

Book / Theatre Reviews

Making Ends Meet at the Margins? Grappling with Economic Crisis and Belonging in Beitbridge Town, Zimbabwe by Rekopantswe Mate; Dakar: CODESRIA, 2005; (Distributed by the African Books Collective); 44pp. ISBN: 2-86978-152-0.

Suffering for Territory: Race, Place and Power in Zimbabwe by Donald S. Moore; Durham, NC: Duke University Press/Harare: Weaver Press, 2005; 399pp. £15.95 (pb); ISBN: 0822335700.

Walking a Tightrope: Towards a Social History of the Coloured People of Zimbabwe by James Muzondidya, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005; 323pp. £19.99 (pb); ISBN: 1592212468. Reviewed by Sarah Bracking, University of Manchester.

Chikwava (2007) recently noted of Zimbabwe's fiction:

Thankfully, in spite of or because of the difficulties that Zimbabwe is going through, the turn of the century has seen a quiet adjustment in the publishing of fiction, giving new voices a better platform to be heard.

The comment seems to carry resonance across, at least, the academic disciplines of social history, sociology, and anthropology. It is as if the political and economic crises have catalysed a deep-rooted collective investigation of embedded cultural identities and inheritances, not least in the selected publications listed above. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that despite of, or again perhaps because of, the diasporic movements of people, and the slow but sure temporal space expanding since

Independence, the Matabeleland atrocities, the 1987 'Unity' Accord, the post-2000 seizures of farms and elections, that a space beyond the established post-colonial landmarks is emerging. And it is emerging as a multi-layered, entangled, and many voiced space, as Moore so expertly narrates in his ethnography of Kaerezi, Eastern Highlands. As Chikwava notes of fiction, but it is also true of academia, the questions and explorations have become more complex and the narrative of liberation war and its aftermath is being more often set aside in favour of investigations of new Zimbabwean lives, emerging from neo-liberalism, globalisation, shifting moral community and political economies of displacement and crisis.

More detailed accounts of the diversity and social history of Zimbabwe are also emerging in contra-distinction to the global labels and fixed polar identities of war, liberation, reconciliation, structural adjustment and the Third Chimurenga. Muzondidya work is archetypal here, although selected from a much larger group of possibles. In *Walking a Tightrope*, Muzondidya writes an impressive social history of how Coloured identity has been constructed and understood, challenging the conventional fixity of ethnicity and race in Zimbabwe as biologically determined through the act of miscegenation, and imposed as a category by the colonial State. He both restores the active agency of Coloured people in making their identity, while going some way to reclaim space for the community in a region where the binary white/black racial categorisation has dominated.

In Mate's ethnographic account of the perception and social construction of 'locals' and 'outsiders' in Beitbridge Town the nuances of conflicted identity and its relationship to entitlements, rights and resources literally comes alive from the page. She has conducted a careful study of tensions and continuities of belonging and outlines the contradictory definitions and criteria used by variously resident people in Beitridge. Those without patrilineal roots and Venda language skills, for example, stress home ownership or length of formal employment in the town as criteria of localness and belonging, whereas those with Venda, Shangani, Sotho or Ndebele linguistic belonging, and corresponding patrilineage and clan name, discount these criteria in favour of an ethnicised indigenous categorisation. To the latter, the former remain outsiders who may, in addition, be seen as an unwelcome beneficiary of local resources, housing and employment.

Also, a central strength of this work, despite the author's initial claim (p.3) to be studying through a binary lens of 'local' and 'outsider' is that she actually goes beyond this initial sorting, accounting for the gradations and multilayered attributes of localness (p. 25). For example, when an Ndebele speaking woman marries an (even more) local Venda man, Mate notes that the children will tend not to learn the patrilineal Venda language, such that even within the non-Shona group of related peoples gradation of belonging, and perceived cultural hierarchy, still occur. In this case, the woman contributes to the family's dispossession from the man's cultural and patrilineal heritage.

After a discussion of the various ills apparently wrought on the town by outsiders (according to locals) – the increase in children born out of wedlock, the increase in informalised, and sometimes criminal livelihoods (foreign currency trading, prostitution and assisted

border jumping), crime, public health crises (cholera and HIV/AIDS), and their trickery in gaining housing and resources – Mate contextualises these perceptions within broader sociological processes. She explains the role of identity cards in producing covert discrimination by authorities (pp.11-12), the role of a crisis in gender relations which produces relationships of mutual abuse (pp. 28-29) and the way in which the crisis of material life is displaced onto and explained within expressions of outrage to the moral community.

What is exemplory about this work is how a careful ethnographic case study can convincingly lead to such insightful theoretical comment. For example, Mate notes of prolonged poverty and material crisis that it affects the morality and behaviour of the poor in particular ways, that 'relationships are temporary and dependent on market conditions' (p.92). Mate concludes that poverty, and its harbinger globalisation, destroys communities and certainties while simultaneously preventing others forming (p.31), although it remains unclear how globalisation can be privileged with such a role, given the salience of localised coordinates of political degeneration, or quite why these degraded and materialised social relations are not a 'community', but rather just a community which does not appeal.

In Moore's much longer book and period of field study in Nyanga District, Manicaland, further entangled contradictions of the Zimbabwean identity emerge in an exceptional ethnographic study of the discursive and material production of power, race, and place, within an anthropological elaboration of governmentality. Moore examines how history, discourse, ideology and cultural understandings combine to produce subjects enlisted in the project of their own rule, guiding their conduct and self-disciplining them, in a Foucauldian sense, into their spaces of racialised

dispossession. This is understood by Moore as a situated 'contingent constellation of practice, milieu, and materiality' (p.4); an

entangled landscape in which multiple spatialities, temporalities, and power relations combine: rainmaking and chiefly rule; colonial ranch and postcolonial resettlement scheme; site-specific land claims and discourses of national liberation; ancestral inheritance and racialised dispossession (Ibid.).

He summarises that 'Rhodesian eviction, Mugabe's escape [through the district in 1975] and political opposition to racialised rule entangled Kaerezians' suffering for Tangwena territory within struggles of national liberation' (p.17), yet 'within any one place, social actors become subjected to multiple matrices of power' (p.21), such that the details of his local ethnography complete the depiction of an entangled landscape strewn with the sediments of historical struggle. This book could not be a better antidote to the standardising and anodyne texts of international development and its knowledge industry, nor a better reminder that Gramsci's 'violence of political economic relations' (p.10) has its roots in an embedded, situated spatiality, disciplined metaphorically and literally through the 'malines' of clinical linear colonial housing (p.39).

I was reminded of the resonance of these architectural and linguistic metaphors of the spatiality and disciplining of development and power, in the similar 'malines' emerging from *Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* ('live well'(sic)), the pictures of the (small number) of outside-toilet-sized 'houses', built in rigid lines, and largely unoccupied due to errors in construction (see Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006). In sum, the continuities of struggle and complexities of a rural identity are carefully explored by Moore with clear contemporary resonance, in an exemplary ethnographic case study: I don't

think I have ever recommended a book to quite so many people, or cited one text so often in quite so many diverse contexts. All these books, and others, contribute to the recognition of a diverse Zimbabwe and indirectly, to the richness of its possible future.

References

Chikwava, B. (2007), 'Zimbabwean Literature: A Nervous Condition', Guest editorial in *Pambazuka News*, 11 January, available from <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/>

Solidarity Peace Trust (2006), "Meltdown': Murambatsvina one year on', available from <http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/reports/meltdown.pdf>

Re-Living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle by Fay Chung; Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute / Harare: Weaver Press, 2006; 358pp. £17.66 (pb); ISBN: 9171065512. Reviewed by Brian Raftopoulos, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town.

It is one of the ironies of Zimbabwean politics that even as the ruling party Zanu PF has recently steadily imposed a stodgy diet of narrow party history on Zimbabweans, this view of the past has been challenged not only by an increasing flow of critical historiography, but also from within the ranks of Zanu PF itself. The latter has taken the form of emerging biographies by critical voices within Zanu PF, that have added very useful insights into the history of the liberation struggle and the internal battles in the liberation movement. These voices have not so much provided a new paradigm for understanding the liberation struggles as added new information to doubts that have been apparent in both the creative literature and historiography of the struggle for some time.