poplak is an award-winning writer and documentary filmmaker. He is a senior correspondent at South Africa's *Daily Maverick* news site.



#FeesMustFall protesters clash with police outside of parliament.

© Onele Liwani

conciliation Commission and in turn were allowed to maintain and increase their economic power in service of the ANC's "trickle down" theory. While Mandela's ANC successfully managed the political turnover, he and his comrades badly botched the economic transition. Black Employment Empowerment initiatives, along with other ill-conceived affirmative action programmes, replaced a narrow Afrikaner elite with a narrow black elite, all underwritten by old white money. In the event, the bulk of the country's wealth has stayed in white hands, with only enough dribbling down to maintain South Africa's position as the most unequal society on earth as measured by the Gini coefficient.

Mandela had a genius for generating symbols. He understood the power of political gestures, but he also understood how dangerous were the sigils politicians carve into the psyche of their people.

Was this Mandela's fault? Was there something inherent in his outlook that was causally linked to the entitlement of those who saw fit to post racist statements on Facebook? Were the luminaries at the *Dare Not Linger* launch there less to celebrate the great man, and more to watch as he tee-

tered on his plinth, another great icon soon to hit the dust before the jeering mobs?

*

Mandela had a genius for generating symbols. He understood the power of political gestures, but he also understood how dangerous were the sigils politicians carve into the psyche of their people. If Twitter were around, he would have used the medium conscientiously, with great care, understanding the febrile nature of the body politic.

His greatest political gesture was the creation of the "Rainbow Nation" – the idea of a country united in its diversity. The idea is a good one, largely because it works: diverse populations are, for the most part, more successful than homogeneous communities. Democratic South Africa was born with eleven official languages, and the new national anthem was an amalgam of the old Afrikaner nationalist anthem, *Die Stem*, and the struggle hymn *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, an act of generosity so astonishing that it wove forgiveness into the South African mainframe.

But forgiveness for what? And what was the old oppressor made to give up in order to square the deal? Mandela didn't see it this way. His mission, as he figured it, was to "liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both" (*Long Walk to Freedom*, 624) –

an impulse that was central to the idea of reconciliation, and formed the spine of the Rainbow Nation. But a new generation of black South Africans no longer seems interested in the oppressors' liberation, neither from the white supremacism that was at the crux of apartheid (and, many would argue, defines the democratic dispensation as well) nor from the fears that attended being a white minority amongst a black majority.

The following was, of course, inevitable: in generating this new lexicon of symbols, Mandela in fact became a symbol himself. On the walls of old white businessmen were pictures of the benevolent smiling president in his signature button-up shirt, arm in arm, hugging into a new world. This willingness to bridge the divide between the old and the new came at a cost – he became the bridge, without the requisite testing to see how much weight he would need to hold. As it turned out, the weight was too much for anyone to bear.

T-shirts, coffee mugs, wall clocks – Mandela's face was emblazoned on a host of consumer items. He became a brand. To no small extent, it was becoming difficult to distinguish him from Morgan Freeman, the Hollywood actor who played him in one of the innumerable dramas based on his life. In these adaptations, he was always too good to be interesting, and the movies were sunk by the weight of his righteous behaviour, while all of the historical context happened off-screen, in some other dimension.

Following his presidency, he became a roving ambassador, a celebrity statesman. At home, everyone claimed him for their own. Like God (whom Morgan Freeman has also played on numerous occasions), Mandela could be used to justify any cause – everything from selling hamburgers to covering up economic racism. As a student statement recently noted, “[As a] a freedom fighter and our first legitimate president – our ‘dearest Madiba’ – is now used to rehabilitate and mask the re-inscription of brutality, control, domination, abuse and conquest: the conquest of your future by a handful of military, gun-crazy lunatics.”

If everybody owned Mandela, then nobody owned him, least of all himself. As he aged, he was portrayed more and more by the ANC as the country's founding father, and therefore as its glue. Even if Mandela hadn't served as a politician in a decade, a vote for the ANC was still a vote for the man who saved South Africa. Meanwhile, young “born frees” – those who were born after the

end of apartheid – didn't feel free, and nor did they feel liberated. If that was the case, then who was Mandela to them but another version of Mickey Mouse – a corporate mascot shilling a theme-park experience?

And yet, this divide became generational because, to a majority of older black South Africans, Mandela remained the key to both the past and the future. For white South Africans, he was the only thing they shared. When he faded as a political force, the bonds evaporated as if they were never there. And the country reverted to its factory setting: a simmering racial warzone rife with inequality.

*

The *Dare Not Linger* launch was thus facing an uphill battle in terms of the zeitgeist. Nonetheless, the speeches were pleasant and so was the African jazz. No one yelled, no one got too drunk, no one argued. Still, it felt oddly like it was taking place in another historical time zone. The

He is a tarnished icon, a man who chose forgiveness and reconciliation over levelling the playing field – but one who did so in order to avoid a race war that could have ended the new country before it began.

previous week, hundreds and hundreds of people had turned out to the launch of a book that profiled President Jacob Zuma's rape accuser, a former family friend named Fezekile “Khwezi” Kuzwayo. The book blew up the bookshops and the airways, and was shortly followed by an exposé of the gangster state called *The President's Keepers*. Those books, among others, felt urgent and necessary.

Dare Not Linger felt like an artefact.

But we must be careful not to write Mandela out of South Africa's explosive present, because no real reckoning with his legacy has taken place. He is a tarnished icon, a man who chose forgiveness and reconciliation over levelling the playing field – but one who did so in order to avoid a race war that could have ended the new country before it began. As South African culture shifts, so too does Madiba. The figure that emerges will be very different from the Mandela that exists today – more complex, more nuanced. More dangerous. ■■■

#RhodesMustFall – It was Never Just About the Statue

Interview

The #RhodesMustFall protest movement began in March 2015 at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. Originally directed against a statue that commemorates the colonial icon Cecil John Rhodes, the campaign marked the beginning of the largest wave of student protests in democratic South Africa. Across the country, students called for the “decolonisation” of universities and free higher education, among other things.

The removal of the statue on 9 April 2015 led to a heated public debate in a society that is still at odds with its divided past and present existence. Some believe that colonialism and apartheid are part of the history of South Africa and that these memorial representations are appropriate. Many others argue that, given the impact of colonialism and apartheid on people’s material lives and psyches until today, public memorials only serve to glorify these systems.

Zethu Matebeni, at the time a senior researcher at UCT’s HUMA-Institute for Humanities in Africa and a member of the #RhodesMustFall movement, took some time out to reflect on the events.

Perspectives: What did the Rhodes statue symbolise to you?



Zethu Matebeni is the convener of the Queer in Africa series, a multidisciplinary project which connects human rights issues, social justice struggles, creative arts, LGBTQ activism and scholarship on African sexuality and gender diversity. Since 2011 she has been teaching and doing research at the University of Cape Town.

Matebeni: Locating the statue at the centre of the most prestigious university in Africa had significance. In many ways, it attested to the ideas that Rhodes himself promoted: the elitism of the white race, his own colonial conquests from Cape to Cairo, and how the land in the Cape should be distributed, to whom and by whom. These ideas are still evident at the University of Cape Town, where Rhodes’ statue towered prominently over the campus and the city of Cape Town at large. It was almost as if Rhodes was gazing on his conquest, wondering how far and for how long into time his colonising powers could reach in taking over the land.

The tragic irony of its positioning, backed by the hall named after colonial politician Leander Starr Jameson, where prestigious events and graduations are conferred, symbolically attests to the relationship that these two iconic figures had to the land they occupied. It also demonstrates how knowledge production is undoubtedly deeply political. While many argue that Rhodes’ investment in education – through the Rhodes and Mandela-Rhodes scholarships and land bequeathed to university campuses – has made significant contributions to higher education, it is also true that it is in universities such



as Oxford and Cape Town that black students were dehumanised and felt alienated from the academic project.

For black students and staff arriving at the university, the statue was a constant reminder of how and for whom the university was designed. This extends beyond the colonial architecture and the spatial planning of the institution to the medium of instruction, the privilege afforded to whiteness, and the value given to middle-class positionality. It is really about the everyday psychic manipulation that enforces one's complicity in glorifying and celebrating statues of colonial conquerors and perpetrators as heroes. Many black students and staff expressed disgust at the assumption and expectation to assimilate to white standards and white values of excellence. This perpetuated how black students were made not to belong at the university. Rhodes' colonial architectural ideals are deeply embedded in the education system. Eventually, these conditions fuelled the students' demands for decolonised curricula and a transformed institutional culture.

Students celebrate as Rhodes statue is being taken down.

© David Harrison

For black students and staff arriving at the university, the statue was a constant reminder of how and for whom the university was designed.

Why have the protests to take the Rhodes statue down started only two years ago, two decades into democracy?

This was not the first time, nor the last, that the symbolic power of this colonial icon was put into question. However, the #RhodesMustFall movement galvanised an electric energy around the world that could no longer be ignored.

Statues and monuments give those with the power and resources to erect them a history. Simultaneously, h(er)istories of those powerless are wiped out because, in essence, colonial and apartheid histories were already about obliteration. Black people mostly appeared as exploitable labour, dispossessed of their lands, bodies and minds. It is thus no surprise that, with the beginning of the democratic era, colonial-infused apartheid monuments, symbols and statues had to be reconsidered.

Already back in 1994, the statue of apartheid architect Hendrik Verwoerd was removed from parliament in Cape Town. Seventeen years later, in a somewhat theatrical event in Midvaal, south of Johannesburg, another bust of Verwoerd was taken down. At the time, people were already attuned to the arrogance of preserving certain histories over others. While, for many Afrikaners, Verwoerd was perhaps a genius of segregation policies, preserving his statue also gave them a sense of history, belonging, and a past from where to gaze into the future. Similar sentiments were expressed about the removal of the Rhodes statue at UCT, in a city where at least two other statues of him exist.

Almost a quarter of a century into democracy, South Africa may have reached an important milestone. Yet the realities of many South

Almost a quarter of a century into democracy, South Africa may have reached an important milestone. Yet the realities of many South Africans are not on a par with such an achievement.

Africans are not on a par with such an achievement. At a time when many South Africans are struggling economically, when the promise of an education system that will liberate the nation fails us, when the brutal deaths of miners shot in Marikana remind us of apartheid-era massacres such as Sharpeville, when the persistence of racial segregation becomes deeply embed-

ded in the social fabric of who we are as a nation, we can only ask: was the rainbow-nation project also a deferred dream? Has the novelty of a post-apartheid nation worn off? All these realities show the pervasiveness of the apartheid project and neo-colonialism. Rhodes is intrinsically implicated in these systems, having been a colonialist who institutionalised racial segregation and was well known for his ventures in mining capitalism.

What is going to happen with the statue? And how should the South African public deal with symbols of the colonial past?

It is not clear what will happen to this particular statue, but important conversations about statues and artworks that were destroyed or deemed offensive in post-apartheid South Africa should be considered for museums. The Rhodes statue, as a colonial artefact in the present, should form part of this archive. While it is a disturbing sight at an institution of higher learning, its legacy should never be wiped out of history. This legacy should always be represented as an ongoing conversation about the role and position of colonial and apartheid beneficiaries in democratic South Africa. In what ways could these people be held accountable for the atrocities they continue to perpetuate on everyday lives of the colonised? In what ways can their histories shape different futures? These are questions beyond the scope of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, which is responsible for monuments and statues.

People with power usually mediate meanings of and access to statues and symbols. What is important is the economic infrastructure that needs to be addressed – the symbols should be an entry point to larger questions about economic redress. In South Africa, apart from

the few black capitalists, the wealth of the nation resides in the hands of white people. Thus whiteness and economic power are synonymous. As a result of access to resources, it would be easy for white people to find a new home for statues and symbols, such as the case with the Hendrik Verwoerd statues. In a democratic South Africa, access to land and infrastructure for the most marginalised and dispossessed should be prioritised first, rather than colonial artefacts.

What or who should occupy the now-empty space?

The space that Rhodes occupied is not empty. Rather, it is filled with herstories and movements. The plinth where the concrete statue was cemented is still in place. Symbolically this foundation represents the institutional establishment that is based on things that do not change. There may be aesthetic changes, but the core remains intact. The encasing of the foundation is immovable, sanitised and gives the impression that Rhodes has been unseated. Yet, more telling is the shadow of Rhodes painted on the ground. As one poster read the day the Rhodes statue was removed: “Next, the invisible statues”. These remain all over university campuses. The shadow, drawn immediately after the removal of the statue by an unknown person, insidiously alludes to this.

What the current protests have shown in South Africa is that iconic figures are, after all, limited. They rarely represent the collective interests of masses, struggles and movements. One or more groups will always be denied visibility and representation by a singular narrative, a sole historical male figure as an icon.

What the current protests have shown in South Africa is that iconic figures are, after all, limited. They rarely represent the collective interests of masses, struggles and movements. One or more groups will always be denied visibility and representation by a singular narrative, a sole historical male figure as an icon. Rather than focusing on statues and the spaces they leave for new modes of occupation, what is more urgent is a social and economic reform needed to transform the lives of many black South Africans. Statues will not do this. Rather, they detract attention from the real material changes that society needs. As students at UCT asserted, “It was never just about the statue!” ■■

Liberation Struggle Icons Fading for Africa's Youth

Takura Zhangazha

It came as a surprise, early in the morning. Two young Zimbabweans, straight out of university, asked me the oddest of questions. "Who was Julius Nyerere? Was he Zambian? Was he South African? What did he really do?"¹

At first, I was shocked. After all, I went through primary school in post-independence Zimbabwe singing all sorts of praises to African liberation heroes. Some of the songs were propagandist, to be honest, such as this one, which we loved to sing without really knowing what the names meant. The lyrics went something like this:

Beautiful Zimbabwe,
We shall never forget you, beautiful
Zimbabwe.
Long live Comrade Machel,
Machel!
We shall never forget!
Long live Comrade Machel!
Long live Comrade Nyerere,
Nyerere!
We shall never forget you,
Long live Comrade Nyerere!

And then the stanza would start again. In such songs, even as young teenagers, we recognised the icons who led the movements for our national and continental liberation. We would trek to the local library to read and discover more about Nyerere, Machel, Neto, Ben Bella, Nasser or Cabral. After reading a decent amount of European history for what was referred to as Advanced Level Studies in the former British colonies, we would take some pride in reading about the Zimbabwean liberation icon Nehanda Nyakasikana, or the Kenyan liberation icon Dedan Kimathi, or the legendary Queen

Nzinga, from what we now know as Angola. And yes, as teenagers we also used to sing lyrics that wished a long life to Robert Mugabe.

But back to my shock at being asked who Julius Nyerere was. It was the realisation that a lot of young Africans would not be able to sing the songs we sang when we were growing up. Some may argue that it is a good thing that such songs are a thing of the past. But the fact is, they were cultural products of our liberation struggle across the continent. The past cannot be wished away, nor is it "best practice" to do so in societies that seek a better democratic future.

Losing Resonance

The liberatory and counter-hegemonic actions of these icons have less generational resonance now. Then, the struggles against colonialism had been won and the universality of human rights, à la the Global North, was assumed – especially after the penultimate African liberation struggle against apartheid in South Africa was won in 1994.²

The post-liberation phase of our African existence was accompanied by the end of the Cold War between Western capitalism and the Soviet Union, a period we had navigated with great dexterity to attain freedom. But this new unipolar and globalised world raised new values and hegemonic influence via mass media (and Hollywood), accentuating narratives that were, and still are, Western in orientation. New icons – mostly musicians, athletes and activists from the North – began to emerge via satellite television, digital video, compact discs, and then the Internet. The overwhelming presence of their images would overshadow the African



Takura Zhangazha is a human rights and democracy activist living in Harare, Zimbabwe. He blogs at takura-zhangazha.blogspot.com and can also be found on Facebook and Twitter.

icons we had previously learned of through song and books.

It was the medium that did it.³

Our embrace of the context-free expressions of global media drew us away from our recognition of African political icons – let alone any contemporary understanding of the true meaning of the liberation struggle, or of the residual effects of those struggles combined with the vestiges of the colonial state. This is especially relevant when we start asking questions about why a pan-Africanist⁴ consciousness dissipates across generations.

This is the key issue. At the turn of this century, most Africans would easily have recognised the liberation struggle icons, their activism for freedom and, in some cases, their martyrdom. These days, the younger generation does not share the same fervour or understand the historical significance of having finally shaken off the shackles of colonial oppression and even post-colonial dictatorship.

The Passage of Time

The reasons for this are threefold, the most significant being the passage of time and the loss of struggle-era memory and consciousness.

Those who participated either directly or indirectly in the liberation struggles would have a clearer memory of the icons and why they were admired or eulogised in song. They would also remember their post-independence leadership, the early achievements and subsequent failures of some of these icons, and why it became a good thing for them to leave political office while they were still in good standing with the people they led or with those elsewhere on the continent who still looked up to them.

After the liberatory moment and its attendant celebratory culture, many glorious icons fell victim to the assumption that their role in winning liberation could keep them above reproach. The vagaries of their post-independence governments were challenged by the demands of legitimacy, sometimes with the result that their iconic status dissipated.

Younger generations of Africans, disillusioned by the non-fulfilment of the promises of liberation and by post-independence conflict, decided to set out on their own and create new heroes. Or, alternatively, to focus more on personal survival than the broader questions of political, social and economic justice.

This emerging disconnection has not been redressed as the gaps in consciousness

Global music star Rihanna with dancers.

© Jørund F Pedersen



widened in the following generations. State repression and the censorship of opposing views by post-colonial African leaders has also hindered those who sought to express and reclaim a more honest meaning of the liberation struggle.

The end result, leading us to the third significant reason that Africa's political icons are increasingly forgotten, was that young Africans found new, less political icons elsewhere.

The Role of New Media in the Creation of New Icons

This rejection of earlier views of the liberation struggle and its leaders, coupled with the expansion of global and Internet-based new media platforms, created new nodes of consciousness for younger Africans.

The immediacy of these platforms does not allow the time for a deeper, more organic understanding of who should be an icon.⁵ The appearance of the new media icons and legends is more ephemeral than those that were born from an organic con-

This rejection of earlier views of the liberation struggle and its leaders, coupled with the expansion of global and Internet-based new media platforms, created new nodes of consciousness for younger Africans.

text of people's true struggles. Even so, the emerging icons fit neatly into the lexicon of the celebrity culture that now dominates media spaces on the continent.

This is not to say that the new icons are illegitimate or in any way less important. They reflect both a departure from the past and what one can safely argue is a new consciousness among young Africans. The historic legacy of various liberation struggles is easily lost in their bread-and-butter concerns today, such as the search for employment, better livelihoods and, regrettably, a desire to travel to the proverbial (and colonially inspired) "promised land" that is the Global North of their celebrity icons.

In this context, the primary challenge has less to do with denying the new expressions of consciousness by young Africans, or with presenting a counter-narrative to this reality, than with finding ways to ensure that

Africa's history and our political liberation icons can survive in this globalised media environment: how can scant attention and resources be allocated to preserve a historical consciousness that recalls the liberation struggle and its iconic leaders, not only as political actors but also as principled and popular projects to realise the true meaning of freedom?

African cultural organisations, mass-media production houses and movie companies should examine critically the sort of content and interpretations they can give to the liberation struggles as they occurred and its icons as they emerged.

This is not to say there have not been attempts to do so. The South African struggle against apartheid is well represented in movies, documentaries, books and web-based content about its prominent leaders and activists. This is primarily a function of that country's ability (to a greater extent) to allow free expression about the liberation struggle. The M-Net African Film Library⁶ has made noble efforts to present the lives of Africa's icons in documentary format, including stellar work on leaders such as Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto and Julius Nyerere. However, I am not sure that this project still has wind in its sails.

Regrettably, and for various reasons, this kind of work has not been done in other African countries on this scale, leading to the erasure of the legacies of true struggle icons by way of censorship and political correctness. That is why there are so few independently published biographies about African liberation icons, let alone feature films or documentaries.⁷

This is not only true of those who are still in power, either as serving presidents or ruling parties. It also includes the lives of smaller actors – the more local icons – in villages where liberation struggles were waged.

Previous arguments against creating a more open and robust discussion on the icons of the liberation struggle held that such stories would be inimical to peace and security. I would argue that the opposite is true. A less fawning manner and more critical cultural content would help to raise young Africans' consciousness, not only to appreciate the importance of liberation struggles as an occurrence but, more significantly, to appreciate the democratic and social-justice values that motivated the struggle against colonialism. This should be



done even if it appears to be a less urgent matter than, say, development issues and climate change.

Our liberation icons remain important – warts and all. They do not need to fade from our continental consciousness of liberation struggle history, nor from the struggles that are continually faced in contemporary times. There must be a continuum of his-

torical representation and imagination of their lives that can capture the increasingly ephemeral attention of young Africans.

Instead of seeking to harness the pan-Africanism of old, this should aim to create a more robust consciousness of the significance of African leaders of the past and of the values and principles that must guide those who would be Africa's future leaders. ■■■

Nyerere's statue in Dodoma, Tanzania.

© Pernille Bærendtsen

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- 1 See: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/15/world/julius-nyerere-of-tanzania-dies-preached-african-socialism-to-the-world.html>.
 - 2 The liberation of the Saharawi people from the Kingdom of Morocco in the northwest of Africa has still not been achieved. Although the African Union has re-admitted Morocco, the issue of the Saharawi Republic is still under mediation: <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Morocco-AU-admission-Sahrawi-division-/2558-3792534-h5u-lux/index.html>.
 - 3 The Medium is the Message: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K06J9v1C9zE>.
 - 4 See: <http://www.africanidea.org/pan-Africanism.html>.
 - 5 The term "organic" is used in a Gramscian sense as it relates to hegemony and counter-hegemony.
 - 6 See: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AfricanFilmLibrary>.
 - 7 South African publisher Jacana Media has an excellent series of pocket biographies and histories related to African liberation movements, co-published with Ohio University Press. See: <http://www.ohioswallow.com/series/Ohio+Short+Histories+of+Africa>.

Mugabe's Legacy: When a Cock Stops Crowing

Brian Raftopoulos

The name of Robert Mugabe is synonymous with both Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and its postcolonial politics. His role and that of his party Zanu-PF have been central to the dynamics of both processes and will mark the legacies of Zimbabwean politics for the foreseeable future. For much of his life as a political figure, Robert Mugabe has often been viewed, in the words of one of his biographers Martin Meredith, as "secretive and solitary", an "aloof and austere figure". However, to speak the name Mugabe is to invoke highly polarised political debates characterised by a raft of tensions – sometimes interchangeable and overlapping, while at other moments forming more lasting binaries – including hope and despair, demonisation and adulation, contempt and fealty, dissent and loyalty. These divisions are constitutive of the violence, fissures and closures that have made up the modalities of Zimbabwe's postcolonial political spectrum and left their painful traces on the political imaginaries of the Zimbabwean citizenry.



Brian Raftopoulos is a Zimbabwean scholar and activist. Formerly a professor of development studies at the University of Zimbabwe, he moved to Cape Town at the end of March 2006 and is currently the director of research and advocacy in the Solidarity Peace Trust/Ukuthula Trust, an NGO dealing with human rights issues in Zimbabwe. He has published widely on Zimbabwean history, labour history, historiography, politics and economic issues.

Early Life and Political Rise

Robert Mugabe was born on 24 February 1924 at Kutama Mission in Zvimba District, west of what was then called Salisbury, the capital of Southern Rhodesia. By many accounts, he was an exceptional student, a loner who preferred the company of books to the camaraderie of his peers and readily imbibed the disciplinary logic of his Jesuit schooling. When Robert was seven,

his father left home to find employment in Bulawayo, remarried, and never returned to his first family. Unsurprisingly, the loss of his father left Mugabe deeply affected.

In 1945, Mugabe left Kutama Mission with a teaching diploma. In 1949, he won a scholarship to Fort Hare University in South Africa, where he interacted with other emerging nationalists and a range of radical ideas. Armed with his degree, Mugabe returned to Southern Rhodesia in 1952 but moved to Lusaka in 1955 to take up a teaching post. In 1958, he moved again, this time to take up another teaching post at Takoradi Teacher Training College in Ghana. In Ghana, Mugabe experienced the thrills, excitement and sense of possibility of a newly independent African state. This was a seminal political moment for him.

Mugabe returned to Southern Rhodesia in 1960 on a long leave to introduce his new wife, Sally Hayfron, to his family. Instead of returning to Ghana, he became involved in the politics of successive nationalist movements, including the turmoil of the split between the two major nationalist parties, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu). In 1963, Mugabe, along with many other nationalist figures, was arrested. He was released during the détente period in 1974 after 14 years in prison.

Mugabe and his colleague Edgar Tekere escaped to Mozambique in 1974 to join the war against Ian Smith's Rhodesian regime that was being conducted from bases in that country. There have been different accounts of Mugabe's rise to the top of the leadership in Mozambique. Wilfred Mhanda, a key liberation-war veteran, was particularly critical of Mugabe's abuse of the trust placed in him



by leading military figures. According to his autobiographical account, *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter*, their support for Mugabe was premised on his commitment to building unity between the rival nationalist movements, a promise that Mugabe reneged on in pursuit of the supremacy of his own party, Zanu. Mhanda writes of their disappointment: “We lived to regret the day we put forward Mugabe’s name”. By 1977, after turmoil in Zanu in the mid-1970s, Mugabe had outmanoeuvred his rivals and established his position as head of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) and its armed wing.

Following the Lancaster House settlement and the 1980 elections, in which Mugabe and Zanu-PF emerged as the dominant party, Mugabe set out his policy of reconciliation with the white population. In effect, this allowed the existing property and economic relations of the Rhodesian period to continue while the politics of state control was transferred to Zanu-PF. This period witnessed the consolidation of Mugabe’s control of both his party and the state. The massive violence perpetrated against Zapu in the Gukurahundi massacres, also signalled that, while these years marked a period of reconciliation with the white population, they also registered Zanu-PF’s violent intolerance of opposition. However, the

1980s were also evidence of Mugabe’s commitment to social policies such as health and education. The expansion in these sectors during this period was second to none on the continent.¹

The Resettlement Campaign

As Zimbabwean politics polarised increasingly during the neoliberal period of the 1990s, and the opposition movement grew in size and influence, both Mugabe’s ideological assertions and his political trajectory became clearer. Facing a real political challenge from an emerging urban-based opposition as well as dissent from the war veterans within his own ranks, Mugabe turned his attention to longstanding grievances around the land question and reconfigured the politics of the state and Zanu-PF. Drawing on a narrative of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism, the Fast Track Resettlement not only radically reconstructed the land relations of the settler-colonial period, it also created a massive rupture in human and redistributive rights. As the politics of the land process unleashed deep questions of citizenship, identity and belonging, Mugabe’s often-valid critique of imperialist duplicity was accompanied by an unacceptable authoritarian intolerance of dissent within Zimbabwe.

Robert Mugabe in the 1980s.
© Paul Weinberg / South Photographs /
Africa Media Online

The armed forces were central to Mugabe's power. From the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the mid-1980s to the violence and coercion against opposition forces in the 2000s, the armed forces ensured Mugabe's long-term repressive rule. These two threads of his politics were inextricably linked and, while some have argued that the land-reform process has provided the potential for future growth, it remains mired in a grim economic environment. For most Zimbabweans, it seemed that Mugabe's rule would only come to an end with his death.

Downfall

In the last few years, an even longer Mugabe dynasty was heralded by his push for his second wife, Grace, to succeed him. In 2014, in a bid to further his wife's ambitions, and with the support of the military, Mugabe arranged the political demise of the favoured contender for his position: Vice-President Joyce Mujuru. Accused of plotting against Mugabe, she was dismissed from her post and replaced by

For many Zimbabweans, Mugabe will remain a contested figure. For those who lived through the humiliations of settler colonialism, his strident critique of its legacies will continue to resonate.

Emmerson Mnangagwa. Mugabe and his wife – now supported and enabled by a faction of Zanu-PF known as the “G40” group, because they represent a younger generation – soon moved against Mnangagwa. He was charged with persistently exhibiting “disloyalty, disrespect, deceitfulness and unreliability” and dismissed from his state and party positions in early November 2017.

The attack on Mnangagwa initiated a dramatic series of events in Zimbabwean politics. In mid-November, following a public warning by the commander of the

Defence Forces, Constantine Chiwenga, that the military would take action against “counter-revolutionaries” in the ruling party, the armed forces moved in and effectively took power away from the executive. In a series of carefully choreographed political moves, this was followed by a massive display of popular support, as well as steps to remove Mugabe, his wife and the G40 group from their positions in the ruling party. This process, which ostensibly provided “constitutionality” to the intervention of the armed forces, was followed by the initiation of a parliamentary impeachment process against Mugabe. On the day the proceedings began, 21 November 2017, Mugabe resigned. Contrary to his belief that he was in control, the military and the ruling party that had sustained his authoritarian politics for close to four decades turned against him. In the end, the dramatic changes in the ruling party resulted in the victory of one faction of the party over another.

For many Zimbabweans, Mugabe will remain a contested figure. For those who lived through the humiliations of settler colonialism, his strident critique of its legacies will continue to resonate. However, his often essentialist and exclusivist assertions of national belonging and his authoritarian intolerance of dissent will be a reminder that an anti-imperialist critique that negates a democratic political project remains unacceptable. In combination with the deep economic crisis over which he presided, it was little surprise that the end of Mugabe's rule was greeted with such momentous national celebration. It appears that many Zimbabweans are prepared to give Mnangagwa, the new president, the benefit of the doubt – at least in the short term. At the same time, the enormous dangers of the precedent that has been set, both by the long-term support of the military for Mugabe's repressive state and the manner in which they intervened to ensure his removal, carry real dangers for the future of democratic alternatives in Zimbabwe. ■■■

¹ It is also interesting to note that David Coltart, a founding member of the Movement for Democratic Change who held the post of education minister during the Government of National Unity between 2009 and 2013, observed that he could always count on Mugabe's support for his programmes during this period.

Popular Versus Official Iconography: The Case of Namibia's Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo

Henning Melber

Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo, a member of Namibia's first "struggle generation", died on 9 June 2017 at the age of 92. Many of his companions, when they moved into office after independence, left behind their declared commitment to the values of equality, democracy and human rights. In contrast, Ya Toivo remained the personification of the desire to live in an independent country governed by and for its people in decency. After his death, this led to a public dispute about who deserves to be elevated to the status of an icon. In Finnish, the word *toivo* fittingly means "hope". Ya Toivo's example shows that iconography can be a matter of controversy between the people and those who govern.

Ya Toivo's Way to Robben Island

Ya Toivo was raised in northern Namibia (then South West Africa), a region then called Ovamboland. While working in Cape Town in the early 1950s, he became politically active through contact with the African National Congress (ANC) and started to mobilise Namibian contract workers. In 1958, he managed to dispatch a tape-recorded message regarding human rights violations in South African-occupied South West Africa that was used in a petition at the United Nations. He was subsequently deported back to Ovamboland where he became involved in the formation of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO).

Despite his reservations as regards the

timing and success of military action, he was involved in the preparations for armed struggle. He was arrested and, along with 36 others, put on trial in Pretoria under South Africa's Terrorism Act. His defiant speech from the dock on 1 February 1968 became a lasting document of Namibian aspirations for freedom:

We are Namibians and not South Africans. We do not now, and will not in the future, recognise your right to govern us, to make laws for us in which we have no say; to treat our country as if it were your property and us as if you were our masters. We have always regarded South Africa as an intruder in our country. This is how we have always felt and this is how we feel now, and it is on this basis that we have faced this trial.¹

Thanks to international pressure, the accused were spared the death penalty but Ya Toivo and several others were sentenced to 20 years imprisonment on Robben Island. His defiance, stubbornness and resilience made him the most respected Namibian prisoner:

In prison Toivo was unbending, seizing every opportunity to show his disdain for his jailors. A fellow prisoner described the scene when Toivo [*sic*] responded to his treatment by a young warder: "Andimba unleashed a hard open-hand smack on the young warder's cheek, sending [his] cap flying and [the warder] wailing (in Afrikaans), 'The kaffir hit me.'" The inevitable spell of solitary confinement followed. When Toivo



Henning Melber is senior research associate of the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria and the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, and has been the Van Zyl Slabbert Visiting Professor at the University of Cape Town. He is a member of SWAPO since 1974.



Ya Toivo and friends from the international solidarity movement celebrate Namibia's independence on 20 March 1990. The official ceremony took place elsewhere in Windhoek.

© Henning Melber

was released in March 1984, short of his full term, he refused to leave his fellow prisoners and had to be coaxed out of his cell.²

Andimba and Madiba (Nelson Mandela) had more in common than a striking similarity of the letters in their names. They remained friends for the rest of their lives.

Into Namibian Independence

When Ya Toivo was released from prison, the leadership positions in SWAPO were firmly occupied. Unable or unwilling to offer him anything with a higher rank, SWAPO created the administrative post of secretary-general, keeping him outside of the consolidated inner circle of power. He humbly accepted what was mainly a symbolic position to represent SWAPO internationally.

After independence was won in 1990, Ya Toivo served in cabinet as minister of mines and energy (1990–1999), minister of labour (1999–2002) and minister of prison and correctional services (2002–2006). The declining relevance of his portfolios suggested that his political weight in the party and

government was marginal. Power politics was a strange thing for him: what mattered was the party and the people. He realised that the two were not identical. Speaking for the last time in the National Assembly on 16 March 2005, he reminded his comrades:

Being a member of parliament or even a minister should not be seen as an opportunity to achieve status, to be addressed as “honourables” and to acquire riches. If those are your goals, you would do better to pursue other careers.³

A decade later, in a 2014 video interview with South Africa's *City Press*, he commented on the values of the Freedom Charter and the current ANC leadership, quipping that the struggle was “not just for you people to fill your pockets”.⁴

Ya Toivo and Namibian Politics

Ya Toivo's enormous popularity surfaced as the news of his death spread like wildfire. For many, it symbolised the end of an era that was marked by a person's moral integrity and commitment to true libera-

tion in the service of the ordinary people. In this view, learning from the past would mean not reproducing similar injustices or inequalities or disrespect for others under a new regime. Such a strong moral compass would remain fixed on loyalty to the people. Referring to his example, a reader wrote to *The Namibian* newspaper:

Namibian government leaders, you must honour Ya Toivo's memory by stopping corruption and exploiting your positions to get richer; eradicate poverty and unemployment. Live humbly not in super luxury and make the best use of Namibia's rich resources to uplift the lives of the have-nots.⁵

It is impossible to assess how much of this was a projection motivated by anger with the new elite, but Ya Toivo was popularly advanced as the preferred icon of the Namibian nation. The praise culminated in references to him as Namibia's "founding father" – but the official historiography had not designated such a title for him. When First Lady Monica Geingos criticised this sentiment as "dishonest" and an "undignified way" to behave⁶, she provoked furious responses from Namibians:

Is it the First Lady's position to accord the title of the founding father of the nation to anyone or to cement the status to the first President or are her sentiments expressed entirely out of fear of the unknown? Every Namibian has the right to their opinion about who deserves to be the founding father, hence I stick with Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, the man deserved the title and rightfully so.

Madam First Lady, please spare us the fake details you want to refresh our minds with about the founding father of the nation that we don't want. We know too well it's Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. Why don't you want the truth to be spoken?

Dear First Lady, please stay in your lane. Leave politics to the politicians. Or are you aspiring to become the Namibian Grace Mugabe?⁷

The dispute indicates a rift in the official patriotic history cultivated by SWAPO. Notably, while being recognised as a true freedom fighter, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo had never been pictured wearing a combat uniform. However, if independence is understood as a personal and collective emancipation from discrimination and injustice, one is tempted to suggest that, in the end, the soft-spoken but firm Ya Toivo represented a more determined militancy than most others in the independence struggle. The countrywide mourning was testimony that Ya Toivo deserved recognition beyond the heroic narrative constructed to legitimise the government's continued execution of power over – but hardly for – the ordinary people. Rather, his enduring integrity and principled values were the reference point for many to distinguish him from his comrades in government.

As this example seems to suggest, people can use iconography as a form of dissent and protest against a dominant narrative. The popular icon is elevated as the embodiment of values the people want to see represented in government, in contrast to the imposed iconography, which may not last forever – as illustrated by the recent example of Robert Mugabe. ■■■

- 1 The full speech was reproduced in a special supplement in *The Namibian*, "In honour of a legend", on the occasion of Ya Toivo's 90th birthday on 22 August 2014. Available at www.scribd.com/document/306287947/In-Honour-of-a-Legend-Andimba-ya-Toivo-at-90 [accessed 23 June 2017].
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- 3 "Toivo's message to Namibia and the world", *The Namibian*, 23 June 2017. Available at www.namibian.com.na/56028/read/Toivos-message--to-Namibia--and-the-world# [accessed 28 July 2017].
- 4 "We did not struggle for you to loot' – Toivo ya Toivo", *The Citizen*, 17 October 2014. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j2xcFEJK9U [accessed 28 July 2017].
- 5 "OAP", "SMS of the Day", *The Namibian*, 28 June 2017. Available at www.namibian.com.na/SMSes/0/2017-06-28 [accessed 28 July 2017].
- 6 Ndanki Kahiurika, "Nujoma is founding father – Geingos", *The Namibian*, 29 June 2017. Available at www.namibian.com.na/166322/archive-read/Nujoma-is-founding-father-%E2%80%93-Geingos [accessed 9 October 2017].
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Icons For My Daughters

Interview

Fatou Kandé Senghor is a Senegalese artist and filmmaker. Born into a family of diplomats, she grew up in various African countries in the 1970s and 1980s. In this interview, she talks about the pan-African icons of her youth, the icons of Senegalese society, and the difficulties of passing on their lessons to her daughters in the digitalised and globalised 21st century.

Perspectives: What or who is an African icon for you?

Kandé: I grew up with a lot of icons – and thinking of African icons reminds me of a quote by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: "Since culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition." Although born in the 1970s, when most colonies were already independent, I remember how I was often trapped in the Western gaze. Luckily, as a daughter of travellers, I got to know Africa better.

While living in Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon, the suffocating experience of successive military dictatorships, lifetime presidents and traditional chiefs made me and my siblings look up to popular icons who changed the stories of their countries and people in a more positive way. Iconic figures that united us with the rest of the globe, such as Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya, Amílcar Cabral from Cape Verde, Patrice Lumumba from Congo, the boxer Muhammad Ali from the US, Steve Biko from South Africa, Thomas Sankara from Burkina Faso. And of course, Nelson Mandela, who was in the shadows for twenty-seven years before his face conquered the world.



Fatoumata Bintou Kandé, better known as Fatou Kandé Senghor, is an artist and filmmaker of documentaries, drama and television series. She also trains young people in film-making. Her latest film, "Giving Birth", a portrait of the mystical Senegalese sculptor Seni Awa Camara, was presented at the Venice Biennale. She has written articles on gender, urban cultures and African cinema. In 2015, she published *Wala Bok*, an oral history of Senegalese hip-hop. Fatou Kandé Senghor lives and works in Thies, Senegal.

Today you live in the country of your birth again. Who are the icons of Senegal?

When you arrive at the international airport, you are introduced to its namesake Leopold Sedar Senghor as the country's icon of choice – whether you agree with it or not. He was of course remarkable: a young Roman Catholic who became the first president of a country with 90 percent Muslims, and yet he was able to give the independent Senegalese nation a new political life. It was also Senghor who created a concept called *négritude*, or the essence of blackness. He organised the famous World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar celebrating blackness for the world to see the contributions of the black man to civilisation.

At the doors of the airport you will bump into a very different type



of icon, a “Ndiaga Ndiaye”, a Mercedes-Benz 508d bus named after a local businessman who was born in 1931. Ndiaye changed public transportation with his bold character when the national transport company, SOTRAC, was not serving places where workers lived. Over the past fifty years, he managed to impose his name on Mercedes-built vehicles transporting the nation. Ndiaga Ndiaye is a perfect example of what a local icon is. His busses have been decorated with a silver sticker of the queen-of-pop Madonna amid images of powerful religious icons, Islamic prayers, and other quotes of wisdom.

Cars rapides, the local minibus taxis, are also important national icons. They were produced in France’s Renault factories between 1945 and 1965, and reinvented by their Senegalese owners, who decorate them in very bright colours and other accessories. As much as they are feared on the road for their bad driving habits, they are Senegal’s pride. In a *car rapide*, you get to fully experience the rhythm of the country, the pulse of its people. Inside, photos of wrestlers, soccer players, singers, wives, and cousins who emigrated cohabit with images of religious patrons. They will pass you by jampacked with people and drums accompanying their favourite wrestlers to the arena. Wrestlers like Balla Gaye 2, Yékini and Tyson are another crop of Senegalese icons, enjoying the status of warriors and living legends, with their fans ready to die for them.

Cars rapides, the local minibus taxis, are important national icons.
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Being an artist yourself, which Senegalese artists do you look up to?

When we were students abroad, it was Youssou N’Dour – a young singer from Medina, a thriving populous area in Dakar – who kept our hearts beating to the drums of the *mbalax* music. He comforted us

that a young Senegalese could conquer the world, if one's dreams are genuine enough. He is an undeniable iconic figure, a global celebrity introducing local Senegalese music to the world.

Another great iconic figure dominates our film history: Ousmane Sembène. Sembène was self-taught and ambitious. He travelled the world and started writing novels in 1956. Because he had so much to share with his continent, he attended film school in Moscow at the age of forty in order to reach larger audiences. He blessed us with great films until he passed away ten years ago. When I first met him in his office in Dakar, he asked me which religious brotherhood I belonged to before letting me sit down. I was part of none; it amused him and he answered, "It won't be for long". I did not say I had great admiration for the Baye Fall.

Who are the Baye Fall?

It is a religious brotherhood that can be traced back to Ibrahima Fall. He was one of the first followers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba who founded the Mouride Brotherhood in 1883. Ibrahima Fall's followers – the "Baye Fall" – have a special way of practicing Islam. Wearing dreadlocks and colourful dresses, they are important guardians of Sufi practice. Among the four Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, the Mouride Brotherhood is the biggest. Until today Cheikh Amadou Bamba is one of the favourite icons for Senegalese youth. Conscious of the influence of his teachings on people, he was exiled by the French. The admiration for his knowledge and wisdom, his generosity and simplicity that have drawn followers in great numbers to him in the past is reviving. Today, the Mourides are a powerful community, spread all over the world, that Senegalese politicians value highly.

In fact, my favourite icons are all the women of the past and present that contribute to the wellbeing of Senegal. Their stories are pushed to the sidelines by portraying them as supporters of their men, even though they have been true change-agents.

All the popular icons you have mentioned thus far are men. What about female icons?

There are many of them, millions if you like. Their stories are hidden, though, and more difficult to relate. In fact, my favourite icons are all the women of the past and present that contribute to the wellbeing of Senegal. Their stories are pushed to the sidelines by portraying them as supporters of their men, even though they have been true change-agents. In the 19th century, women in the northern Senegalese village of Nder refused to be captured by the Maures and Toukoleur kings, setting their village and themselves on fire. Aline Sitoe Diatta is another remarkable example of female resistance, in this instance to colonial rule in the southern region of Senegal. She was deported to Timbuktu where she died in 1944 at the young age of 24. The public memory has also forgotten to mention that women followed the famous Senegalese corps of colonial infantry in the French army known as *les tirailleurs sénégalais* that served in both World Wars. They catered for their wellbeing, and loaded guns in the trenches. While on the move, they carried the kitchen utensils and the heavy gunpowder. Another often unnoted chapter is that of Sukeyna Konaré, who led the first female political organisation that fought to give all the women on French territory the right to vote in 1944. In May 1945, an official bill was passed by the French metropolis. In the 1950s, a powerful women's union sent Rose Basse to a meeting in Cotonou, Benin, where the future of Africa was discussed by its leaders prior to facing General de Gaulle to tell

Aline Sitoe Diatta was a Senegalese heroine of the opposition to the French colonial empire often called the Joan of Arc or the Marianne of Senegal.



him what they wanted for the future of the colonies. In her speech, Rose Basse was the one who clearly used the word “independence”. All those women are too often forgotten.

Many of the icons you mentioned are icons from the past. Can they be sustained into the future?

I am 46, with daughters who are digital natives and Africans of Islamic faith. I chose to throw the anchor in Senegal to watch them grow and groom them into the different narratives of the continent, the continent I have travelled and know so dearly with all its flaws. Yet I am often asking myself, “What could I possibly pass on to their generation? What should I share with them, how, when and why in this globalised world of modern technologies?”

My three daughters seem to be colour- and gender-blind, more confident and tolerant than me. However, I am not sure whether my attempts to teach them about pan-Africanism, Sufism or feminism have delivered good results.

Every now and then, as my nine-year-old would part from her television to come to me for a quick hug, I ask, “You know who Bob Marley is, right?”, and she would answer, “A football player? A basketball player?” My consolation is that his music has been sampled by

a number of DJs and MCs all over the world that my daughters follow on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook – and that a nine-year-old is not a good barometer.

When I read African authors like Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Maryse Condé, Ken Bugul, Boubacar Boris Diop, when I watch films by African filmmakers Abderrahmane Sissako, Ousmane Sembène, Souleymane Cissé, I cannot stop thinking about my daughters.

I keep on trying to introduce them to all my icons, especially the forgotten women of our country. Because if I don’t, my daughters would miss out on chapters that had so much impact and that show them about the women they could become in their families, their communities, their schools and their country. What future awaits us, if my daughters would be only exposed to women who gave birth to iconic religious figures, and those who bore heirs for them in a country still looking for saints and miracles, while global television and social media only presents them Kim Kardashian, Nicky Minaj and Rihanna? Wouldn’t the whole world be in danger? ■■■

My three daughters seem to be colour- and gender-blind, more confident and tolerant than me. However, I am not sure whether my attempts to teach them about pan-Africanism, Sufism or feminism have delivered good results.

To Define a Continent By Its Icons Diminishes Its Politics and Its People

Mary C. Curtis

Life is complicated. That is why too many people turn to stereotypes and exceptional examples to define a country, its politics and people. Though this tendency is universal, it has had a pernicious durability when it comes to the continent of Africa.

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie distilled this phenomenon in her 2009 TED talk, “The Danger of a Single Story”, which considered the perils and misconceptions that result when, for instance, the continent of Africa signifies only poverty, disease and political dysfunction, crowding out countless individual and pertinent stories. Adichie does not spare herself and openly refers to the occasions when such assumptions have led her down an incorrect, incomplete narrative path.

Ironically, Adichie herself has become an icon: “the African author in the spotlight” – the light that at other times has shone on Chinua Achebe or Wole Soyinka, for example. That spotlight is fickle, and has room for only one at a time. It is a pattern that holds across categories, be it music (Fela), acting (Lupita Nyong’o) or – most importantly – politics, where much is at stake, from trade to aid to global policy.

By making anyone bigger than the truth – and impervious to it – the story of progress and setbacks is simplified, and rendered useless. During my trip to South Africa in early 2017, the late icon Nelson Mandela was still at the centre of so much contemplation. He was the leader against whom all others were (and are) judged, to some extent. Does that larger-than-life iconic status – well deserved, to be sure – serve to keep frozen some aspects of life as it is lived across the continent?

Another danger of putting faith in one iconic figure is the temptation to look for – to wait for – that saviour to appear almost miraculously, ready, willing and able to solve any problem and make every life more meaningful. Of course, true progress comes with cooperation and often does not need a leader.

Nelson Mandela as Africa

You cannot escape the outsized influence of Nelson Mandela – not only in the story of South Africa, but in any story of the continent. When I visited the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, his visage and wise quotes could be spotted at the entrance and throughout the building: “To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

Mandela’s influence extends to the world. When white supremacists and neo-Nazis led a violence-fuelled march in the college town of Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, former U.S. President Barack Obama – himself a true African American whose father was born in Kenya – turned to Mandela’s words for the much-loved tweet: “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion...”

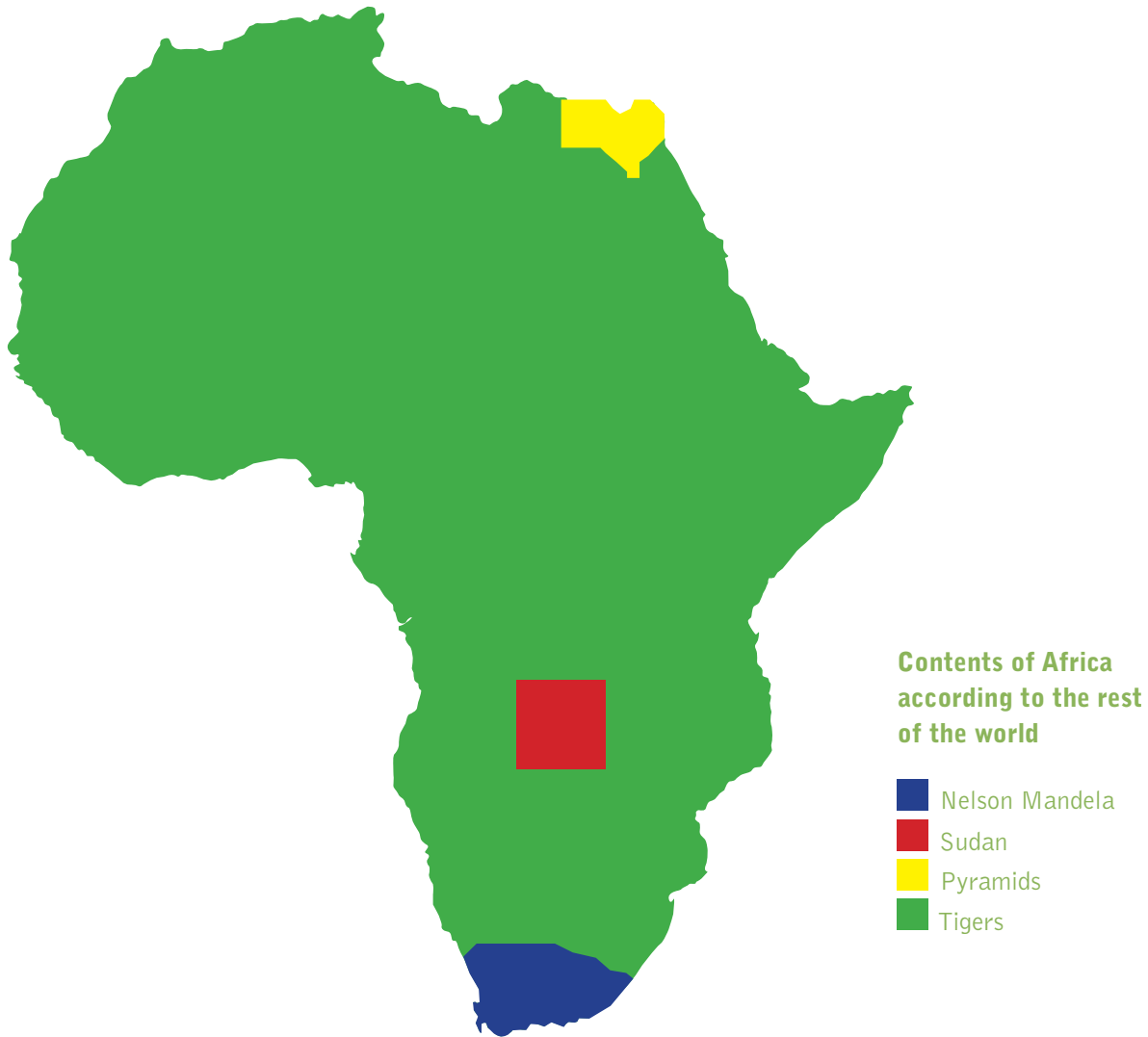
It went on: “People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love...”

“...For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

The Apartheid Museum does not ignore the stories of other heroes of the movement, including Desmond Tutu, Walter and Albertina Sisulu, and Joe Slovo. But the fact that



Mary C. Curtis is an award-winning journalist and educator based in Charlotte, North Carolina. She has worked at *The New York Times*, the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the Associated Press and AOL’s Politics Daily, covering politics, culture and race. Curtis is Senior Leader with The OpEd Project at Yale University, Cornell University, Ford Foundation and Aspen New Voices in Johannesburg, South Africa. She was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and Kiplinger Fellow at Ohio State University.



Mandela's story is told in complex detail only strengthens the man's iconic, almost supernatural, status. How could one accomplish so much, suffer through so much, live through so much and come out on the other side a statesman and a leader?

Yes, his longevity is one part of it. In his case, we see the arc of a life and a cause come to fruition. So many, like Steve Biko, were killed before they could fulfil their own promise and that of their country. Others, like Hector Pieterse and the many young people who were killed, jailed or disappeared during apartheid, never even had a chance at life.

But ask those outside of Africa to name an icon and Mandela comes to mind first. The world saw Mandela emerge from his Robben Island prison, touched by age and grey, with a constant smile and universally relatable visage. He was unthreatening, too – which is how many prefer those they honour. He was father and grandfather, the man

By making anyone bigger than the truth – and impervious to it – the story of progress and setbacks is simplified, and rendered useless.

who talked to his jailers with compassion. The rough edges that had been smoothed out made him even more interesting. He suffered pain and hurt, the death of family members, including a son from AIDS, giving him a chance to break new ground by talking about it, thus cementing his legacy.

But treating him as an untouchable icon diminishes the potentially valuable lesson that anyone – any man, woman or child – can play an outsized role in a family, community or society. If the point is that no one can match the accomplishments of such an icon, or that any human being is perfect, the effect is stifling.

Africa is More Than One Country

Africa is more than one country. That seems a silly statement to have to make, but this one word often evokes an image that ignores the diversity of peoples, landscapes, political systems, music styles, etc. that gives each country on the continent its distinctive individuality. Each country also has a history. But many people, especially those looking on from afar, do not have the time or rigour to investigate it. It is also a problem when these histories have been written by colonisers, the victors who can shape a narrative to their advantage.

When people are looking for Africa's "next Mandela", the truth is hard to see. From the historic presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia to the complicated legacy of Paul Kagame in Rwanda to the recent disputed elections in Kenya, the story is not about "Africa"; it is about individual countries and their relations with each other and within the global community.

Some in the West did put Sirleaf on that pedestal. One may suspect that this was as much for her Harvard connection as for her recognition of the challenges facing her country's health systems, even more so in the wake of the Ebola crisis.

In the Diaspora, the Problem Persists

This tendency to frame a people in the shape of an icon is not just an African phenomenon. It provides a sort of shorthand for any place that is unfamiliar. But it has a particular edge when referring to people of colour, as though a leader is needed to identify groups it would take too much effort to distinguish as individuals.

In the United States, African Americans know this well. So many who do not know or understand our long history use the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. as a touchstone. If only there were another King, they muse (or scold), African Americans would be organised, satisfied and peaceful, and would behave in an acceptable way even when

demanding civil rights and an equal place in America.

This nostalgic view ignores the fact that King was never universally popular. His "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" admonished his fellow pastors – white clergy – who opposed the civil rights struggle for pushing too much too fast. After he spoke against the Vietnam War, some of his supporters abandoned him.

In death, King became a martyr and, yes, an icon. But to the extent that the icon was moulded and shaped to serve the beliefs of others, his righteous demands for justice took a backseat to his words of reconciliation. Those who knew the man and appreciated his message knew that its complexity made it more powerful.

Why It Matters

Everyone and every place needs its heroes, to celebrate and to give hope. But awareness is also essential, to know that these important symbols can be both brilliant and flawed, and that they were supported by others whose names and contributions must not be lost.

The notion of a single person, a single icon, poses a danger, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says in her own, yes, "iconic" words:

Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes. There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo, and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5 000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasises how we are different rather than how we are similar. ■■■

Remembering Amadou Hampâté Bâ

Abdourahman A. Waberi

What do a university in Dakar, a university in Abidjan, a research programme at the University of Nantes, a national performing arts centre in Bamako, a middle school in Niger and a square in the 10th arrondissement of Paris have in common? Guess! The answer consists of three words: Amadou Hampâté Bâ. If the list above is far from complete, it must be recognised that Amadou Hampâté Bâ is one of these rare beings that Providence endowed with seven lives, endeavouring to pass on the legacies of the past. Woven into the works of great ancestral word-smiths, his oeuvre is the seismograph of human wisdoms and divine signs. Successively a writer, storyteller, poet, ethnologist, spiritual leader, numerologist and diplomat, Amadou Hampâté Bâ was in constant dialogue with young people from the continent.

Family Epic

Called Amkoullé, a nickname given to him by his relatives, Amadou was born in Mali (then French Sudan) at the beginning of the year 1900 in the city of Bandiagara, close to the cliffs of Dogon Country. His biography is an epic novel, as recounted in his posthumously published memoir.¹

The two branches of his family belong to two important but opposing lines in the history of the former Peul Empire of Macina. Young Amadou's childhood was marked by the echo of fratricidal wars, family dramas and the colonial conquest. After losing his father at the age of three, he found solace with his mother Kadidja and Tidiani Ama-

dou Thiam, his mother's second husband who raised him as his own son, and his relatives:

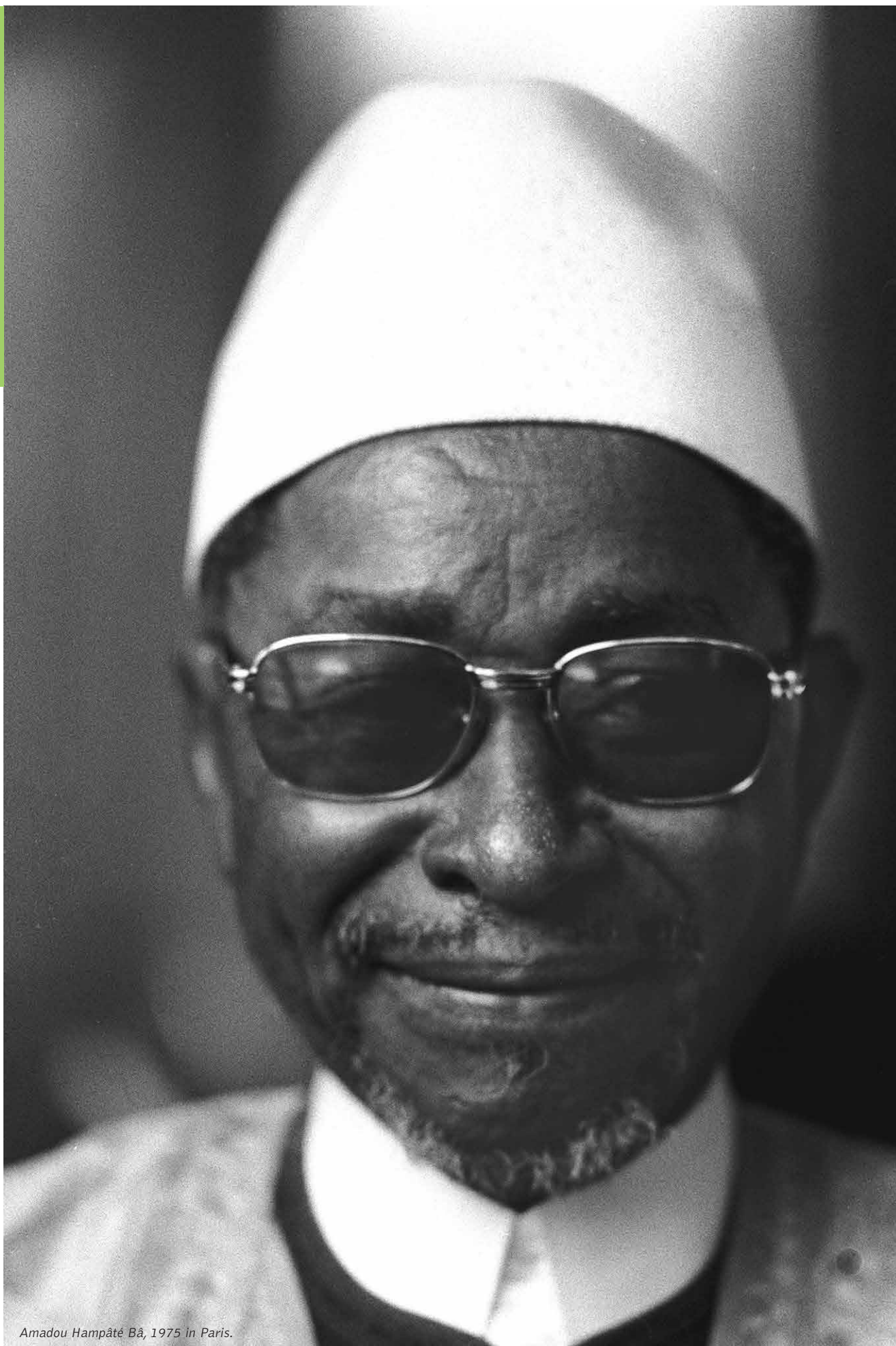
I have no memory of my father, because I had unfortunately only spent three years in this stormy world where, like a piece of calabash carried away by the river, I was to float along in step with the political or religious events brought about by the colonial presence.

Amkoullé's eventful life is a leap in the great history that naturally occupies an important place in his memoirs. Yet beyond the milestones and adventures, what must be retained from his 850-page memoir are the very rich teachings, initiations and experiences that Amkoullé had the privilege of receiving and endeavoured to pass on to others throughout his life.

Any great man is the product of many confrontations and multiple influences, and the author of *The Strange Fate of Wangrin*² is no exception to the rule. Because he stood up to an arbitrary administrative decision, his professional career did not get off to a smooth start. As punishment, the governor sent him to take up a post as a "temporary writer on an interim and special basis" in a most remote area of the Upper Volta. However, what was an arbitrary and unfair sanction transformed itself into a wonderful opportunity. On a professional level, Amkoullé gained in-depth knowledge of the colonial system: after all, he was not only the interpreter, "the Commander's mouth", but also "his pen and pencil". On a personal level, the young clerk discovered himself, established numerous contacts with elders, and opened his heart and wings far and



Abdourahman A. Waberi is a critically-acclaimed writer born in what is today the Republic of Djibouti. His work has been translated into a multitude of languages. A current columnist for the French newspaper *Le Monde*, he teaches French and Francophone Literature and Creative Writing at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.



Amadou Hampâté Bâ, 1975 in Paris.

wide. An autodidact, he was continuously alert and curious, learning everything from everybody. Later on, he would say of himself, “I graduated from the great university of the spoken word taught in the shade of baobab trees”.

Spiritual Son of Tierno Bokar

If one element of the atypical journey of Amadou Hampâté Bâ must be remembered, it was his bond with another great man: Tierno Salif Bokar. Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ was the spiritual son of Tierno Bokar, his master and guide who would make him understand the true meaning of the mysteries on this earth. Having walked along the less travelled and the usual paths to access higher spheres of religious and spiritual knowledge, Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ was always open to dialogue, irrespective of the beliefs, knowledge, function or moral and spiritual influence of his interlocutors.

In 1939, devastated by the passing of Tierno Bokar, whose death he considered almost as his own, he was ready to devote himself fulltime to the transmission of his legacy and gathering of oral knowledge. He would again be faced with difficulties: the colonial administration and traditional religious establishment condemned him for belonging to a branch of the Tidjaniya Islamic brotherhood, deemed to be anti-French. He narrowly escaped deportation. Professor Théodore Monod welcomed him to the French Institute for Black Africa (IFAN) in Dakar. The appointment was a promotion but also a way to protect him from harassment. In 1944, he presented *Kaïdara*, a prose text of the Peul initiation tale, which made the academic world recognise him for the first time.

The rest is a history known to all West African scholars: his training with Monod, his links with the major French Africanists (Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Louis Massignon), his election to the executive board of UNESCO, his friendship with the Ivorian president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Posterity has especially retained his role as a tireless defender of African cultures.

His advocacy for the collection and conservation of African traditional knowledge remains a great event for all people of goodwill. In 1960, the native from Bandiagara sounded the alarm at UNESCO: “Since we have admitted that the humanity of each

people is the heritage of all mankind, if African traditions are not collected on time and written down on paper, they will be missing one day in the universal archives of humanity”.

His support for the cause of oral tradition was not rhetorical. Amadou Hampâté Bâ lived his entire life in humility and modesty, respecting the Peul code. He was known to be tolerant, respectful and generous. He was equally indifferent to praise as to criticism. Better still, he did not take anything seriously, poking fun at everything and himself first of all. When he was given the honorific “Hampâté Bâ the Wise”, he burst into laughter.

An autodidact, he was continuously alert and curious, learning everything from everybody. Later on, he would say of himself, “I graduated from the great university of the spoken word taught in the shade of baobab trees”.

I can assure you that reading his memoir will also leave you, the reader, affected, seduced and shaken by this great African thinker and universal humanist. And a happy man at that: “If you are looking for a man, come to me. I will dance with buffoons, I will speak with vagabonds”.

A Beacon for the Youth

At a time when the whole of Africa finds itself threatened by the terrorist hydra that proclaims Islam, and when some young people no longer hide their distress, it would not go amiss to cast a glance backwards to reconnect with the legacy of elders who were always willing to give advice and provide other life lessons.

Six years prior to his death in 1991, the great Malian wrote an open letter addressed to “The Youth”³, which today touches us even more vigorously. It teaches us cardinal virtues such as open-mindedness, patience, tolerance and humility. The author of the letter is presented as a simple collector of light and not as a great man protected by his knowledge or his advanced age:

The one who is speaking to you is one of the first people to be born in the twentieth century. He has therefore lived a long time and, as you can imagine, has heard and seen

a great deal from across the world. However, he does not claim to be a master of anything. Above all, he wanted to be an eternal researcher, an eternal student, and still today his thirst for knowledge is as strong as it was in the early days.

After painting a broad picture of his long years of learning and numerous travels in Africa, Europe and the rest of the world, he shares his first lesson: Young people, always strive to understand people and seek mutual understanding by every means! Instead of our differences separating us from others, they will become sources of complemen-

Amadou Hampâté Bâ pulls out one of the vivid images he secretly had up his boubou's sleeve: "Much as a carpet's beauty depends on the variety of its colours, the diversity of humans, cultures and civilisations makes the world beautiful and rich. How boring and monotonous a uniform world would be."

tarity and mutual enrichment. Amadou Hampâté Bâ pulls out one of the vivid images he secretly had up his boubou's sleeve: "Much as a carpet's beauty depends on the variety of its colours, the diversity of humans, cultures and civilisations makes the world beautiful and rich. How boring and monotonous a uniform world would be."

From recognising interdependence and the spirit of tolerance and solidarity, the Malian savant then invites the youth to take only one step with enthusiasm:

Young people, as the last-born of the twentieth century, you live at a time that is frightening because of

the threats weighing on humanity, and exciting because of the opportunities that are opened up in the field of knowledge and communication between people... Traditional civilisation was, after all, a civilisation of responsibility and solidarity at all levels... Never a woman, child, patient or old man would have been left to live on the margins of society, like a spare part.

Our peoples, he writes, worked out a fine human science where humans were not separated from the natural environment as is the case today everywhere in the world:

Humans were also considered as responsible for the balance of the natural world around them. They were forbidden from cutting a tree for no reason, or killing an animal without valid reason. Land did not belong to them but was entrusted to them by the Creator as a sacred trust to be managed.

The multifaceted crisis currently faced by our planet does not come out of the blue. It is a consequence of the divorce between humans and nature in which humans strive to dominate at any cost whatsoever. The Malian visionary invites us to question the dominant and destructive way of living: "The good gardener is not the one who uproots, but the one who, at the right time, knows to prune dead branches and, if necessary, to carefully make useful grafts."

Now is the time for everyone, young and old alike, to read this valuable letter, and to continue to unravel the valuable lessons lavished by the sage of Bandiagara.⁴ ■■■

* Translated from French by Nathalie Heynderickx

*The original article, "Amadou Hampâté Bâ, puits de sagesse pour la jeunesse africaine", is available at <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201711020412.html>.

1 Bâ, Amadou Hampâté (2012), *Mémoires*, Paris: Actes Sud.

2 *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* (1973): https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27%C3%89trange_Destin_de_Wangrin.

3 It can be read here: <http://www.deslettres.fr/damadou-hampate-ba-jeunesse-soyez-au-service-vie/>.

4 For a complete overview of the oeuvre of Amadou Hampâté Bâ in English, see: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/amadou-hampate-ba>.

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Southern Africa Office

Vunani Chambers
33 Church Street,
Cape Town, South Africa

T: +27 – 21 – 4616266
E: info@za.boell.org
I: www.za.boell.org

East & Horn of Africa Office

Prof. Wangari Maathai Road
PO Box 10799-00100 GPO
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T: +254 – 20 – 3750329
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Nigeria Office

93 Obafemi Awolowo Way
Jabi District
Abuja, Nigeria

T: +234– 80– 99905176
E: info@ng.boell.org
I: www.ng.boell.org

Senegal Office

109, Rue Carnot
x Mass Diokhane
Dakar, Senegal

T: +221 33 889 96 05
E: info@sn.boell.org

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About the Cover Artist

Kudzanai Chiurai was born in 1981 in Harare, Zimbabwe where he currently lives and works. His work is focused on tracing the trajectory of political, economic and social conditions in his homeland from colonialism and independence, to the present day.

Chiurai completed a BA Fine Arts degree from the University of Pretoria (2005) and remained resident in South Africa for several years where he held numerous solo exhibitions with Goodman Gallery, accompanied by publications he co-edited with leading African thinkers and creatives. Notable international exhibitions include *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited* curated by Simon Njami at Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2014) and SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah USA (2015); *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (2011), which acquired Chiurai's work for their collection; and *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2011).

