

The fault lines inherent in the post-apartheid rainbow myth are beginning to show clearly and decisively after 21 years. These are not the same sentiments shared by Warman when she asks each of her interviewees “was the struggle and the sacrifice worth it?” What is emerging on the campuses, streets, and public discourse in South Africa is a fundamental question of the stakes of liberation and freedom and the legitimacy of the dogmatic history of the anti-apartheid struggle for “non-racialism”. In this regard, several questions we can take from Rampolokeng need to be posed to any contemporary historical texts: is it a work in “obscenity-heritage” and “superstars” that once again waves the boneless slogan of Amandla or is it a contribution to a much needed deepening of the historical archive? Warman’s text, unfortunately, seems to answer in the affirmative to the first set of questions.

A history of Zimbabwe

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Alois Mlambo’s many works (single, co-authored, and edited books ranging from studies of industrialisation, white immigration, to structural adjustment, and the wide-ranging *Becoming Zimbabwe* edited with Brian Raftopoulos; and scores of articles ranging from the history of Zimbabwe’s civil aviation to the Cold Storage Commission to sanctions against Rhodesia, student politics in the 1970s, and university policies and practices after 1980) have positioned him extremely well to write this accessible *tour de force* of what has added up to create today’s well-known superficially but poorly understood Zimbabwe. This important book is the result of decades of intense research and writing – scores of theses have been scoured, thousands of pages of primary documents from archives to government bureaus have been scrutinised, and every secondary source imaginable has been interrogated – to make a clearly written

text suitable for undergraduates sparkling with more originality than most of that genre. Indeed, after reading Mlambo's *A History of Zimbabwe* (that he uses the indefinite "a" instead of the definitive "the" is a testament to his modesty) one concludes that this sober, objective and "very" comprehensive account is a thousand times better than the bluster that has often passed as Zimbabwean history and historiography in the past.

Mlambo slips by the racist rants of early Rhodesian rambles (evident far too easily today on websites from such entities as the Rhodesian Embassy in Iceland) with barely a nod to the reactionaries – but pays strict attention to the pre-colonial past. He all but ignores the enthusiastic hurrahs of the nationalist cheerleaders (Zimbabwean aficionados may insert the historians who best fit in the blanks; those who have only a passing interest need not bother). Yet the patriotic historians' bitter critics who thought something more progressive might ensue are confined to the nooks, crannies and detours of the current ruling party's road to power that they thought might open new vistas (*A History* only spends 10 pages on the "ambiguities and contradictions of the liberation struggle" [p. 164], but the fact that he names that war *Chimurenga/Umvukela* instead of just the first word signals that he will not confine the Zimbabwe African People's Union and its stalwarts memorialised in the preface on "notable figures" to non-history's dark dungeons, and the oft cited Machingura/Mhanda's *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter* suggests Mlambo's serious thinking about real possibilities – or perhaps just serious factionalism – within the nationalists' internecine fighting). Fancy post-colonial theories are trashed because ignored although the literary and musical contributions to nationalism and post-nationalism (*A History* does not use the latter phrase) are considered duly; esoteric or contrarian historiography deeming timelines of no utility is also dispensed to dustbins.

What emerges is historical materialism worn lightly: this book is a keen appreciation of the effects of Zimbabwe's economic warps and weaves – much of which is conditioned by *political* decisions at key moments, so the book is in the realm of "political economy" – on the majority of its people, millions of whom now eke out a living far away from their homeland. Mlambo's stark statistics tell the story when needed. It's a pragmatic volume, with little time for the ideological chimeras informing the fantasies of structural adjustment through to *Third Chimurengas* and the inchoate opposition to it (was the Mugabe government *ever* "Marxist" though – p. xxiii?), but keenly aware of the socio-economic and cultural tensions leading, in the absence of the

material forces needed to overcome them, to their catastrophic consequences. It covers the colonial era through its federalist efforts and into the doomed Unilateral Declaration of Independence as even-handedly as the last decade and half of calamity: what counts most are jobs and roads – industrialisation and the infrastructure supporting it. Thus the book is not pessimistic: in the *longue durée* that in other hands might be called the “national democratic revolution”³ Mlambo’s very last words opine that “there is every reason to hope that ... Zimbabwe will succeed in becoming a united, democratic and prosperous country” (p. 259) in spite of his long list of polarising factors in the last two pages and the crises in most of the rest of the book, culminating in the ruling party’s murderous frenzy when it lost the March 2008 elections (the recounting of which, by the way, concludes seventeen of the best pages on Zimbabwe’s post-2000 crisis one will read for a long time).

Perhaps it is the steadfast political neutrality of this book that makes its last hope seem forlornly fragile: if one looks back to the mini-biographies of the “notables” (biases and oversights often come out in timelines and choices of VIPs) and checks out Emmerson Mnangagwa, for example, one will neither know that he was in charge of security when the *Gukurahundi* war against ZAPU killed thousands of Ndebele people nor that he is quite likely to be Zimbabwe’s next president. Thus we are hoist by the historians once again on the petard perplexing so many students of society and especially those of ones passing through tumultuous transitions: what counts, historical structures or agents of history? Where do they meet and how? If the answer is not in this book (can one only pose counterfactuals about the role of particular people in political history, i.e.: what would be the case if Robert Mugabe had not been able to climb the pole to power and keep it?) its reading is absolutely necessary for those concerned with that dialectic in Zimbabwe today and soon become part of this long and complicated history.

3 Alois Mlambo, “Two perspectives on the National Democratic Revolution in Zimbabwe: Thabo Mbeki and Wilfred Mhanda”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30(4), January 2012, pp. 119-138; “A decade of disquieting diplomacy: South Africa, Zimbabwe and the ideology of the National Democratic Revolution, 1999-2009”, *History Compass*, 8(8), August 2010, pp. 752-767.