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Explaining Zimbabwe's 2023 Harmonised Elections: Voter Suppression and Voter Intimidation

by Brian Raftopoulos and Sara Dorman

Introduction: an uneven playing field

The citizenry's hope for a legitimate and credible election process that would fulfil one of the central objectives of the liberation struggle, namely one person one vote, remains unfulfilled.

The 2023 Harmonised Elections were the latest iteration of contested elections that have marked the public sphere for much of the post-independence era in Zimbabwe.

Since 2018 the ruling party, Zanu PF, has employed several strategies to dismantle the opposition. These include:

- The use of the judiciary to remove Nelson Chamisa from his position as President of the MDC Alliance, after the passing of Morgan Tsvangirai¹.
- The installation of a more pliable leadership of the MDC under Douglas Mwonzora, currently claiming to be the 'legal' President of the MDC Alliance.

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*Election posters in Harare.
Photo ©James Nkwashu*

Election: continued from previous page

- The Headquarters of the MDC Alliance, and the state funds allocated to the parliamentary opposition, were passed on to the Mwonzora leadership.
- The creation of a Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) process controlled by Zanu PF, which Chamisa's party refused to join.
- Harassment of members of the opposition ahead of the 2023 elections, including politically motivated arrests and detentions.

Together, these strategies forced the opposition party to reform itself into the Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), despite the lack of resources which had accumulated since 2000, substantially weakening the party's institutional base.

Zimbabwe's civic space has also been severely affected by systematic victimisation of its leaders (teachers, doctors, students, journalists). In addition to the use of the state security apparatus to intimidate civil society actors, several pieces of legislation threaten their fundamental freedoms:

- The Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Act (PVO Act): the controversial amendments to the PVO Act threaten the right to freedom of association by controlling civil society organisations' governance and programme activities. These include management choices and funding decisions². The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association expressed grave concern that 'the overall impact of the Amendment Bill, would likely be detrimental to civic space in Zimbabwe'³. The Act awaits the final signature of the President, but its impact on spreading fear amongst civic actors has already been felt.
- The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act), commonly referred to as The Patriot Bill, criminalises Zimbabwean nationals from speaking to foreign groupings within and outside government structures. Although framed as a call to criminalise individuals and institutions that call for sanctions, the Bill seeks to restrict Zimbabweans within and outside the country from 'speaking negatively' about the country.
- The increasing use of the Maintenance of Peace and Security Act as the Government of Zimbabwe's 'weapon of choice to prosecute citizens', is a constant reminder of the settler-colonial regime's deployment of the Law-and-Order Maintenance Act to suppress anti-colonial struggles during the period of white minority rule.⁴

Elections 2023: results challenged

Within this political context, it is therefore not surprising that the Mnangagwa regime claimed electoral victory. At Presidential level the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission announced that Mnangagwa won 52.6 per cent of the

vote, with Nelson Chamisa of CCC in second place at 44 per cent. In terms of Parliamentary seats, of the total 210 seats contested, Zanu PF claimed 136 seats followed by 73 seats for the CCC, with Zanu PF again failing to achieve the two thirds majority it hoped for.

However, parallel tabulations by civil society groups have questioned these results⁵ and called for ZEC to release results with more detail.

At time of writing they have released the vote by province and constituency, but not the vote breakdown at polling stations, where the V11 forms are signed by officials and agents to certify the results. (The V11 form is an original document carrying results from a polling station.)

Observers express concerns

Preliminary reports from the electoral observer missions were also critical of the electoral process, casting severe doubt on the legitimacy and credibility of the 2023 elections.

At the centre of this critical evaluation has been the report of the SADC Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM). The report questioned several aspects of the electoral process, including:

- The Delimitation Report, which failed to observe the correct methodology for calculating the 20 per cent variance constitutional rule with respect to minimum and maximum sizes of the 210 constituencies.
- The delay in releasing the voters roll to opposition candidates.
- The cancellation of CCC rallies.
- The repressive political implications of the PVO Amendment Act and the Patriotic Act.
- The excessive increases in nomination fees for Presidential and Parliamentary candidates, with the former increasing from US\$1,000 to US\$20,000, and the latter from US\$50 to US\$1000.
- Questions around the independence of the judiciary and ZEC.
- The unlawful repressive activities of the quasi-security intelligence operation known as the Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ), whose members occupied desks at several polling station exits.
- The lack of fair coverage by the state-controlled media, and denial of several foreign media bodies into the country.
- The late arrival of ballot papers at polling stations particularly in the opposition supporting areas of Harare and Bulawayo. Many polling stations did not open at the required time, with voting time extended into the next day. Others ran out of ballots. Preliminary data analysis suggests that voter turnout was lower in these areas.
- At many polling stations there were cases of voters who were not able to vote because of various challenges including the absence of their names from the voter's roll, voters ending up at the wrong polling stations, and the lack of IDs or passports.

The SEOM Report thus concluded that some aspects of the Harmonised Elections ‘fell short of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)’.

The interim report of the Commonwealth expressed similar concerns, and concluded that while the voting process was ‘well conducted and peaceful’ there were ‘a number of significant issues that impact on the credibility, transparency and inclusivity of the process’.

With the report of the African Union also noting these issues, combined with critical press statements from the EU, US and the Spokesperson for the Secretary General of the UN, there is a growing consensus of opposition voices within Zimbabwe, regional, continental, and international bodies, on the legitimacy crisis of the 2023 elections. This is the first time since such a consensus resulted in a SADC mediated dialogue after the violent election in 2008, resulting in the Government of National Unity 2009–2013.

The timidity and mixed messaging from the ANC have emphasised both the existential crisis within the South African ruling party and the movement from quiet diplomacy under former President Mbeki to complicity with an authoritarian regime. To complement these concerns, an article by Tim Cohen in the South African based media group, the *Daily Maverick*, pointed to key statistics in the voting patterns in Zimbabwe.

Firstly, the proportion of registered voters is small compared with the population, with only 35 per cent of the county’s 15.9 million citizens being registered.

Secondly the number of registered voters has declined from 6,623,511 in 2013 to 5,695,706 in 2023.

However, even as the number of registered votes has declined, the number of votes cast has increased. Cohen concludes that voter registration has been suppressed, especially in opposition voting areas⁶. The flood of outwards-migration also contributes to this, with few able to return to Zimbabwe first to register, and then to vote.

Economic revival also depends on political progress

In its attempts to move beyond its growing legitimacy crisis, compounded by the serious concerns raised over the recent election, the Mnangagwa regime will also have to deal with the economy.

A major hurdle will be the conditions set out in the ADB Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution Process for Zimbabwe, which emphasise that political reforms are needed in order for economic commitments to be met. One of the conditions of this dialogue, as stated by the President of the Africa Development Bank Group, is a commitment by the governance working group:

to tackle and make measurable progress on critical issues of freedom of speech, human rights and protection, and implementation of laws in line with the constitution, as well as the implementation of the Motlanthe commission of inquiry and compensation of victims. And we must show progress

on the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). All of which should make for peaceful, free and fair elections.⁷

No way forward?

Zimbabwe’s election has again failed to provide a legitimate political basis for a new government. With suppression and intimidation of voters captured by journalists, and condemned by election observer teams, Zimbabwe election has not won over its critics.

The road to reform in Zimbabwe continues to be a very hard journey.

Footnotes

1. Judgement No. SC 56/2020 Civil Appeal No. SC 289/2019. The Supreme Court judgement delivered in March 2020 set out that the ‘essence and objectives of the corrective measures to be implemented by the Party is to restore the status quo ante that prevailed before the irregular and unlawful appointments to the Party presidency took place.’ This in turn would require the ‘convening of an Extra-Ordinary Congress to elect a new President following the demise of Dr Tsvangirai’, resulting in the Deputy President Khupe assuming the role of Acting President, until the election of a new President at the Extra-Ordinary Congress.

2. Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, *The Great Gift of Active Citizens: How the PVO Bill threatens active citizenship in Zimbabwe*. 2022; The Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, *The Legal Monitor*, 14 February 2022.

3. UN Special Rapporteur, Ref: OL ZWE 3/2021, 17 December 2021

4. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, *The Legal Monitor*, 29 April 2022, p1.

5. https://twitter.com/freemanchari/status/1696833111487619299?s=61&t=DW1gbn_9Z35WRH6VW3IIwA

6. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-08-28-after-the-bell-were-the-zimbabwean-elections-free-and-fair-please-spare-me/?utm_source=To

7. Speech Delivered by Dr Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank Group, Harare, 23 February 2023. <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/speeches/speech-delivered-dr-akinwumi-adesina-president-african-development-bank-group-2nd-dialogue-platform-arrears-clearance-and-debt-resolution-process-zimbabwe-harare-zimbabwe-23-february-2023-59299>

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For details of election results, see:

Presidential election:

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6545>

Senators to represent persons with disabilities:

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6546>

Senator Chiefs:

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6547>

Constituency members of the National Assembly:

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6548>

Party-list members of the National Assembly:

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6549>

Research Day 2023

Reflections on Religion and Gender

Diana Jeater's reflections on an unusual and challenging Research Day.

In some ways it was more like another kind of meeting the Society has held in the past – something we called an 'away day'. Today has been one where we shared experiences, rather than just having academics presenting papers.

I want to highlight one particular contribution: that given by 'Munya' who, as a gay Zimbabwean man, spoke as part of Panel 2 on *Gender in Zimbabwe and the Diaspora*. I cannot recall any Research Day before, when someone spoke so directly about their experiences of their sexuality.

It broke a taboo – we only realise the taboo was there when someone breaks it.

No absence of research

In the past, I have usually tried to pull out strands from the presentations at a Research Day, but this event wasn't like that.

I want to address the issue of the apparent lack of research into the topic of the day – the links between religion and gender. As Dr Dominic Pasura noted early on, these research topics tend to exist in 'silos' and don't get put together as much as they should. But there is value in linking the two: religion is often a very important contributor to gender oppression – both women's oppression and oppression around other sexual identities.

I listed some of the research in the 'chat', and I believe that we need to find ways for this research to be more widely known. I think that more institutional memory within the BZS is needed: issues were raised that have been covered in earlier Research Days – it would have been good to refer back to, and cite, those earlier interventions.

There is also the question of what research is for. There is a tendency to assume that research (and research funding) should be policy-oriented and quantitative, which had led some commentators during the day to dismiss more experiential and qualitative evidence as 'unreliable'. But the value of the Research Day is that it allows us also to theorise the issues we are discussing.

Political economy

We should welcome the focus on political economy in some of the papers, which went beyond an instrumentalist approach to research. A lot of what we heard tended towards description and policy proposals, and was not rooted in deep theorisation. But we need theory – we need it to understand power structures so we can help young Zimbabweans (especially women) negotiate them: to understand what religion is doing (and what patriarchy is doing) to limit how we can think, and to limit the opportunities that are available to young Zimbabweans ... those

The speakers

The following is a shortened version of a detailed report of the day drawn up by BZS president, Knox Chitiyo. A fuller version can be found on the BZS website.

Guest presentation

HE Ambassador Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, Embassy of Zimbabwe in Sweden outlined her career, which has led her from civil society and political activism to her current Ambassadorial role. She spoke of the need to keep in touch with the diaspora, and to give a voice to young people and to women, and to empower them.

Panel 1 Religion in Zimbabwe and the Diaspora

Fortunate Hove, the panel chair, stressed the need for safe spaces for young people, especially girls.

Pastor Gary Cross spoke on *My Perspectives and Journey in Faith* – and on religion in Zimbabwe. He acknowledged the past injustices of colonialism – we need now (he said) 'to reclaim African culture' from its subjugation by early missionaries – who thought Christianity must be white/European – and consider what it means to be a Christian African.

He stressed the need to talk about gender values and contested the view that Christianity is by definition a tool for the oppression of women.

Dr Keith Silika from Liverpool John Moore University spoke on *Ethnographic Insights into Religion and Community Policing in the UK Zimbabwean Diaspora*. He spoke of the problems that touch the diaspora community, and how religion could lead to a limited understanding among the police – taking as an example practices and belief systems of Vapostori communities (members of a Christian religious sect). In the UK, these have raised issues of abuse that have sometimes led to police and social worker interventions. Religion can be both a fault line and a bridge between communities.

Dr Paul Matsvai, Zimbabwean Christian Fellowship Across Frontiers: The UK Experience spoke of the importance of cross-denominational prayer meetings in the context of the diaspora, and how Christian assemblies can be 'home away from home'. This has seen the establishment of *Mothers Mubatanidzwa* and *Zimbabwe Christian Men's Fellowship UK*.

Janita Hargoven, of the Hindu Society Harare and the Hindu Community in Zimbabwe, told how the community had, since the earliest arrivals from the state of Gujarat in the 1900s, a history facing racism and of battling with the colonial authorities. She told the meeting that: 'The ability to talk about gender has opened up in the last 10 years.'

Keynote speaker

Wadzanai Garwe, from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) spoke about colonialism and religion. Traditional African belief systems, she said, are still a major part of modern life. She criticised the Catholic Church for intolerance (such as against gay people) and how the brutalisation of African boys within the church has not been addressed, she thought – and her belief that the lack of recognition of sexuality has led young men to develop addictive behaviour and be unable to keep up relationships, and so on. 'Our men are quiet because they cannot speak.'

Panel 2 Gender in Zimbabwe and the Diaspora

Nancy Kachingwe spoke on *Decolonising Zimbabwean and wider African Gender Discourses*. She said a white imperialist project

are issues of political economy.

Forms of mentoring were often mentioned during the day, as valuable initiatives that help to challenge oppressive systems. But we can't mentor away power structures.

Nancy Kachingwe made a fantastic contribution, rooted in political economy, about how African feminism must be a 'praxis' (a point where theory and practice become a single process) and that it must be ready 'to break eggs'. But we need more theorisation about what eggs we are breaking and which eggs need to be broken – including, possibly, the concepts of 'feminism' and 'gender' themselves.

Decolonising and translation

The question of what we mean by gender was raised in the call for the Research Day, but only touched upon tangentially in the course of the day itself.

This was the questions around whether and to what extent Western constructs of gender are similar to or different from African constructs of gender and lived experiences.

Acknowledging the importance of this issue is part of the process of 'decolonisation' that we have been urging at the Research Day for a decade or more. That means recognising and addressing how the European enlightenment has defined the way the global academy defines knowledge and thinking, and how, as a result, the rest of the world's ways of thinking were marginalised, hidden and in some cases destroyed.

African feminism has been addressing the Western assumptions within mainstream feminism for years. During the Research Day we didn't do much to address directly the importance of acknowledging potentially non-European, African, ways of understanding gender, changing masculinities, other sexualities and women's oppression in African contexts. These matters were hinted at, particularly in discussing masculinity in the diaspora, but not fully formulated.

Decolonising as an academic process is linked to an attention to translation, which we also needed to discuss more. When decolonising, we start to think with different tools, having realised that we don't have to think the way Europe thinks. We must get away from the belief that ideas are only seen as respectable if they have the imprimatur of the global academy. We have to 'think from the south' and use concepts available outside Europe.

This often means recognising that words are not readily available in European languages for the concepts being used, and we need to pay attention to what is changed and lost in translation.

This is especially the case with concepts of mental health, systems of spirituality and healing, which don't translate easily. An example of what can be done came from Dorcas Gwata's work on the 'friendship bench' programme. This is mental health work that is 'respectable'

Continued on next page

reorganised society racially and required societies to adjust structurally. Post-colonialism, things haven't changed – 'But contemporary black and African feminists are recovering African perspectives and challenging Western feminism. The rise of 'decolonial' feminism is reaffirming the struggles of women in the global south, in their own voices.

'We should be prepared to break eggs'.

Dr Sophia Chirongoma, author of *Gender and Academia in Zimbabwe and the Region*, made a presentation about gender as a major issue in academia in Zimbabwe. See pages 7 and 8.

'Munya' shared his lived experiences and perspectives as a Zimbabwean LGBTQ person (probably the first ever to speak at a Research Day). LGBTQ people feel dehumanised, he said, by the way religion tries to 'explain them away'.

The LGBTQ experience is often minimised, trivialised and sexualised, he said. Yet LGBTQ people need a sense of community and belonging. Being gay is not a life-style choice. It makes no sense to talk about "recruitment" to being gay. LGBTQ rights are human rights.'

Panel 3 Religion and Gender in a Global Context

Panel Chair: Dr Dominic Pasura of the University of Glasgow opened the session by saying that 'religion is one of the chief sites of gender oppression' but 'it doesn't have to be'.

Dorcas Gwata (*Gender and Mental and Reproductive Health in Zimbabwe*; and *Gangs in London*) spoke about the intersection of youth violence, religion, gender, sexuality, and mental health in Zimbabwe and the UK.

She described the Zimbabwe Health Training Support (ZHTS) mental health project in Zimbabwe: workshops and outreach in Mbare, Ngomahuru psychiatric hospital in Masvingo; and workshops in Bulawayo.

She described her UK work in mental health research, and counselling work with gangs in London. Gangs can be places, she said, where sexual preferences can be simultaneously hidden and expressed.

Tefsi Golla of the Institute of National Resources and Sustainable Development *Religion and Gender in Ethiopia* outlined the historical context of religion in Ethiopia where, generally, Islam and Christianity have coexisted peacefully.

The current Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, incorporates religious narratives in his politics. Tefsi highlighted the lack of studies on modern day intersections between religion, gender and identity in Ethiopia.

Reverend Nomatter Sande of the Apostolic faith Mission Mount Zion Coventry Assembly and UNISA spoke on *Perspectives on Apostolic Faith Communities in Zimbabwe and the UK*. Nomatter discussed his research and community work with the church and Zimbabweans across the UK, and said that there is a need to rethink the norms of masculinity in the diaspora. Men need to understand that women can take a leadership role.

He went on to say that there is evidence showing that female violence against men is increasing in the diaspora. He believed that the issue of violence against men is not adequately addressed. (This presentation elicited probably the liveliest interactions of the day.)

Acknowledgements

Knox expressed his thanks to Research Day co-organisers Dr Roselyne Masamha and Dr Sophia Chirongoma, along with Professor Diana Jeater, and further thanks went to Margaret Ling and Rori Masiane for handling the logistics and administration of the Research Day and to Professor Miles Tendi and the African Studies Centre (ASC) for the longstanding partnership with, and support for, the Research Day and other BZS events.

Research Day: continued from previous page

within the global academy, but at the same time working with traditional concepts.

Dr Sophia Chirongoma's account of her edited collection (with Esther Mombo), *Mother Earth, Postcolonial and Liberation Theologies* (Lexington, 2021), shows how non-African cosmologies have been introduced into the heart of Zimbabwean culture. If we bring these outside concepts into religion and culture, what words are we going to use to talk about them?

During the Research Day, we talked about decolonising the key concepts – gender, humanity, etc.

Here we need to pay more attention to translation and interpretation – and what we mean what we talk about religion and gender, masculinity and so on. Using colonial language can lead to distortion, and policy can get derailed if we are not clear about what we mean.

Religion and patriarchy

It is unhistorical to see Zimbabwe just as a Christian country. Christianity is a recent introduction, as are other religions, such as Islam and Hinduism, which arrived at around the same time as Christianity. Christianity has become ubiquitous because the state supported the missionaries in forcing it on everyone.

Christianity consequently has a troubled relationship with traditional religion, especially for the elite classes, many of whom were educated by missionaries, and who find it difficult to admit they still take part in traditional rituals, especially regarding mental health healing. In fact, psycho-social approaches in African medicine can often be more valuable for African clients than western medicine.

A consequence of the ubiquity of Christianity is the embedding of patriarchy found in some Christian traditions, along with hostility towards some African traditional religions, communities, LGBTQI communities etc.

Although indigenous culture is routinely represented as patriarchal, we nevertheless heard repeatedly, throughout the day, how it is scriptural authority (not traditional culture) that is used to support patriarchal power and the marginalisation of women, the limits on their control over their bodies and so on. It is worth investigating what this tells us about how authority and power work in contemporary Zimbabwe, which takes us back to those questions of political economy.

Masculinity and religion in the diaspora

Dr Keith Silika's contribution at the beginning of the day drew attention to the way Zimbabwean men find their practices of religion do not adapt well in the UK. He described how the expectations of the diasporan community differ from those of their neighbours, and the problems this can cause. In Zimbabwe, prayer plays an important part in public life. It is involved in seeking religious treatment for mental health problems, and it brings communities together. People often find that, in the diaspora, having to work without that can be unsettling, creating

strains and difficulties for both the diaspora and those among whom they are living. This particularly impacts men: women are usually more active in church.

The nature of masculinity has changed – and this brings us back to political economy. What are men's needs, and how will men themselves recognise what their needs are? Who controls household income when women find it easier to get work than men? How can African feminism be lived in the diaspora and in Zimbabwe to construct religion, particularly among men, in positive ways, rather than as part of patriarchy?

During the Research Day we addressed a huge range of questions about gender and the diaspora which had been covered in previous Research Days, including the presentation of Dominic Pasura's landmark paper, 'Do You Have a Visa?' *Negotiating Respectable Masculinity in the Diaspora* at the 2014 Research Day. It was a constant theme in today's discussions, as well, and will no doubt continue to be an important area for further research.

Conclusion

In summary, the Research Day was an immensely valuable and honest conversation, in which we shared experiences as much, or more, than research findings.

It highlighted the value of putting gender and religion together in intersectional thinking and research. It also highlighted how we need more political economy and more theory in our research.

We need to decolonise the tools we think with, and the languages we think in, when we think about gender, masculinity, patriarchy, religion, spirit, mental health. If we do not do the work that is needed to understand power structures, at the level of political economy and at the level of constructing how we think, then we cannot develop appropriate policies to address the problems raised for both women and men in the struggles over gender and religion.

Professor Diana Jeater is Professor of African History at the University of Liverpool and former Associate Dean in Education.

Do you live in the UK and have friends or family in Zimbabwe who would enjoy being part of the BZS network?

If you do, please consider sponsoring them to become members.

A growing proportion of our new members are Zimbabwe-based and have been sponsored by friends in the UK to get around the practical difficulties of paying membership subscriptions from Zimbabwe.

Membership subscriptions for Zimbabwe-based members cost only £10. They will receive their copies of *Zimbabwe Review* and other BZS communications by email and be kept informed of our online events programme.

Contact the Membership Secretary Margaret Ling: margaret.ling@geo2.poptel.org.uk to find out more.

Gender and Academia in Zimbabwe and the Region

Dr Sophia Chirongoma on the obstacles that women face in higher education

The UN sets seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose mantra is ‘leaving no one behind’.

These are ambitious, and cover a wide range of areas, including eliminating poverty and hunger, achieving good health, reducing inequality and more.

The main target for the fourth SDG on quality education is to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.’

The implication here is that all people, regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity etc, should enjoy access to equitable and quality education. This dovetails with SDG 5, whose main goal is to ‘Achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls.’

Surely, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls should be one of the main targets for all nations.

My focus

As an African academic activist, the focus of my discussion is on Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Zimbabwe is my motherland, where I did most of my education and I have been teaching at Midlands State University for the past ten years. Before that, I lived in South Africa as a postgraduate student and an educator for eight years (2004–2012). Hence, my views on gender and academia are mainly shaped by my experiences of living, studying, teaching, researching, and engaging in gender activist work in these two countries.

I will try to unpack my discussion in four sections

- 1 Literacy levels and access to basic education
- 2 Teenage pregnancy, rape and child marriages;
- 3 Gender disparities at tertiary institutions
- 4 The need for peer mentoring and female role models.

Literacy levels and access to basic education

While considerable progress has been made in Zimbabwe and South Africa to bridge the gender gap in terms of accessing education, we still have a long way to go when it comes to achieving gender parity in all academic circles.

According to the 2022 national statistics, Zimbabwe has consistently maintained high literacy levels, 95.2 percent males and 92.4 percent females are literate. In South Africa, the adult literacy is nearly the same among women and men, at 95.5 per cent.

Yet even with these high literacy levels, when it comes to progressing for tertiary education and seeking employment opportunities, the gender gap seems to widen. This is the result of the highly patriarchal traditions, which place boys and men further up the ladder of society, whilst women and girls continue to be kept on the lower rungs.

The gender-based division of household chores, especially in the rural communities and in some informal communities in the urban areas, places a heavy burden of

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- 1 No poverty
- 2 Zero hunger
- 3 Good health and well-being
- 4 Quality education
- 5 Gender equality
- 6 Clean water and sanitation
- 7 Affordable and clean energy
- 8 Decent work and economic growth
- 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- 10 Reduced inequalities
- 11 Sustainable cities and communities
- 12 Responsible consumption and production
- 13 Climate action
- 14 Life below water
- 15 Life on land
- 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
- 17 for the goals

domestic chores on the girl child, to the detriment of educational performance. Furthermore, in some poor families, the boy child continues to be the one who is given priority when it comes to deciding on who drops out of school due to financial constraints.

Teenage pregnancy, rape and child marriages

Various forms of sexual and gender-based violence pose a major impediment to the attainment of gender equity in Southern Africa.

For instance, during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown phase, the government of Zimbabwe reported that nearly 5,000 teenage girls fell pregnant in January and February 2021 and about 1,800 entered early marriages during the same period.

Similarly, South Africa’s rate of rape, including early marriage, forced marriage and harmful religio-cultural practices, has been found to be one of the highest in the world. Six per cent of girls in South Africa are married before the age of 18 and one percent are married before their 15th birthday.

These statistics reflect the gender disparities which put young women and girls at a disadvantage when it comes to competing on the job market. As the adage goes ‘educate a woman and you educate a nation’. The fact that these young girls drop out of school at such a tender age reduces their chances of becoming economically independent.

Furthermore, it constrains their capacity to support their children to attain better quality education – children whose mothers are educated have an advantage of being tutored at home.

This is especially the case with the newly introduced learner-centred educational system in Zimbabwe, (CALA – Continuous Assessment Learning Activity), which constitutes 30 per cent of the exam mark.

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Gender and academia continued from previous page

This system emphasises various learning activities or assessments that require students to conduct detailed research-based activities in areas where they incorporate practical activities. These include data collection through interviews, questionnaires, and checklists.

The South African education system also uses the same learner-centred curriculum, known as Continuous Assessment (CASS), which also constitutes 30 per cent of the exam marks.

The nature of these education systems is such that children whose parents have high literacy levels, particularly the ones with computer literate parents, have higher chances of excelling than those who don't. Hence, when young girls drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy, sexual violence, or early marriage, this creates a vicious circle because their offspring will also end up having the quality of their education compromised, as they won't be receiving the necessary educational support from their mothers.

Gender disparities at tertiary Institutions

It is commendable that more women and girls are now enrolling at tertiary institutions. However, the inherent gender disparities are still starkly present. There are still some subjects or areas of specialisation which are still stereotyped as either feminine or masculine.

For example, while the world is tilting towards STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), when it comes to selecting areas of specialisation, starting at 'A' level, these subjects continue to be male-dominated. As a result, when students enrol at college or university, these gender-based dichotomies will persist.

This disparity also becomes apparent in the male-to-female ratio of lecturers at college or university level. Another impediment that stands in the way of attaining gender equality is the lower number of women in the key leadership and decision-making positions at tertiary institutions. This starts at the Student Representative Committees, which are usually male-dominated.

Likewise, when it comes to lecturers, there are fewer women occupying positions such as department chairperson, faculty dean, Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC), or Vice Chancellor (VC).

Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, where I am currently teaching, was established in 1999 (24 years ago) – yet the first female PVC was only appointed in 2018, (19 years later). The proportion of female PVCs and VCs in tertiary institutions in both South Africa and Zimbabwe is less than 10 per cent.

In South Africa, something that is heart-wrenching is the way the tenure of female VCs recently appointed at the University of South Africa and the University of Cape Town have been embroiled with students and staff strikes and lawsuits.

Looking at it from a gender-critical perspective, one

tends to notice that this has been largely ignited by the fact that African female academics seem to be being attacked because of their gender and colour. It is as if our society is not ready for female leadership at the higher echelons of power. Even the number of female PhD holders and professors is much smaller than that of their male counterparts at most Southern African university.

This could be because the same gender-based division of labour at the domestic sphere, which I have mentioned above, also has a huge impact on female academics' opportunities for rising up the academic ladder. The major challenges encountered by academics when it comes to balancing heavy workloads and conducting academic research make it practically impossible for many female academics to compete on even ground with their male academic colleagues – most of whom do not have to worry about domestic chores.

The need for peer mentoring and female role models

While this discussion has highlighted some of the main impediments to attaining gender parity, the situation is not altogether gloomy.

As has been noted, there is hope for fulfilling the main goals for SDG 4 and 5. Through peer mentoring between male and female colleagues, collaborations between female academics locally, regionally, and globally, it is possible to flatten the gender curves in academia. Through continually socialising boy children to embrace the fact that we are all equal, we can make strides in unravelling the deep-seated gender stereotypes.

Parents, guardians, siblings, spouses, friends, and associates, it is our responsibility to affirm the girl child, to continually remind the boy child that it is okay to compete for the first position with a female classmate and to be beaten by her.

For female academics who have successfully risen up the academic ladder, it is prudent for us to encourage and mentor emerging female academics.

It is high time that those who have made it to the top and those who are still striving to climb to the top make resolute efforts to unshackle the 'Pull her down' (PHD) syndrome. Men and women of Africa – united we shall stand and divided we shall fall.

The attainment of SDGs 4 and 5 is not a pipe dream, it is achievable, if only we work together as a team and do our part.

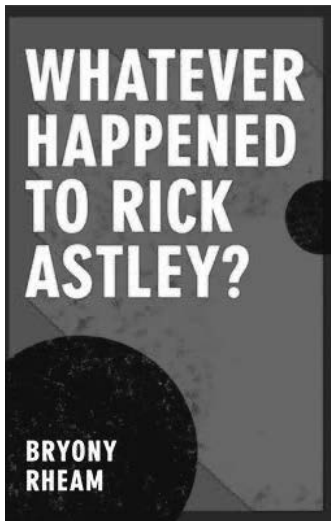
Our religious and cultural values are endowed with teachings on unity and solidarity, progress, and prosperity. Let us tap into them and dare to dream for a gender inclusive and gender equitable African society. In unity with the SDGs' mantra 'Leaving no-one behind', let us make sure that this is achieved and we attain quality education whilst enjoying gender equality.

Dr Sophia Chirongoma is a senior lecturer in the Religious Studies and Ethics Department at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe.

Review

Whatever happened to Rick Astley?

Pat Brickhill reviews a collection of short stories by Bryony Rheam



Bryony Rheam's latest book is a collection of short stories, each one is linked in some way to Zimbabwe.

Most are set in various suburbs of Bulawayo where Bryony lives with her family. A handful are set in the UK, and *The Piano Tuner*, a touching story of prejudice and compassion, is set in Zambia. The subject of each story ranges from potholes to disappearing electricity,

and the physical and human neglect of Zimbabwe, but each describes a different facet of loss.

'The beauty of the ordinary'

I would agree with fellow Zimbabwean writer Siphwe Ndlovu, who writes on the back cover that Bryony portrays loss 'of identity, memory, country or a loved one' and 'capture(s) the beauty of the ordinary'.

The writer has a gift for vividly painting with words the world she is writing about. We are drawn into a realm of reflection that arises with the passage of time as we grow older: reliving childhood, or the excitement of joining the world of adults, combined with the loneliness that can come with old age.

These themes are developed in *The Queue* and *These I have Loved*, while the consequences of bad life choices are explored in *Dignum Et Justum Est*.

Bonding

Bryony Rheam has a wonderful talent for bonding the reader with the story, tackling emotions that are familiar, looking at belonging, the loss of country, of husband, or merely the passage of time. Each story left me with a strong sense of the character struggling against the vagaries of life and perhaps attempting to reach a point of resolution or even redemption.

Castles in the Air was a beautiful descriptive story blending the compassion of motherhood with the magic of childhood, as the mother distracts from a power cut by taking her daughter on a late afternoon walk, enthusiastically joining in her child's imaginary games. My least favourite story was *The Colonel Comes By*, which describes the stark, desperate struggle of a single mother, as the ending left this reader rather confused.

The Big Trip, *The Young Ones* and *Last Drink at the Bar* explore the familiar divide that opens with choices, or the lack of them, by those who leave their country and

those who remain – as each attempts to justify or acknowledge where they live. *Moving On* is a story of coming to terms with the hidden trauma of loss that surfaces when memory and reality merge.

Bryony Rheam gives a glimpse of her skill at humour with *Christmas*. *The Fountain of Lethe* uncovers a memory from childhood perhaps best left buried.

Finally, the title story is a wonderful wistful reflection of a mother inspired by remembering a song from her youth in *Whatever Happened to Rick Astley?*

I found this anthology both touching and entertaining. To some these stories will provoke nostalgia, for many people have endured the trauma of leaving the country of their birth – often leaving loved ones behind. Some tales will leave the reader with a familiar longing and feeling of sadness but every narrative is bursting with warmth and empathy. This anthology provides a poignant glimpse into the lives of strangers who are nevertheless familiar, to all who are fortunate enough to be able read it.

I thoroughly recommend it.

Whatever happened to Rick Astley? by Bryony Rheam is published by amabooks, Zimbabwe

ISBN 97817793 10958

224 pages, 2033

Pat Brickhill is a freelance writer and BZS Secretary.

Writing for the Review

Guidelines for contributors

1. Offers of material or ideas for material from members

We love getting suggestions and offers of material.

The *Review* belongs to the members, and the more input we get from members the better. Ideally, that comes with an offer to write it, or a suggestion of someone who can do it.

But do get in touch before sending us anything – to save confusion!

2. Obituaries

We suggest that there should be two kinds of obituaries – both, as you would expect, relevant to Zimbabwe.

a) obituaries for well-known people written by someone familiar with their life. We will happily accept suggestions.

b) for less well-known people: whose colleagues feel should be acknowledged but who is 'unsung'.

We can then publish something like the Guardian's *Other Lives* obituaries, written by a friend or relation.

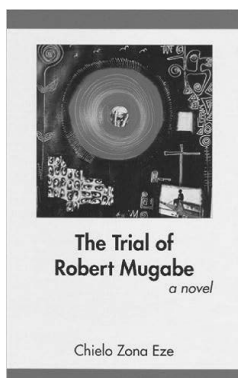
3. Lastly ...

if you've agreed to write for the *Review*, please let me know as soon as you can if there's any problem (meeting the deadline, etc) so we can look for a way to fill in the space and, if possible, reschedule you!

Jenny Vaughan, Editor, Zimbabwe Review.
jenny@jennyvvaughan.co.uk

New Books from and about Zimbabwe

This selection covers new books coming to our attention in the period December 2022 – August 2023.



Chiellozona Eze
The Trial of Robert Mugabe
Unable to recall when exactly he died, Robert Mugabe is shocked to be in the presence of God for trial. Facing him are countless people who died during his regime. They tell their stories, after which God condemns him to hell. Mugabe suddenly wakes up, in Harare, realising he just had a dreadful dream.

This novel ‘draws deep from the well of African literature to challenge a post-independence leadership whose discourse of victimhood has been used to legitimate the most appalling brutalities’ – Prof. Meg Samuelson, Stellenbosch University.

Chiellozona Eze grew up in Amokwe, Nigeria, and is currently Professor of English and African Literature at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago.

126 pages, paperback, Cissus World Press, USA, 2019, ISBN 9781733587211



Oscar Gwiriri
Zororo Risina Zororo (novel in Shona)

Zorodzai akashanyira kumusha kwavo kwaHonde munguva yedenda reCovid 19, pari panguva yezororo. Chakaitika ndechakaitika ariko, vanhu vachirarama pamaramiro avo ayo airatidza kuti vamwe vakange vasingakendengi

zvavo pamusoro pekudzivirira denda iri rakange richitekeshera nekutsvaira vanhu pasi pose. Bhuku rino rinobuditsa huumwe hwevanhu vekumamisha uko kunonetsa kuvapatsanura nyangwe pachikurudzirwa kuti vataramuke. Zviitiko zvakafanana nejana, ndufu, matare, misangano nezvimwewo zvinoenderera mberi mukuunganidza vanhu, nepo zviine njodzi. Tinoona sadunhu achiunganidzawo varanda vake kuti avayambire kuti vasaungane. Kuzvitaure tingareva nepasipo, zvave kuda kuzviverengera nyaya iyi inoti kusetsa, kusuwisa nekufadzazve semare.

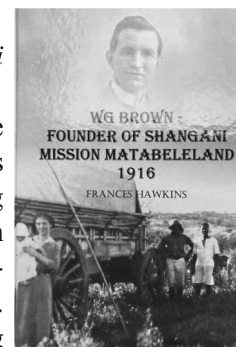
Zorodzai visits his rural home in Honde, in the eastern Manicaland province of Zimbabwe, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic during his school break.

He finds the people living recklessly, uncaring of the danger of Covid-19. The rural folk are interconnected, and it is difficult to separate them even when this is the rule. Cattle herding, funerals, court trials, and village meetings carry on despite their dangers.

146 pages, paperback, Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9781779314918

Frances Hawkins
W G Brown – Founder of Shangani Mission, Matabeleland, 1916

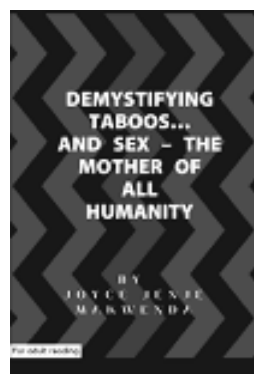
An account of the early mission life of the Reverend W G Brown and his wife Mrs Kate Brown, the pioneering founders of the Shangani Mission in Matabeleland on behalf of the London Missionary Society in 1916. They travelled by wagon, building brushwood stockades for protection from wild animals at night, learning to deal with insects, snakes and malaria, bake bread in the ground, pickle a boar and make their own furniture polish, liniments and embrocation. In the course of their work they met the late King Lobengula’s Matabelele Queen, Losekeyi, and his third son Prince Tshakalisha, among others.



When the Reverend Bowen Rees retired from Inyathi Mission in 1924, Brown was appointed Principal and turned the school into a flourishing self-supporting Boys’ Industrial Institution, the finest education facility in the country.

485 pages, 224 photos, paperback, Memories of Africa UK, 2023. Available on Etsy at <https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/1467536147/inspiring-account-of-life-of-reverend-w>

The following three titles are from the Joyce Jenje Makwenda Collection Archive. Joyce Jenje-Makwenda is an award-winning producer, journalist, artist, ethnomusicologist, scholar, archivist, historian, researcher, lecturer, researcher and writer. Born in Mbare, Harare, in 1958, she has been involved for the past 30 years in music, popular culture, media, politics, women’s history and gender issues.



Joyce Jenje-Makwenda
Demystifying Taboos and Sex – The Mother of All Humanity

A thought-provoking, entertaining and informative compilation of stories and articles aimed at demystifying the world of sex, sexuality and relationships while also exploring African traditional customs, practices and beliefs.

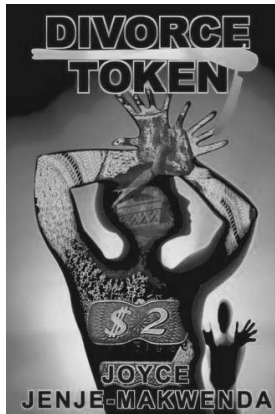
202 pages, paperback, Joyce Jenje Makwenda Collection Archive, Zimbabwe, 2022. ISBN 9781779272812

Joyce Jenje-Makwenda
Diary Notebook – Women Politicians/Parliamentarians of Zimbabwe

A celebration of the many unsung heroines among African women in the fields of politics, leadership, sport, media, art, sculpture, activism, business entrepreneurship, and

education. Women who make changes in their communities or countries, and inspire other women in doing so. It chronicles the journeys of women politicians from 1800 to today, starting with Modjadji, Nehanda and Lozikeyi through to Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity 2008.

234 pages, paperback, Joyce Jenje Makwenda Collection Archive, Zimbabwe, 2017, ISBN 9780797462595



Joyce Jenje-Makwenda
Divorce Token

Netsai is a hard-working woman, who spends sleepless nights in her cramped four room house, sewing clothes for a living. Her story takes the reader to mid-1980s Zimbabwe, when there was an upsurge of the African middle class, and an exodus to the former 'Europeans Only' upper-class suburbs. Netsai and

her husband Herbert dream of buying a house in one of those suburbs and living happily with their children. But does money buy them what they seek?

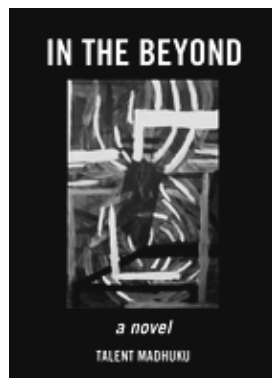
216 pages, paperback, Joyce Jenje Makwenda Collection Archive, Zimbabwe, 2017, ISBN 9781779319739

Talent Madhuku

In the Beyond – a novel

After the tragic death of his mother, Tichakunda goes to live with his maternal grandparents. After they pass away, he leaves his home with his lover Shorai and goes to Harare. When their relationship goes sour, Shorai leaves him with nothing but an HIV positive condition. Tichakunda sees no other option but to turn to the sale of illegal drugs for his survival. This is a story of a young man's reflection of past circumstances and the choices he made and how they shaped and changed his life.

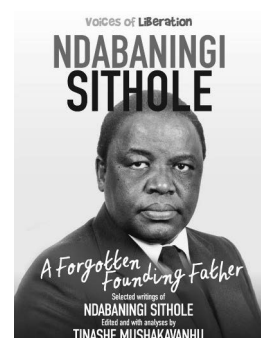
186 pages, paperback, Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9781779314963



Tinashe Mushakavanhu

Voices of Liberation: Ndabaningi Sithole – A Forgotten Founding Father

As the founding president of ZANU, Ndabaningi Sithole was at the vanguard of the Zimbabwean nationalist movement in the 1950s and 60s. He was also one of the first black writers in Rhodesia and

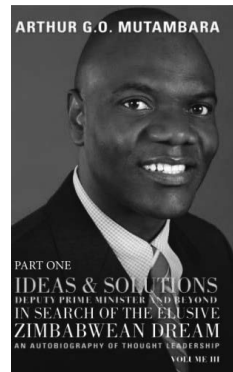


made prolific contributions in various genres including fiction, poetry, polemics and autobiography. Yet Sithole

has receded from view, partly because of his own political misfortunes, and partly through the machinations of his erstwhile comrades and political opponents.

This biographical mapping of Ndabaningi Sithole's political and intellectual contributions reflects a new and emerging discourse on marginalised historical and national figures.

256 pages, paperback, The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, 2023, ISBN 9780796926388



Professor Arthur G.O. Mutambara
Ideas & Solutions – Deputy Prime Minister and Beyond 2009–2023

This is the third volume in a series tracing the thinking of Professor Arthur G.O. Mutambara over 40 years of independence, as his generation sought the transformation it wished to see in Zimbabwe. In his view, it has been one national tragedy after another, the situation

degenerating further in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. An insecure and divided seurocratic state, ethnonationalism, looting of national resources and violent repression of citizens are reflected in the shrinking of the democratic space, pervasive and unrelenting poverty, destruction of livelihoods, a collapsed healthcare system and avoidable loss of lives.

520 pages, paperback, SAPES Books, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9780639776187 (also in Kindle format)

Previous volumes in the series are: *In Search of the Elusive Zimbabwean Dream: An Autobiography of Thought Leadership* (2017), and *The Path to Power: An Autobiography of Thought Leadership* (2018)

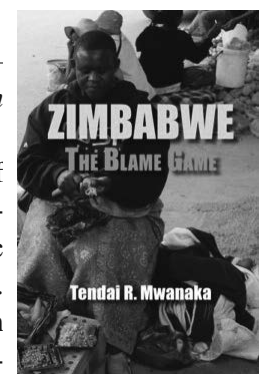
Tendai Rinos Mwanaka

Zimbabwe: The Blame Game – Recollected Essays and Non Fictions

An attempt to start the process of finding who is to blame for Zimbabwe's political and economic problems and how to solve them. We need to face each other with an open mind, honest engagement, with real love that doesn't just run along the path to judging, with forgiveness, with real reconciliation.

The contributions focus on the Government of National Unity (GNU), the 2013 elections and their aftermath, and, in particular, tackle life in exile, especially for those Zimbabweans who left for South Africa.

204 pages, paperback, Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9781779243171



Continued on next page

New books – continued from previous page

Tendai Rinos Mwanaka

Zimbabwe: The Urgency of Now – Creative Non-Fictions and Essays

This is a creative follow-up to the more academic and journalistic style of *Zimbabwe: The Blame Game*. It explores the issues confronting Zimbabweans in imaginative language, mixing storytelling, diary, memoirs, playwriting and poetry with nonfiction.

228 pages, paperback, Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9781779243188

Bryony Rheam

Whatever Happened to Rick Astley?

Bryony Rheam, the award-winning author of *All Come to Dust* and *This September Sun* has now published a collection of 16 short stories illustrating the daily life and the greater fate of ordinary Zimbabweans over the last 20 years. (See page 9 for a full review.)

224 pages, paperback, amabooks Publishers, Zimbabwe, 2023, ISBN 9781779310958. The book is published in the UK by Parthian Books, ISBN 9781914595141

ZIMBABWE
THE URGENCY OF NOW
Tendai R. Mwanaka



Season of Growth

BZS member Edgar Muzvidzwa has recently published a book titled *Season of Growth*.

It is a guide to promoting personal and professional growth in every area of life, including business and career, education, relationships and spirituality.

Edgar explains that '*Season of Growth* builds connections between nature, religion and the dynamics of human lives, beginning with the revelation I received through watching rain falling in Waterfalls, Harare.'

As a church pastor, he drew on his revelation in his preaching. The book gives hints for making growth sustainable and points out the pitfalls to be avoided to maintain it.

Season of Growth is available on the AuthorHouse website, Amazon and other outlets. 52 pages, paperback, AuthorHouseUK, 2023, ISBN 979882308369.

For more information, contact Edgar at edgar-muzvidzwa@gmail.com

Season
GROWTH

Edgar Muzvidzwa



An Oxford Tribute to Dambudzo Marechera

Tinashe Mushakavanhu describes an exhibition held in Oxford about a former student

A 20th-century writer, Dambudzo Marechera has, in the 21st century, been claiming his place in Oxford – the university – from which he was ejected in 1976 – and the town.

Our exhibition, which ended on 23 August (Zimbabwe's election date) was an abbreviated history of one of the most fascinating figures in 20th century African literature.

He arrived in Oxford as a young student from (what was then) Rhodesia, where he had been expelled from the local university for leading protests against segregation.

But Dambudzo Marechera found Oxford a difficult and disagreeable place.

He stopped attending tutorials and was drinking heavily – which led to his college 'sending him down'.

What happened after he left the university is a matter of speculation, but when he resurfaced, his first book, *The House of Hunger*, was about to be published in the Heinemann African Writers Series.

50 years on

It is almost 50 years since the young Marechera matriculated into Oxford to study for a degree in English. While he never graduated, he became an important writer from Africa using the expression of English.

The exhibition, *Disruptive Dialogues: The Legacies of Dambudzo Marechera*, was the culmination of a year-long

Dambudzo Marechera's groundbreaking The House of Hunger, originally published in 1978, was reprinted in 2022 in the series Penguin Modern Classics.
ISBN 9780241544259
176 pages



project supported by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH). The project was a knowledge exchange collaboration with Niall Munro, Professor of American Literature at Oxford Brookes University.

It also featured new work by artist Wynona Mutisi, who produced comic illustrations of Marechera in Harare.

Opening space: Zone 1 of four

The exhibition was set out in four zones, beginning with an opening space that introduced the audience to Marechera as an extraordinary poet, prose writer, enabler, and provocateur – a different kind of Oxford author who has never been fully acknowledged by the city and the university.

from *The House of Hunger*

Dambudzo Marechera's first book, *The House of Hunger*, was published by Heinemann as part of the African Writers Series in 1978. Though a fiction, the novella reflects on Marechera's own childhood in Rusape and the brutal conditions of that environment.

In this excerpt, the narrator recalls an incident when he escaped to a nightclub, the walls of which were covered in advertisements for 'skin-lightening creams, Afro-wigs, Vaseline, Benson and Hedges.' He ends up going with one of the skin-lightened dancers to a room where an effigy of Ian Smith, the prime minister of the white supremacist, minority government in Rhodesia, 'dangled by the neck from a large butcher's spike.'

That night all the lights I had known flashed through my mind. The pain was the sound of slivers of glass being methodically crushed in a steel vice by a fiend whose face was very like that of my old carpentry master who is now in a madhouse. The skin-lightened dancer – she was burning, burning the madness out of me. The room had taken over my mind. My hunger had become the room. There was a thick darkness where I was going. It was a prison. It was the womb. It was blood clinging closely like a swamp in the grass-matted lowlands of my life. It was a Whites Only sign on a lavatory. It was my teeth on edge – the bitter acid of it! It was the effigy swinging gently to and fro in the night of my mind. And the pain of it flared into flame, flickering like a match; for a moment it lit up the room, making the shadows of the naked dancer and me leap quickly across the ceiling and fuse into an embrace. Leaping like ecstasy grown sad – a violence slowly translating into gentleness.

But the match died out and history was the blackened twig of it. The fine grains of that burnt-out insurrection were the stories of those black heroes among whom my story was merely one more skin-lightening pain.

The House of Hunger (London: Heinemann, 1978, 2009), p. 37

The exhibition displayed a number of panels giving background information about Dambudzo Marechera and his work. Other exhibits included videos, a replica of a tent he once lived in – and (below) the fox-hunting costume he famously (and ironically) occasionally wore.



Zones 2 and 3

The second zone of the exhibition explored Marechera's presence in Oxford and Harare by considering the cityscapes that shaped him and his writing, and how – through digital maps produced for this project – people in both cities can enter into a dialogue with Marechera's ideas and trace his ghost everywhere.

The third zone focused on the ways in which

Marechera's writing invites his readers to speculate about the futures of both Oxford and Harare, and about how we can support artists, and about ourselves. It included writing from members and ex-members of the homeless charity Crisis, inspired by Marechera's work, and projects by architecture students from Oxford Brookes University.

Final part

The final part of the exhibition brought the past into the present and challenged the notion that creativity and knowledge need to be located in any one place. Perhaps one of the things we learn from Marechera is that disruption is a vital and necessary way of working and living.

Uncomfortable questions

Marechera's work poses uncomfortable questions about the city, institutions, and the spaces we live in, but it also shows how artistic production can act as a form of resistance to oppressive structures of power – and even enact change.

This exhibition, in which Marechera occupied space in a gallery in Oxford's city centre during the summer of 2023, was the author's 'second coming' to the city and provoked discussion and debate about who belongs here.

Disruptive Dialogues: The Legacies of Dambudzo Marechera, was an exhibition at Old Fire Station Arts Centre in Oxford between 4 July and 26 August 2023.

Curated by Tinashe Mushakavanhu and Niall Munro.

Tinashe Mushakavanhu is a Junior Research Fellow in African and Comparative Literature at the University of Oxford.

Dambudzo Marechera

- 1952 Tambuzai* Charles William born 4 June 1952
Vengere Township, Rusape (one of nine siblings)
 - 1958 Attends primary school in Vengere
 - 1965 Father dies in accident
 - 1966 Boarder at St Augustine's Secondary School,
Penhalonga - 3 As at A level
 - 1972 Awarded Scholarship to University of Rhodesia
 - 1973 Expelled from University of Rhodesia
 - 1974 Awarded a Scholarship to New College,
Oxford University
 - 1976 Expelled from Oxford University
 - 1978 *The House of Hunger* published by Heinemann
 - 1979 Awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize
 - 1980 *Black Sunlight* published by Heinemann
 - 1982 Returned to Zimbabwe
 - 1983 Attended first Zimbabwe International Book Fair
at the National Gallery
 - 1984 *Mindblast* published by College Press
 - 1987 Died 18 August 1987, Harare aged 35
- * Meaning: 'the one who is to be troubled'.

Lobola/roora – its history and meaning

Vimbai M. Matiza-Mtombeni examines the tradition – and how it is changing

Lobola/roora is a custom that was practised traditionally in Zimbabwe and which has been passed on to the present day.

Today, there are differences from the past in the way the custom is being practised. Culture is dynamic: the core value of paying *lobola* is still there, but the way it is done has changed.

The gist of the matter is the purpose of the custom – that is, why it was, and is, done. How it is done may have changed, but the changes are superficial and reflect the fact that people today are living in, and are affected by, environments and cultures that are very different from those of earlier generations.

The tradition

Traditionally, *lobola* was paid by the bridegroom as an appreciation to the bride's family for having her as his wife. In Zimbabwean Shona custom, its aim was to build relationships (*kuumba ukama*), thus the saying '*azvara nhongo azvara sheche*' and vice versa. (Meaning, if you have a boy child, when he marries you will have a girl child.)

In fact, building recognisable and respectful relationships was the main purpose of *lobola*. This was seen in the bride price that was charged: the groom must work as part of the 'price', or submit something useful to the bride's family – such as hoes, and any other tools that were used in the home were accepted. It was a sign of respect and, more importantly, bringing the two families together.

The same principle of *lobola* still applies today, but, with the introduction of the cash economy in Africa, the practice was slowly turned into a money-making opportunity for the brides' families.

A girl-child is viewed as a source of wealth and an opportunity to get money when the couple gets married. Whilst the philosophy of *lobola* is still there, we cannot run away from the hard financial obligation that is placed on both the bride and the bridegroom in the way things are practised now.

Today there is the issue of having to pay for food, the *roora* 'squad team' and their attires, the decorated venues and, subsequently the bride price itself.

In short we talking about a mini wedding, complete with cakes to be cut and eaten.

A shared responsibility

A particularly significant change to traditional practice has developed: paying the 'bride price' was originally the sole responsibility of the groom and his family – which is culturally correct.

But the infiltration and fusion of many cultures from around the world has seen the woman or the girl child participating in the payment of her *lobola* – a new and

interesting phenomenon in the practice, very different from its traditional form.

That is what I meant by the effects of the different environments involved in the practice, which are creating a 'hybrid' practice in which *lobola* becomes a shared responsibility between the two families coming together to make financial arrangements for their children's marriages.

Not a matter of property

The traditional custom of marriage in Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular, was not meant to make women property of their husbands or their families. The idea was to be complementary to each other and to build sustainable relationships among themselves.

Today, bride price is valued differently in different circles in Zimbabwe – for a number of reasons to do with how society now works. This includes the way some people like to show off on social media, displaying their achievements on digital platforms. It has become a competition – people want to be seen to do more, and better.

This tendency to use the *lobola* custom as a vehicle to show off does raise questions about its value.

The assistance that the bridegrooms are getting from the brides' families also challenges the commitment of these unions. Some question whether a couple will continue to value their marriage in same way because of the equal roles they play in the *lobola* ceremony.

Those questioners look back to the time when the idea was that the bridegroom would feel the need to love and protect his bride because of the resources that he would have put together to get her. But it seems that this idea has been changed by new influences and ways of thinking.

The Marriage Act

Perhaps more importantly, the introduction of the new Marriage Act in Zimbabwe (giving rights to 'girlfriends' in registered unions) has changed the attitude to *lobola*. The promotion of social unions led people to lose respect for *lobola* – especially in the face of economic hardships. People cannot afford the style of *lobola* that has grown up.

The practice seems to have been undermined, and the way it is done may vary, but the overarching principle and its core value remains – to bring families together.

Underneath it all, that philosophy remains the same.

Dr Vimbai M Matiza-Mtombeni is a Senior Lecturer at Midlands State University

See also: *Lobola: Its Implications for Women's Reproductive Rights* by Sara Mvududu 56 pages, Weaver Press, 2002, ISBN-10: 1779150067

ISBN-13: 978-1779150066

<https://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/lobola-its-implications-for-womens-reproductive-rights>

News in brief

'The pain of remembering'

Author and journalist Trevor Grundy, an occasional contributor to *Zimbabwe Review*, has used his blog to publish an article: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections: The Pain of Remembering Gukuruhundi*, by South Africa-based Zimbabwean journalist Brendan Seery. See: <https://www.trevorgrundy.news/the-pain-of-remembering-the-start-of-one-of-africas-most-ignored-genocides/>

Trevor has also published a second article on *Gukuruhundi*, quoting a 'deeply disturbing' report by Dr Hazel Cameron, Director of academic consultancy and research institute, Pearl International Insights, based in Dundee, Scotland. See: https://www.scienceopen.com/document_file/944114af-dd2b-49fa-bece-acf7beb7110f/ScienceOpen/SCJ_13_1_Cameron.pdf

Zimbabwe, she wrote

The Guardian 25 July carried an article headed: *Zimbabwe, she wrote: the women telling their country's story for a new era*.

This, and a BBC World Service programme, *The Documentary: Women Writing Zimbabwe*, aired on 30 July, both draw attention to the proliferation of writers – especially women writers – emerging from modern Zimbabwe.

'Look at any fiction prize recently and odds are that you will find a Zimbabwean woman nominated, be it Tsitsi Dangaremba, NoViolet Bulawayo or Petina Gappah', says the BBC programme's website. 'But forget the glitz of the Booker, what is the situation inside Zimbabwe?'

The programme and the *Guardian* both go on to explore the phenomenon of the sheer numbers of writers and the quality of their work, and what their writing can tell us about modern Zimbabwe.

We hear from several writers – many well known in southern Africa, but less so outside the region.

The first quoted in the *Guardian* is Sipiwe Gloria Ndlovu (*The Theory of Flight*, Penguin South Africa, 2018), whose writing addresses the *Gukuruhundi* massacres. She mentions the events that 'define their generation': 'The war, the HIV crisis, migration and the brain drain, and the creation of the Zimbabwean diaspora.'

The BBC programme, similarly,

describes 'fearless women who write about violence, love, pain, and politics and try to tell the complicated story of the past and the present of a country which may only be four decades old, but whose people and history stretch far further'.

BBC presenter Tawanda Mudzonga asks these authors: what inspires them? What challenges do they face because they are women? And what risks do they run, writing about difficult subjects in a country where the political situation is ever more restrictive and freedom of speech increasingly under threat – and where opinionated women, including writers, suffer significant abuse from social media and elsewhere.

Finally, she asks whether the conditions still exist to nurture a new generation of women writers in Zimbabwe?

BZS members might try to answer that. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jul/28/zimbabwe-she-wrote-the-women-telling-their-countrys-story-for-a-new-era> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0g2swhg>

Tribute to Thomas Mapfumo

The website *African Arguments* has published a tribute to Thomas Mapfumo, to mark his retirement after a 50-year career. His final concert took place in the UK (in Leicester), in June of this year. See: <https://africanarguments.org/2023/07/zimbabwean-legend-thomas-mapfumo-retires-in-exile/>

Quiz Night in Stevenage

John Addison, Secretary of the Stevenage Kadoma Link Association (SKLA) has announced a Quiz Night at 7 pm at Stevenage District Scout Hall on 23 September. He says, 'Payment is to be made on the night, but we really want people to book in advance, as this will help in our planning,

'As an incentive, all those making advance bookings will be entered in to a free draw for an M&S voucher.

'Last year's quiz was a resounding success, it raised vital funds for our school fees scheme in Kadoma, and it was a hugely enjoyable evening. So you can enjoy yourselves and support a very worthy cause at the same time. Please spread the word. The Eventbrite option for booking is now live.' See: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/d/uk/united-kingdom--stevenage/skla/>



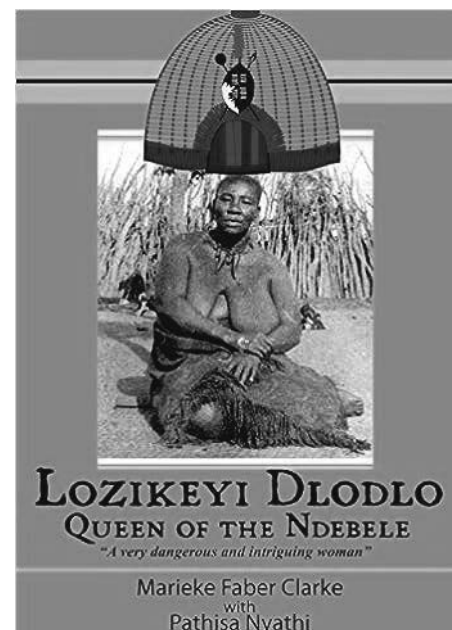
The stars are still bright

The Stars are Bright: Zimbabwe through the eyes of its young painters from Cyrene (1940-1947) was an exhibition of paintings, featuring over 75 works by more than 40 young artists attending the Cyrene Mission School in 1940s rural Zimbabwe.

Since it took place in 2020, there has been a fundraising campaign to publish a book of the paintings. After a number of delays, the most recent news is that publication is 'back on track'. See: https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/tsab/sab/posts/3855280?ref=ksr_email_backer_project_update_registered_users

Queen Lozikeyi

BZS member Marieke Clarke writes: 'I have co-researched and co-written a biography of Queen Lozikeyi with Pathisa Nyathi and his publishing house, Amagugu. The book was first published in 2010, but we keep it updated whenever new information comes to light. It is available from the African Books Collective (orders @ africanbookscollective.com), and from Pathisa Nyathi or from the National Gallery at Douslin House in Bulawayo.'





ALL Members and Friends of BZS welcome ONLINE on Saturday 14th October 2023

42nd BZS AGM & MEMBERS MEETING 12.00-14.00 BST/13.00-15.00pm CAT

BZS AGM AGENDA

Welcome and introduction

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of AGM 15th October 2022
3. Matters arising
4. Chair's report
5. Treasurer's report and accounts
6. Secretaries' reports including Membership Report
7. Reports
8. Motions for debate
9. Roll of Honour
10. Election of officers and executive committee members
11. 2024 Programme
12. Any other business

If you wish to attend the AGM

Please register on eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/britain-zimbabwe-society-2023-annual-general-meeting-tickets-695297372157> to ensure you receive the Zoom link.

The meeting will elect a committee for 2023/4: the current BZS committee members are listed below under *Contact the Britain Zimbabwe Society*. All officer and executive posts fall vacant each year. Existing post holders may stand again, and nominations are invited for all officer and non-officer posts.

Further details about the meeting, including the minutes of the 2022 AGM and a nomination paper to be used for any of the executive positions are in the insert enclosed with this issue of Zimbabwe Review.

Contact the Britain Zimbabwe Society

President: Knox Chitiyo

2022–2023 Officers and Executive

Chair: Millius Palayiwa

Vice-Chair: Rori Masiane

Secretary (Minutes/Correspondence): Pat Brickhill

Secretary (Membership): Margaret Ling

Information and Publications Officer: Jenny Vaughan

Web Officer: Philip Weiss

Treasurer: Margaret Ling

Other Executive members:

Diana Jeater

Victor de Waal

Pelagia Nyamayaro

The Stevenage–Kadoma Link Association

This is a list of the members of the 2022/23 Executive. The Annual General meeting (see above) will elect a committee for 2023/4.

Britain Zimbabwe Society Membership Form

To join and receive your regular copy of the *Zimbabwe Review*, postings on the members e-mail discussion forum and WhatsApp network membership, please print and send the completed form below with your subscription cheque to:

Margaret Ling, BZS Membership Secretary, 25 Endymion Road, London N4 1EE

Please enrol me/us in the BZS at the following annual rate (tick relevant box).

(You may also join the BZS online, payment by credit/debit card, via our website:

www.britainzimbabwe.org.uk/join-bzs-today)

Rates

Ordinary	£21	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unwaged/student	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joint (two at one address)	£25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Institution	£50	<input type="checkbox"/>

Membership runs by calendar year; renewals are due on 1 January each year.

NAME

TELEPHONE:

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

EMAIL