



STRUGGLES FOR DECOLONIZATION BY AFRICA, FROM CHINUA ACHEBE TO NELSON MANDELA

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Abstract

This paper commemorates the large historical lives of Chinua Achebe and Nelson Mandela, both of whom died in 2013. It is noted that the nature of African and world reactions to the deaths of the two men undoubtedly reflected their different biographies, the relative valuations of the political and the artistic in the popular imagination, the oscillation of ideas and action in the praxis and political economy of social struggle, and the assorted demands and terms of literary and political combat. It is argued that underlying the different remembrances were the thick braids of the twists and turns of modern African history, of the continent's struggles for the triple dreams of African nationalism--decolonization, democracy, and development--that intersected the lives of the two men. Achebe's and Mandela's significance arises out of the manner in which their stories embodied and bore witness to Africa's protracted drama for historical and humanistic agency, for the reclamation, reconstitution, reaffirmation, and self-representation of Africa and its peoples from the existential, economic, and epistemic violence of Europe that began with the depravities of the Atlantic slave trade and intensified with the depredations of colonialism. Also, their lifetimes reflected the profound complexities, contradictions, and changes of colonial and postcolonial Africa, the development of African worlds--its cultures, arts, politics, economies, societies, and ecologies--out of the interconnections, intersectional ties, and intertextualities of Africa and Europe, as well as Africa and the world mediated by the diaspora and globalization. The essay explores the historical journeys and meanings of Achebe's and Mandela's lives placed in the expansive context of African nationalism. In this intriguing story, their two countries bookend each other.

Full Text

The deaths of Chinua Achebe and Nelson Mandela in 2013 marked the passing of two large historical lives that embodied Africa's long twentieth century in all its complexities and contradictions, tragedies, and triumphs, its enduring struggles and endearing dreams, perils, and possibilities. There was an outpouring of mourning, celebration, and commentary around Africa and the world that was unprecedented for an African writer and an African leader. When Achebe died on March 21, 2013, at the age of 82, he was remembered as an African literary titan, a

towering man of letters, the father of modern African literature (Frederick), a beacon of moral clarity and intellectual integrity, Africa's greatest storyteller ("Chinua Achebe"), a champion of Africa and its creative pulse, Africa's voice and Nigeria's conscience, and an exemplary writer, activist, teacher, and critic who mentored generations of African writers and gave young writers permission to dream . The funeral of the revered writer was a national event, attended by the presidents of Nigeria and Ghana and other political dignitaries with all the pompous grandeur beloved by the Nigerian elite that he so sternly despised and denounced.

Mandela's death on December 5, 2013, at the age of 95, elicited even greater global attention. It was greeted with glowing tributes from world leaders and major magazines and newspapers carried special features on his extraordinary life and legacy. He was showered with lavish praise as a great man, a colossus and conscience of his nation and the world for his magnanimity, moral courage, and dignity; for his resilience, patience, and passion; for his charisma, charm, regal countenance, and common touch; for his humility, visionary, and political brilliance; and, above all, for his spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, believed to be the driving force behind the South African "miracle" that steered that beloved country from the abyss of a racial bloodbath. Dozens of countries declared days of mourning. His memorial service was one of the largest in history, attended by fifty-two current presidents and sixteen prime ministers, scores of former leaders, and a who's who of world power and celebrity.

The nature of African and world reactions to the deaths of the two men undoubtedly reflected their different biographies, the relative valuations of the political and the artistic in the popular imagination, the oscillation of ideas and action in the praxis and political economy of social struggle, and the assorted demands and terms of literary and political combat. One was a Nigerian writer and literary icon, the other a South African politician and an iconic statesman; one died in the diaspora where he spent long stretches of his adult life, the other in his homeland from which he was isolated for decades; one spent twenty-three years in partial physical paralysis from an automobile accident, the other twenty-seven years in the imposed incarceration of apartheid jails. But the thick braids of the twists and turns of modern African history, of the continent's struggles for the triple dreams of African nationalism--decolonization, democracy, and development--also intersected their lives. Achebe's and Mandela's significance arises out of the manner in which their stories embodied and bore witness to Africa's protracted drama for historical and humanistic agency, for the reclamation, reconstitution, reaffirmation, and self-representation of Africa and its peoples from the existential, economic, and epistemic violence of Europe that began with the depravities of the Atlantic slave trade and intensified with the depredations of colonialism. Also, their 11 fetimes reflected the profound complexities, contradictions, and changes of colonial and postcolonial Africa, the development of African worlds--its cultures, arts, politics, economies, societies, and ecologies--out of the interconnections, intersectionalities, and mtertextualities of Africa and Europe, as well as Africa and the world mediated by the diaspora and globalization.

This is what this paper explores, the historical journeys and meanings of Achebe's and Mandela's lives placed in the expansive context of African nationalism. In this intriguing story, their two countries bookend each other. If Achebe's Nigeria and literary imagination witnessed the early flowering of African nationalism, Mandela's South Africa and political activism marked the consummation of Africa's struggle for decolonization. But at the time of their deaths, it was clear that decolonization, the most momentous event of the 20th century, was an incomplete project, that the other objectives of African nationalism remained unfulfilled. This is another thread that interweaves their lives and legacies; their acute sense of the unfinished business of African

liberation. The paper begins with brief notes on the African intelligentsia and nationalism, which define the lives and legacies of the two men. Second, it focuses on Achebe's monumental contributions to African cultural nationalism and literature. Finally, it tries to place Mandela's long walk to freedom in the context of other founders of modern African states.

The Imaginations of the Nationalist Intelligentsia

Achebe, the writer, exhibited the literary and artistic sensibilities of African nationalism, while Mandela, the revolutionary, expressed its political dimensions. Both represented the discourses of the colonial intelligentsia. Much has been written about the double consciousness of this intelligentsia, which was apparently rooted in the alienation and ambivalence of its loyalties and ambitions as a class that straddled, often uneasily, coloniality and its modernist claims and nativity and its timeless traditions. It is often argued that they felt comfortable neither with Africa, which bred them, nor with Europe and America, which they were socialized to admire. They learned to talk and dream in both indigenous and imported languages.

In reality, this was more than a bilingual intelligentsia. Rather, it spoke in many registers. Its collective memories and imaginations transcended the binary constructions of the colonized and colonizer, the fictions of a homogenized Africa and Europe, for they engaged and embodied the imagined communities of race, colony, ethnicity, and culture, all of which created their own complex transnational and diasporic identities. Slavery and colonialism had invented Africa as well as Europe, generating new global racial and cultural configurations, while within Africa itself new constellations of ethnic and social identities appeared.

The African intelligentsia was caught up in the tensions between territorial and transnational nationalisms, between local and Pan-African identities, injunctions, and ideologies. Each form of nationalism had its own distinctive demands and dangers, possibilities and pitfalls rooted in specific political and cultural economies. The same nationalists who wrote eloquently about the subjugation and redemption of "mother" Africa produced the foundational texts of their colonial nations and ethnic groups, giving them primordial charters through heroic narratives of African agency. This is why Achebe's tales of Ibo society in its grueling confrontation with colonialism became powerful parables of the Nigerian and African conditions and Mandela's protracted struggles against apartheid captivated Pan-African imaginations and solidarities.

However, there is need to distinguish the projects of nationalism, between the repressive nationalism of imperialism and the progressive nationalism of anticolonial resistance, between the nationalisms that led to colonial conquest and genocide and those that sought liberation for oppressed nations and communities, between struggles for domination and struggles for freedom, between the reactionary, reformist, and revolutionary goals of various nationalisms. Socially, African nationalism had diverse ethnic and civic dynamics, spatially territorial and transnational dimensions. Its ideological and intellectual referents and representations were also quite diverse and expansive. Nationalism was, indeed, and remains a house of many mansions.

This is what accounts for the divergences and convergences of Achebe's and Mandela's nationalisms. The two men's nationalisms differed not only because of their disparate personal, professional, and political biographies, but also because of the different historical geographies and political economies of colonialism and anticolonial struggle in their respective countries. Their nationalisms encompassed struggles over ideas and representations, material conditions, and political power. Further, there were salient moral and psychic dimensions, the striving for a sense of collective well being and dignity so cruelly ruptured by colonialism. Thus, there were political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, and intellectual articulations of nationalism.

Anticolonial nationalism was expressed through political and civic organizations, as well as cultural and religious organizations, such as independent churches and peasant movements. It was also manifest in the realms of the performing, visual, and literary arts and an assortment of intellectual movements from Senghor's Negritude to Nkrumah's consciencism to Nasser's "three circles" to Nyerere's "African socialism." Each of these exhibited complex spatio-temporal articulations, organizational modes, social inscriptions, and discursive strategies. In short, African nationalisms, like other nationalisms, were not only invariably complex, often contradictory, and always changing, but also multiple and multivocal in their expression. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that amid all its internal complexities and diversities, African nationalism was a project that sought to achieve five historic and humanistic tasks: decolonization, nation-building, development, democracy, and regional integration. In spatial terms, it was a territorial, regional, and transnational nationalism; in social terms a democratic and developmentalist nationalism. From its inception, it had a dual face: it was a struggle against European rule and hegemony and a struggle/or African autonomy and reconstruction, a revolt against Europe and a reaffirmation of Africa. It was woven out of many strands. Ignited and refueled by local and specific grievances against colonial oppression and exploitation, it drew ideological inspiration from diverse sources, including those from Africa itself, the African diaspora, Europe, and the colonial and ex-colonial worlds of Asia and Latin America.

Achebe's Reinvention of African Literature and Culture

Achebe's historic importance in the annals of African literature is derived from the centrality of his work in framing such a powerful charter of literary and intellectual decolonization. The publication of Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958 was a landmark literary and cultural event not because it was the first novel published by a Nigerian, let alone a West African or an African writer, but because it came in the tumultuous throes of decolonization.

The novel derives its preeminence as a referent in the African literary tradition, argues Simon Gikandi, a leading critic of Achebe, "for the marking and making of that exciting first decade of decolonization". Its irruption at this monumental moment made *Things Fall Apart* a foundational cultural text that provided a counterpoint to the colonial library. It helped establish and reconfigure an African literary tradition by interrupting and recreating the institutions of critical interpretation and education and setting "the terms by which African literature was produced, circulated, and interpreted" (Gikandi).

In *Arrow of God*, a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, regarded by some critics as Achebe's finest and most complex novel, "as the richest and most suggestive of Achebe's novels, which is to say one of the richest and most suggestive novels of the twentieth century," to quote Nicholas Brown for its revolutionary politics of form; for "its multitude of narrative voices", to quote Ambreena Manji; and for its masterly depiction of what Mark Mathuray calls the antagonisms and oppositions of continuity and change, colonial power and traditional power, political power and sacred power, desecralization and retaining the sacred, conversion and fidelity in the Ibo world under colonialism. Achebe writes with such assured intimacy, empathy, and insight that the novel's characters like Ezeulu become, to quote Abiola Irele, one of Achebe's most incisive readers, "nothing less than a world historical figure, taking his place alongside those epic victims of historical events who have embodied, in their fullest dramatic manifestations, the most stringent dilemmas of human experience" .

Achebe's crusading cultural nationalism best represented in the two novels became an enduring characteristic of African literature--the excavation of African cultural traditions and agency from

the debris of colonial disorder. This literary retrieval and reaffirmation of Africa's history and humanity paralleled nationalist historiography that was simultaneously mounting a vigorous ideological and methodological revolt against imperialist historiography and its Eurocentric narratives of eternal European superiority and African primitivity. Nationalist historians such as Nigeria's Kenneth Dike and Ade Ajayi were painstakingly recovering African activity, adaptations, choices, and initiatives before and during the colonial encounter.

Achebe's superb literary skills were no less evident in his indigenization of English to carry the weight of the culture and moments he was imaginatively recreating. This became another key register of the African literary tradition. Many of Achebe's followers sought to reclaim cultural authenticity and aesthetic originality by peppering their work with the riddles and proverbs of local languages and invoking the enchanting, haunting, and enigmatic myths, folktales, poetry, drama, and epics of oral tradition. But this gave rise to another misconception in the reading of African literature, a tendency to see the appropriation of oral narrative as a return to authenticity based on the historically inaccurate supposition that Africa is ontologically oral, while writing is European. Writing has a long history in many parts of Africa. The Ethiopians, for example, were writing before the English had learned the Roman alphabet.

Achebe also sanctified the shift from the literature of protest against the colonial order to the literature of protest against the postcolonial order. The literature of post-independence disillusionment did not start with him. In 1956, the South African writer Peter Abrahams had warned in *A Wreath for Udomo* against exaggerated expectations, indeed, predicting that disillusionment would follow independence. In 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence and of sixteen other countries, Achebe published *No Longer at Ease*. The protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, is caught in the confluence of the debilitating demands of tradition and modernity and trips between the stubborn legacies of colonialism and the heady dreams of independence, fueled by the class pressures of accumulation and corruption. Achebe's treatment of corruption in *No Longer At Ease* by the new elite proved prescient. So did the ending of his fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, which is dominated by the conflict between Odili Samalu, an idealistic young teacher, and his former teacher, Chief Nanga, a corrupt Cabinet minister, who is forced from office following a military coup. When Nigeria's first military coup happened in 1966 some even wondered whether Achebe had advance warning! *A Man of the People* signaled the new thematic wave that was to dominate African literature for the next three to four decades in which potential disillusionment turned into actual disenchantment.

In his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, published twenty-one years later, Achebe sought both to portray the decadence and authoritarianism of the postcolonial state, as well as explore the alternatives to that order and the role of enlightened intellectuals. The narrative delicately weaves the contestations and contradictions of what All Erritouni calls the dominant, residual, and emergent registers. The first refers to the dominant social order represented by General Sam, the second, traditional institutions and values represented by the Abazoman elders, and the third, the leadership possibilities of social forces marginalized by colonialism and nationalism represented by Beatrice Okoh, the first major female character in Achebe's novels, and the urban workers. (5) Achebe became a literary institution in part because of his institutional role as the founding editor of the African Writers Series, which was established by Heinemann Educational Books in 1962. As editor in the first ten years of the series, who discharged his role of mentoring young writers across the continent without pay, James Currey tells us, "Achebe wanted the Series to reflect all the richness and variety of an emerging independent Africa" (578). It is hard to

overestimate the crucial role the AWS played in the development of African literature, in the circulation and consumption of African literary texts within and outside the continent.

Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom

We are similarly indebted to the nationalist leaders that brought political independence, notwithstanding the limits of decolonization and the unfulfilled dreams of African nationalism. Among them, lies the towering life and legacy of Mandela. Mandela's seminal stature is evident from the way everyone sought to bask in his reflected glory, including many African leaders who compare quite unfavorably with him for their mendacity, self-aggrandizement, and dictatorial tendencies. It is hard to remember that Mandela was once widely reviled in much of Euroafrica as a terrorist as he was revered in Africa and the progressive world as a revolutionary figure. He is now everyone's venerated hero, the man sanitized into a transcendent myth; his place in African history stripped of its messy contexts and multiple meanings; his life and legacy of protracted struggle morphed into a universal redemptive tale of reconciliation. His iconic image of lofty leadership satiated a world mired in pettiness; it was a resounding reproach to the small-minded leaders most countries were cursed with. The various Mandelas commemorated after his death offered different opportunities to people, politicians, and pundits in the North and in the South--absolution from the barbarous crimes of imperialism for the former and affirmation of their humanity for the latter and a reminder of the heady dreams of independence.

As with the day he was released from prison in 1990, many will remember where they were when they heard the news of Mandela's death I vividly remember February 11, 1990. I sat glued to the television with bated breath for the live broadcast of Mandela's release. I told my then six-year-old daughter this was one of the most memorable days for my generation and she would live to remember it, too. I choked with tears of joy, anger, sadness, pride, anticipation, and other bewildering emotions as we watched the tall, smiling, dashing, and unbowed Mandela walking out of Victor Verster Prison beside his wife, Winnie, a militant in her own right who had suffered so much and done a lot to keep his memory alive. They walked with defiant dignity, holding hands, their other arms raised with clenched fists. The announcement of his death, although long anticipated because of his age and grave illness, came more unceremoniously. It arrived as a news alert on my iPad as I was working on some memo in my office. But it was no less momentous for it marked the end of an era, of Africa's long 20th century.

Predictably, in the days and weeks after his death the traditional and social media were awash with tributes, reminiscences, and verdicts on Mandela the person, the politician, and the symbol. In the United States and Britain, politicians, pundits, and celebrities fell all over themselves to find the most laudatory words to describe Mandela as the epitome of global moral authority, of humanity at its best, the last in the hallowed canon of 20th-century saintly liberators from Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King. Such encomiums are to be expected for a world hungry for goodness, forgiveness, trust, and optimism that Mandela exuded so masterfully. Conveniently forgotten is the fact that the British and American governments upheld the apartheid regime for decades and condemned Mandela's African National Congress as a terrorist organization. We all remember Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's resolute defense of the apartheid regime and fierce condemnation of the ANC and its leaders including Mandela. In the United States, ANC leaders were officially regarded as terrorists until 2008.

Post-apartheid reconciliation may or may not have been a romantic attribute of Mandela the man; it was certainly a pragmatic imperative for Mandela the nationalist leader. Mandela's life and legacy need to be stripped of the psychologizing and symbolic discourses preferred in the

popular media and hagiographies. It could be argued that he and his comrades were able to sublimate their personal anger and bitterness because the liberation struggle was too complex, too costly, too demanding, too protracted, and too important to do otherwise. Reconciliation was both a tactic and a necessity because of the dynamics of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

This is to suggest that like all great historical figures, Mandela can best be understood through the prism of his times and the political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics and conditions that structured it. Mandela changed much in his long life but it was a life defined by the vicissitudes of African nationalism. For those who don't know much about African history, or are wedded to exceptionalist notions of South African history, they would be surprised to learn the parallels Mandela shares with the founding fathers of many other independent African nations, in whose rarefied company he belongs. In fact, his historic significance, and the eruption of grief over his death and gratitude for his life in the Pan-African world and elsewhere, can partly be explained by the fact that he is Africa's last founding father.

Mandela embodied all the key phases, dynamics, and ideologies of African nationalism from the period of elite nationalism before the Second World War, when the nationalists made reformist appeals to the colonial regimes, to the era of militant mass nationalism after the war when they demanded independence, to the phase of armed liberation struggle. Many countries achieved independence during the second phase through peaceful struggle. Others were forced to wage protracted armed struggle. The variations in the development and trajectories of nationalism were marked by the way each individual colony was acquired and administered, the traditions of resistance in each colony, the presence or absence of European settlers, the social composition of the nationalist movement, and the nature and ideologies of the leadership. Similarly, there were different ideological orientations and emphases. Some nationalists espoused secular or religious ideologies; among the former there were competing liberal, socialist, and Marxist ideologies that would later frame postcolonial development agendas.

Thus Mandela was not an advocate of Gandhi's or King's non-violent resistance not because he was not a man of peace, but because he correctly understood that in the South African context, fighting against an obdurate racist minority settler regime required all available tactics from mass protest to armed resistance. For him multiple tactics had to serve the overall strategy of achieving national liberation. In short, as a freedom fighter he was simultaneously a political leader and a guerrilla leader. Under the ANC's broad and tolerant political umbrella he worked with traditionalists, liberals, socialists, communists, and Black Consciousness activists, both before and after his long incarceration.

The long and large lives of many of Africa's founding fathers including Mandela represent a historic rebuke to the destructive conceits of European colonialism. In the notorious words of Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of the settler colony of Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, the European colonists believed colonialism would last at least a thousand years. Set against many of his fellow founding fathers, Mandela stands out for his singular contribution to democratic politics. He relinquished power after only one five-year term in office. Many others were overthrown in coups like Nkrumah or died in office like Kenyatta and Houphuet-Boigny. Before Mandela, the only other African leaders to voluntarily leave office were Senghor and Julius Nyerere, the founding President of Tanzania. Mandela's example shines all the brighter when compared to his nemesis in Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, once a widely admired liberation hero who remains president thirty-four years after independence. Mugabe together with the likes of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, in power for twenty-eight years, and still going, represent the dinosaurs of African politics in a continent that has been undergoing various forms

of democratic renewal since the turn of the 1990s, in part influenced by the demonstration effect of South Africa's transition to democracy and Mandela's enlightened exit from office.

The lateness of South Africa's decolonization, it can be argued, helped compress the sequentiality, as it turned out for the early independent states, of the five objectives of African nationalism. While the latter achieved decolonization, they struggled hard to build unified nations out of the territorial contraptions of colonialism, which enjoyed statehood without nationhood. They came to independence in an era when development, democracy, and regional integration were compromised by weak national bourgeoisies, relatively small middle classes, and the Cold War machinations of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Mandela's South Africa benefited from both the positive and negative experiences of postcolonial Africa, the existence of a highly organized and vociferous civil society, and the end of the Cold War, which gave ample space for the growth of democratic governance and the rule of law. But the new post-apartheid state was held hostage to the dictates of the negotiated settlement between the ANC and the apartheid regime arising out of the strategic stalemate between the two sides--by 1990 South Africa had become ungovernable, but the apartheid state was not vanquished as happened in Angola and Mozambique.

This, combined with the global triumph of neo-liberalism in the post-Cold War era, guaranteed the powerful interests of capital in general and the white bourgeoisie in particular against any serious economic restructuring despite the great expectations of the masses and the ambitions of successive development plans by the new government from the Reconstruction and Development Program to Growth Employment and Redistribution to the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative. Many in South Africa and among the African left accuse Mandela of having failed to dismantle the South African apartheid economy that has left millions of black people, especially the unemployed youth, in grinding poverty. Reconciliation, they argue, rescued whites from seriously reckoning with apartheid's past and its legacies and deprived blacks of restitution. Such critical assessments of Mandela's legacy can only be expected to grow. Mandela's death forces South Africans to reflect on the post-apartheid state he helped create. Deprived of Mandela's aura, some believe, the ANC's monopoly of power will continue to erode.

Nevertheless, the post-apartheid state achieved much faster growth than the apartheid regime ever did. The country witnessed massive expansion of the black middle class and the ANC government fostered the growth of a black bourgeoisie through the black economic empowerment program much as the apartheid regime before it had cultivated the Afrikaner bourgeoisie through apartheid affirmative action. There was also some reduction in poverty, although huge challenges remain in terms of high levels of unemployment and deepening inequality. Interestingly, South Africa now lags behind much of the continent in terms of rates of economic growth, in part because of the lingering structural deformities of the apartheid economy in which the peasantry was virtual destroyed, the labor absorptive capacity of the economy is limited by its high cost structures, and South Africa suffers from relatively low levels of skill formation for an economy of its size because of the apartheid legacy of poor black education. In 2014 South Africa was overtaken by Nigeria as Africa's largest economy. The continent's rapid growth, reminiscent of the immediate post-independence years, which has been dubbed by the world's financial press with the moniker of a "rising Africa," has given rekindled hopes for the establishment of democratic developmental states that might realize the remaining goals of African nationalism.

Thus, Mandela's political life and legacy resemble in significant ways that of other African founding fathers and South Africa's trajectory mirrors that of other African countries,

notwithstanding the differences of national historical and geopolitical contexts. It is worth remembering Mandela's rhetoric of reconciliation was a staple among many African founding presidents in the immediate post-independence years. Kenyatta used to preach reconciliation, urging Kenyans to forgive but not forget the ills of the past as a way of keeping the European settlers and building his nation fractured by the racial and ethnic divisions of colonialism. Even Mugabe in the euphoric days after independence urged reconciliation between white and black Zimbabweans before domestic political challenges forced him to refurbish his revolutionary credentials by adopting radical land reform and rhetoric.

So widespread and powerful did the movement become that Democratic and even Republican politicians scurried to prove their anti-apartheid credentials. In 1986, after nearly two decades of Black Congressional representatives sponsoring sanctions bills, the CBC registered a historic victory when it succeeded in getting the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act passed over President Ronald Reagan's veto. That marked the apotheosis of African American influence on US policy toward Africa, which was not to be repeated any time soon. Mandela's release in 1990 and subsequent visits to the United States were widely celebrated as the return of a native son. This was true in other parts of the diaspora from the Caribbean to Latin America, Europe to Asia. It is therefore easy to understand the iconic status of Mandela and the overflow of emotion his death provoked in the Pan-African world. The fact that President Obama started his politics as a student at an anti-apartheid rally, and his acknowledged indebtedness to Mandela's exemplary life and struggle, offers a poignant thread in the thick ties that bind Africa and the diaspora in the struggle for emancipation from racial tyranny and dehumanization.