

Selected and reviewed by **Belinda Otas**

Book Reviews



The Chimurenga Protocol
By: Nyaradzo Mtizira
Published: Botshelo Publishing
ISBN: 978-007942-8925

The issue of land ownership in Zimbabwe has long been a point of contention between the governments of Zimbabwe and the UK. This is the point of focus in Nyaradzo Mtizira's history-inspired novel, *The Chimurenga Protocol*. Mtizira sets out to make a case for the present day land redistribution by outlining the injustice to indigenous Zimbabweans, whose ancestors were forcefully evicted from their lands under British colonial rule.

Chimurenga is a Shona word for "revolutionary struggle", and in this case, the struggle of Zimbabwean freedom fighters against the rule of white settlers hell-bent on taking over their land.

From the First, Second, and Third Chimurengas to the present-day dispute over land, Mtizira takes us on a journey in this four-part story. He starts in the 1800s and lays the foundation of the First Chimurenga, where he paints a picture of the resilient and persistent force of the local people who refused to let go what was rightfully theirs without a fight.

It was a bloody engagement on both sides, and Mtizira depicts William Mason, the Queen's representative in Rhodesia at the time, as a sadistic, racist and condescending man on a mission to rid the indigenous people of all dignity:

"In my experience, I have never engaged a dedicated fighting force similar to these men. They are deeply committed to halting the expansion of the Queen's Empire. Our presumption has been that because they are

Africans and illiterate, they will succumb to our will as the white superior race. After all, we have brought the influence of civilisation and culture to this Dark Continent. They owe us a debt of gratitude," Mason tells one of his officials.

Leaping forward to present-day Zimbabwe, the story has not changed: the case for land ownership is still a controversial topic, as demonstrated by the character of Hamandishe Chamunorwa, who is caught up between the British and Zimbabwean establishments. Armed with a secret file that could benefit the British, his actions are seen as treachery and the race to catch up with him before he hands it over starts.

The Chimurenga Protocol is described as "a searing indictment of colonialism and its dark practitioners". Mtizira's offering is a thought-provoking exposition on the issues of the colonial occupation of Zimbabwe and the African continent, with its imperialist agenda.

It is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the explosive subject matter and the deep affinity to land ownership and why it is treasured by Africans.



Migritude
By: Shailja Patel
Published: Kaya Press, US
ISBN: 978-188503-0054

It is not every day you get a writer whose heritage spans three continents, but that is what you have with Shailja Patel, a Kenyan-Indian-American writer. Her words are dark, deep and hypnotic.

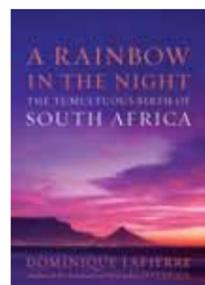
Patel's words transpose you intellectually, mentally, and emotionally to a different place and time with this debut poetry

collection, *Migritude* – a word she coined from the words *Migrant*, *Attitude*, and *Negritude*.

Part memoir, part political history, and part performance tour-de-force, Patel weaves together family history, reportage, and monologues of migration, violence, colonisation and love to create an aching and beautiful portrait of a migrant's journey.

Inspired by a box of saris that her mother has been saving for her since she was a child, in the hope that it would one day be her wedding gift, *Migritude* is Patel's own gift to the world, for she remains single. She leaves nothing untouched, radical enough to ensure her narrative includes political coverage and truths such as the role of the British and US governments that supported Idi Amin to take over the government of Uganda.

Migritude does not disappoint.



A Rainbow In The Night The Tumultuous Birth of South Africa
By: Dominique Lapierre
Published: Da Capo Press, UK
ISBN: 978-030681-8479

To understand South Africa's political repositioning in recent history, its racial tensions, social and economic divides and its ever-evolving nature, you have to understand the country's past. This is the mammoth task that Dominique Lapierre has taken on with his epic historical account of the rainbow nation. Divided into four sections, "In Search of a New Promised Land", "The Prime Minister's Bulldozers", "Helen and Chris: Two Lights in the Darkness" and "God Bless Africa," Lapierre chronicles a horrid and harrowing history of oppression and subjugation.

When the first set of Dutch citizens led by Jan van Riebeeck were sent to what is known today as South Africa by the Dutch East India Company, the sole objective was to farm and establish a seaport where the Company's other fleet of ships could come and reload as they sailed to India and other parts of the world. Interestingly, when Van Riebeeck set sail for the shores of South Africa, he was told: "Avoid any contact with the indigenous population beyond offering them gifts and trinkets to barter for fresh meat. No other relations, no attempt to educate, convert, or subjugate. Above all, no fraternisation. The native people are foreigners and should remain so."

The dream of the promised land would soon turn sour when the original inhabitants of the land fought back. Lapierre weaves a harrowing narrative drenched in blood, from the war with the Zulus and other indigenous people to the Anglo-Boer War.

Fast-forward to 1938, the year the architects of apartheid started devising their plans. Led by Daniel François Malan and Hendrik Verwoerd, things would never be the same.

In Malan's words: "Until the laws regulating the coexistence of whites and blacks in this country are part of a legislative arsenal formally inscribed in the constitution of a South African State, this racial pollution will only get worse. With consequences I will leave to your imagination..."

By 1946, almost 300 years after the Dutch settlers arrived, ordinary South Africans had embarked on a fight that would cost lives and see their freedom taken away.

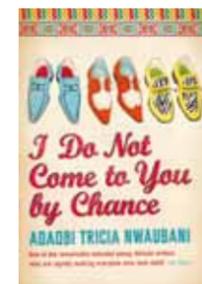
It was the fight to free themselves that would see many black South Africans, such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and many others, spend years in prison as a new generation of South Africans battled the startling reality of their restricted lives.

By the 1970s, Prime Minister John Vorster and his government had successfully ensured that over 20% of South Africa's six-million-strong black population were living in cramped ghettos under the ethnic redistribution agenda.

Lapierre's story is one of pain and hope, told with great sensitivity, though he could be accused of bias towards the ANC. Nevertheless, his book is an absorbing read. It shows triumph over adversity and manages

to question the reality of the Rainbow Nation promised after the historic 1994 elections, as he highlights the new challenges of today.

It is a must-read for anyone passionate about African history and the many cycles its nations have grown through in order to define themselves.



I Do Not Come To You By Chance
By: Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani
Published: Phoenix
ISBN: 978-075382-6973

By now, the world is well versed in the email and 419 scams which originate from Nigeria, asking the intended victim or (*mugu*) dumb person who falls for them to help with clearing funds from a foreign account.

The emails are so emotionally touching that the victims have compassion on a stranger asking for help, or is it the promise of sharing the pot of gold that is very alluring for those who fall for the scam?

These are just some of the many questions you ask yourself as you read Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's captivating and critically acclaimed debut novel, *I Do Not Come To You By Chance*.

It is the story of Kingsley, who upon graduating from university, joins the thousands of unemployed graduates looking for that elusive job in a nation where jobs are hard to come by.

As the first son of the family, Kingsley understands his responsibilities and he desires to fulfil them were it not for the hard times that have fallen on the nation. The death of his father does not help matters either. When help comes knocking in the form of his uncle, Boniface, aka Cash Daddy, there is a price tag attached. He never thought he would have to pay for it, and so his journey into a seedy world begins.

What is outstanding about Nwaubani's offering is that she captures the "now moment" of contemporary Nigerian life, delivered with nuances and humour pertinent to the country, and its social and cultural life as she explores the reality of

trying to survive in the Land of Topsy-Turvy. Yet, she maintains a universal appeal with her narrative. Her book is an accomplished debut, worthy of the accolades and praises it has already received.



A Fine Madness
By: Mashingaidze Gomo
Published: Ayeobia Press, UK
ISBN: 978-095624-0149

Part prose, part poetry, *A Fine Madness* is a befitting title to this evocative offering about war from Mashingaidze Gomo. With a foreword written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, which sets the scene for what is to come, the narrative tells the story of war in the Congo as narrated by a soldier who lived through it.

Gomo, a former Zimbabwean Air Force pilot, has served in some of Africa's most devastating wars, including the one in the Congo.

His experiences have served him well because he succeeds in painting a visual tapestry of the heinous images that come with war. Through the words of an observant soldier we experience the loneliness, horror, and harrowing nature of war.

It is clear that experiencing war and writing about it gave the author an insight into why Africans must tell their own stories. His rage is uncontained about the continuous interference of foreign powers in African affairs in the chapter, "The Rape":

"And the rapist were providing huge sums of money as pre-natal aid to nurture the unwanted pregnancy to a healthy delivery of their bastard offspring that would inherit Africa and hand it back to them."

A Fine Madness is a poignant reminder of the devastating effects of war on the mind and the destruction it leaves in its path, and Gomo reminds us most importantly of the human cost.

This is a deep excavation of Africa's wars and how they have in turn turned her children into beggars. *A Fine Madness* is Gomo's song for Africa and Africans. ■NA

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