

Long Time Coming: Short Writings from Zimbabwe

(Reviewed by Memory Chirere, University of Zimbabwe)

Long Time Coming carries stories laced up with short poems. It takes variegated glances at what has come to be termed the Zimbabwe crisis for close to a decade now. The glances are thankfully numerous and this is the blessing brought by bringing together many writers under one cover. In most of these stories there is the outstanding view that what bedevils Zimbabwe comes from the inside and outside and from the unresolved Zimbabwe past. Then, sadly, there is the uncomplicated view by a few of the writers here that all Zimbabwe's problems are due solely to misrule or due only to the evils of one tribe over another. Even more intriguing is the view by some writers here that the Zimbabwean crisis opens up new opportunities and ways of viewing Zimbabwe, present past and future.

You come across the multi talented type like Pathisa Nyathi, Ignatius Mabasa, John Eppel, Raisedon Baya and Julius Chingono. Then you have the immensely fresh and very talented like Judy Maposa, Sandisile Tshuma Linda Msebele and Thabisani Ndlovu who leave you wondering, even crying: where have these gems been hibernating all along? Then there are visitors to Zimbabwe like Ian Rowlands and Gothataone Moeng who felt touched by what we do to one another and what has been done to us in Zimbabwe.

Judy Maposa could be the greatest find in this book. Her story *First Rain* is a transcendental piece. Here the world is solid, gas and liquid. I have only met the equivalent in Jose Saramago of the novel called *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*. I read this story five times for the sheer opportunity of being transfigured. In the end Judy Maposa's dry Bulawayo has water gushing from every tap.

Sandisile Tshuma's *Arrested Development* can work as an example of how good stories can only come if writers 'forget' form and structure and tell their story unhinged like you do to a close mate from the comfort of night and darkness when the door is shut. Pillow talk is how I could describe Sandisile's story. No wonder why the editor made this one the first story. In half a dozen pages she effortlessly takes you through issues of inflation, border jumping, tribalism, queues...

Linda Msebele is a writer of great courage. Her *The Chicken Bus* could be the most uplifting story in this book. Her characters 'refuse to turn sour, the ones who won't let fear cloud their brows, the ones who still smile.'

Thabisani Ndlovu's *Stampede* can win a prize any day. It is a surrealist work of art about how body, spirit and mind engage in a

wretched struggle against one another before the final fall. It is about working for systems in which one remains invisible and one can never dare rebel or think about it.

The more well known writers bring depth and experimentation to this anthology. You see it in the poetry of experienced masters like John Eppel and Pathisa Nyathi. They make Bulawayo come alive with both its beauty and ugliness.

The 'Harare boys' cannot be outdone. Julius Chingono writes with a very well hidden tension that erupts from seemingly simple narrative. He begins with: 'I had no bus fare to take me home and it was 4:45pm' and all hell breaks loose. Chingono's story is about the desperate levels to which people can sink in the Zimbabwean crisis. A grown up man finds suddenly that he not even a single cent to get him onto the bus back home.

Ignatius Mabasa's story is about the shifting identities during the Zimbabwean crisis. Although Mabasa argues that he prefers the Shona medium, his story here in English shows why he is fast becoming the leading Zimbabwean writer of his generation. His poem called *Poetry is* goes:

Poetry is a white child
Lost in the darkness of a cinema house
Holding my black hand
Calling me daddy...

You should not miss the stories of the three writers of the moment in Zimbabwe, Brian Chikwava, Christopher Mlalazi and Petina Gappah. However, be warned! You need to read their short stories with both your eyes and mind open. In the end you may laugh and cry at the same time.

The book helps to show that 'amaBooks could be fast becoming for Bulawayo what Weaver Press is to Harare. You see it in the very meticulous editing and inspired choice and arrangement of artists.

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