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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Modumedi Moleli** By B. Graaf. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988, 135 pp., ISBN 0-86922-375-5, Z\$8.44.

This is a biography of teacher-evangelist Modumedi Moleli who was martyred in the 1896-7 Shona uprising. Graaf portrays the selfless commitment and bold personality of Moleli and sheds light on the variety of historical realities and trying circumstances within which Moleli made crucial decisions to which he tenaciously adhered.

Moleli was brought up in Mphahle among the Baralong of the Northern Transvaal and became associated with the Wesleyan Methodist Church community which was founded in about 1867 by a former migrant worker in Natal, Samuel Mathabathe. This community was plagued by persecution and suffering as a result of clashes with traditional customs and beliefs and ultimately was driven into exile over a dispute centred on the fate of twins born to one of the Christian families.

The period 1867-85 constituted a formative phase for Moleli, who, through the trials of the Christian community, grew to have confidence in his faith and in his ability to stand as an independent Christian. The second phase of Moleli's life spans the years 1885-93, a period in which the exiled church's hope for a missionary was realized when the Revd Owen Watkins came to Good Hope Mission. When the subject of opening up a new missionary front north of the Limpopo in Mashonaland was broached, Moleli volunteered his services as a teacher in this venture. He and several other African evangelists finally arrived in Salisbury in August 1892.

The years 1893-6 represent the last phase in Moleli's life. He was permitted by Chief Nenguwo to open a school in his village, where Moleli showed himself to be a teacher of rare resourcefulness and innovation. However, despite his successes and ability, he found himself in conflict with Shona custom on issues ranging from marriage and respect for ancestors to dress code and related issues. Many traditional rigorists considered Moleli's teaching pernicious and their only solution to the disasters that had ravished the land was to withdraw the children from Moleli's school and to arrange its ultimate closure. Conscious of this ominous situation yet at the same time sympathizing with the people in their plight, Moleli was undaunted: the school had to go on. Reassured by Chief Nenguwo of his support, Moleli remained committed to his dwindling congregation.

Moleli remained true to his faith even during the 1896 uprising. His attempt to save the life of James White, a settler farmer, undeterred by the sinister monitoring of his (Moleli's) activities by traditional rigorists led by Chiriseri, was a manifest act of selfless love for his neighbour. This act was pretext enough for Chiriseri and his followers to murder Moleli.

Graaf, unlike Jean Farrant who wrote on Bernard Mizeki, does not pretend to give a definitive biography of Moleli. As Graaf himself says, the text of this publication was completed as a dissertation in 1969 but has been published, unchanged, twenty years later. A major problem arises, therefore, since modern scholarly trends are not considered. For instance, Graaf's treatment of the

1896–7 uprisings is clearly ignorant of modern research which demolishes much of Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* on which the author relies absolutely.

In spite of its shortcomings the biography will no doubt appeal to a wide range of people interested in local history. The book is a fitting tribute to a great teacher and martyr, one who laid a strong foundation to what later became the famous Nenguwo Training Institute (Waddilove). That the book should come from a long-serving teacher and pastor at the Institute is a recognition of the rare educational and evangelistic qualities that Moleli possessed.

*University of Zimbabwe*

P. H. GUNDANI

**Ezivusa Usinga** Gweru. Mambo Press in association with the Literature Bureau, 1989. 253 pp., ISBN 0-86922-448-4, Z\$16.00.

This anthology contains examples of the work of Ndebele poets who have been represented in previous anthologies, such as J. N. T. Dupute, P. S. Malunjwa, B. L. M. D. Ndlovu, O. L. Mlilo, N. C. G. Mathema, D. E. Ndoda and N. S. Sigogo, to mention a few. New poets have been included, but apart from D. N. Ncube and D. F. Gumpo, the new poets have, on average, only two poems each compared to the nine each of the more established poets.

The new authors might be expected to provide a new trend, a new approach, a freshness of ideas and presentation, a new rhythm and a movement towards a new poetic excellence, but they simply seem to be following an established pattern in respect of an established poetic tradition. Emphasis is still placed on the familiar and now common Ndebele forms of linkages: parallelism, chiasmus, and regular end-rhyme in couplet form with a recurrent spicing of free verse. The poets still resort to disguised repetitions in terms of noun-verb linkages, alliteration and assonance, imagery links and symbolism, open repetition of identical items, and phrase and verse forms. The new poets are respecting an old tradition nurtured in secondary-school education and emphasized in teacher-training colleges and the University. The poetic style of the new poets seems to be tame, uniform and hedged between stable 'acceptable' and known boundaries.

The themes covered in the anthology range from Ndebele traditions and customs through modernism to the Zimbabwe liberation war (pp. 8, 11, 13, 22, 30, 156, 182, 222, 226). Love is explored (pp. 63, 66–73, 154, 159, 202, 211, 221, 247) as are death (pp. 20, 31, 136, 209, 229, 233) and life (pp. 196, 199, 200, 237). At the same time, a miscellany of experiences covering the natural world, money, youth, old age, party politics, jealousy, pain and happiness are explored as well.

In general the poet's private experiences are explored, giving most of the poems a first-hand interpretation. The safe retreat by some poets into private experiences robs the book of a certain degree of concentration. The accountability of poets in socio-economic and political concerns is thereby affected. The poets have placed themselves in a relatively safe position and have apparently ignored social challenges. The book does not look at the war, heroes and socialism with insight. The future vision seems to be ideologically bankrupt and optimistically

ambitious. There is in the poems an underlying escape from a problem or a set of problems into a protective optimism. As a result the anthology *Ezivusa Usinga* does not contain any strong social protest or any criticism of social injustices. It might be referred to as poetry which does not speak for the masses.

Most of the poems in the anthology would seem to have been in 'cold storage' in the Literature Bureau or at Mambo Press waiting to be published, a factor which accounts for their limited relevance in the 1990s. Unfortunately, proof-reading and editing have not been of the highest order and the numerous typographic errors tend to interfere with the smooth conceptualization of the poems, since the reader has to spend time 'rewriting' and subsequently reinterpreting some terms.

Despite the basic weaknesses, the anthology has much to offer to the student of poetry as well as to the researcher interested in the 'hidden' subconscious and conscious working of the Ndebele poetic mind. It is a book well worth reading in terms of the variety and scope of the poems as well as for the potential that it has for providing room for poetic discoveries.

*University of Zimbabwe*

J. ZONDO

**Family Law in Zimbabwe** By W. Ncube. Harare, Legal Resources Foundation, 1989, xxviii, 227 pp., ISBN 0-908312-01-6, Z\$25,00.

The author tells us in the preface of this work that his aim is to provide a 'concise and comprehensive overview of family law in Zimbabwe both under general and customary law'. There is no doubt that Ncube has written an adequate reference work that will be useful to various professionals who need to know the law as well as, obviously, the legal practitioner and law student. Its defect is that it is rather more concise than comprehensive. A person seeking an answer from this work is likely to be frustrated in being able to extract only general guidelines to the law, thus requiring further research in order to find a specific solution. This is unfortunate in view of the large number of semi-trained people administering the law who would benefit from a comprehensive text as well as many legal practitioners who are themselves operating without reference to a full library.

However, the book's real strength is in bringing together, for the first time, what the law is in respect of families under the two systems of law in Zimbabwe. By collating this information from previously dispersed and sometimes inaccessible sources, the book is of tremendous value. Its pitch will limit its use to those familiar with the law rather than provide an easily understandable source for the layman. Throughout the book there is a sense that the author was in haste to complete and publish the manuscript. This feeling pervades from the first part — also the weakest — where the inherited legal system is discussed in rhetorical rather than historical terms through to the final chapter which ends so abruptly that the author's relief at having reached the end of his labours is almost tangible.

Having looked at how the two systems of law co-exist, Ncube then examines the different issues that can give rise to actions between parties. Each of these

issues are discussed in relation to their implications under the general and customary legal systems. In the first and second sections, the author rarely comments whether the courts had, in important post-Independence cases, reached the correct decision. On page 129, for example, the Supreme Court appears in *Dolby v. Lewis* SC No. 34 of 1987 to have come to a blatantly political, rather than legal, decision regarding the removal of a child (of divorced parents) from its jurisdiction. It is important, in a legal system governed by precedent, to challenge potentially wrong decisions so that they can be overruled if necessary.

In the second section, the author considers the law as it affects children. A wide range of interesting and topical points are discussed, including the status of children conceived through artificial insemination, where Ncube gives a succinct appraisal of what he believes the legal situation to be. A hint of the haste earlier alluded to can be seen on page 77 where the author has omitted an important alternative to Section 62 of the Adoption Act (*Chapter 33*). The text makes reference only to potential applicants who are known to the parents and completely omits paragraph B of Section 62(a)(ii) which allows the court to select applicants on the register of the Director of Social Services.

Ncube seems more sure of himself in the section on marriage. His previous tendency to disregard anomalies and contentious decisions is replaced by a sure touch, especially when discussing the proprietary consequences of the breakup of a marriage under both systems of law. Ncube sensitively discusses the need for the courts, when splitting the matrimonial property, to be aware of obligations both parties — but particularly the man — may have to future families. Then, suddenly, after this excellent analysis, the last paragraph is abruptly reached.

As is inevitable with a text of this nature, it will be out of date as soon as the (constantly referred to) Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (No. 2 of 1990) becomes operative. It is hoped that in future updated versions, Ncube will take the time to provide the comprehensive cover promised in the preface of this first edition.

MARY STOCKER

**The Conundrum Trees** By C. Emily Dibb. Harare, Modus, 1989, vi, 153 pp., illus., ISBN 0-908309-03-1 (pbk), Z\$29,28.

Few authors can write successfully about their attitudes towards animals and nature, possibly because nature inspires such intensely personal feelings. This little book of recollections is written by someone who clearly loves the Zimbabwean bush and the author's enthusiasm is strongly evidenced. Unfortunately, there is no clear theme to the book and it comes across as a series of small stories with only the author's love of nature and outdoor life in this country to connect them. Although the book is well written I had some difficulty in reading it because, at times, I could not be sure what the point of it all was.

The first part of the book ('On Safari') deals with incidents that the author and her family experienced in the Zambezi Valley. Having myself lived in the Zambezi Valley for several years, I have heard many similar stories, embellished to varying degrees, and there was nothing novel in this section for me. The second part of the book ('Simple Pleasures') was, I thought, rather better as the experiences it describes are simpler, less dramatic and so better written.

Perhaps this is because many of these stories stem from the author's experiences as a child. Childhood memories may be more vivid than later experiences and, with the passage of time, become romanticized. I certainly enjoyed a wave of nostalgia while reading about many of the same things that I did as a youngster, including sampling that most wonderful of indigenous fruits, the snot apple (I much prefer its delightfully onomatopoeic Sindebele name — *Xaguxagu*).

The third part of the book ('Abdul') is about an injured Abdim's Stork which the author rescued and cared for until it was able to fly away. This is an interesting and well-written piece which taught me something about these birds, but I feel that Abdul's story does not deserve such a large proportion of the book and that one or two chapters could have been eliminated without much loss.

University of Zimbabwe

B. E. MARSHALL

**The Praises of Dingana: Izibongo zikaDingana** Edited by D. K. Rycroft and A. B. Ngcobo. Pietermaritzburg, Univ. of Natal Press, Killie Campbell Africana Library Series, 1988, xiii, 258 pp., ISBN 0-86950-629-7, R46,50.

It is a fitting tribute to Dingane (Dingana) that Rycroft and Ngcobo should have reproduced his praise-poem (*izibongo*) in written form. This poem brilliantly illustrates the genius of the Zulu *izimbongi*, perhaps most memorably expressed in the following immortal lines (p. 74)

*Vezi kof' abantu*  
*Kosa' izibongo*  
*Izona zosala zibadalula*  
*Izona zosala zibalil' emanxiweni*

Vezi, though people may die, praises remain  
 These will remain and bring grief for them  
 Remain and lament for them in the empty homes.

The book is also a tribute to James Stuart's extended study of Zulu history and culture. The present *izibongo*, a tremendous 432 lines, were collated by James Stuart from sixteen different sources and have never been published before in this full form. The present transcription was made from six recordings made by Stuart for the Zenophone Record Company in London between 1927 and 1930, of which only the first was ever issued commercially. Accompanying the transcription is an English translation with a detailed line-by-line commentary to aid the literary historian and the literary critic. It provides the reader with material as near as possible to the nineteenth-century recitals of *izibongo*, and the sound recording has been diagrammized to represent the way in which the *imbongi* recited the poem, thus animating the frozen *izibongo* as much as possible.

But for a reader seeking ground-breaking research on *izibongo*, this book is a disappointment. There is a lack of rigorous analysis that such a subject now requires. For example, Rycroft and Ngcobo do not defend their definition of

*izibongo* as 'eulogies' beyond simply telling us that it was a term James Stuart 'favoured' (p. 11). The term is ideologically inadequate, thinly selective, and may cause misunderstanding of the institution of *izibongo*. Gunner,<sup>1</sup> Mapanje and White,<sup>2</sup> and Opland,<sup>3</sup> among others, see the need for a more informed definition.

Rycroft and Ngcobo's work is deeply concerned with the question of authorship (see Chapter Three and Appendix). They recognize Magolwana as 'the greatest *imbongi* of all time' (p. 38) and maintain that he was Dingane's *imbongi*, who later served both Mpande and Cetshwayo, but who did not serve Shaka. Cope quotes Kunene,<sup>4</sup> who 'attributes the perfection of the stanza [structure of *izibongo*] to Shaka's famous praiser, Magolwana'. Since Rycroft and Ngcobo concede Magolwana was the greatest *imbongi*, it is sensible to assume that Magolwana in fact predates Dingane and that he could have composed the beautiful praise-poem of Shaka. There is need for further research into the matter of Magolwana.

For the Zimbabwean reader there are numerous references to Mzilikazi which are very interesting, sometimes because they are misleading: for example, line 65 'Wadl' uMlomo-wezingaba kwaMashobane' (You killed Mlomo-wezingaba among the Khumalo), means that Mlomo-wezingaba was killed by Dingane, but in fact Mlomo-wezingaba was still alive at the time of Mbiko's rebellion in 1870 in which he (Mlomo-wezingaba) took Lobengula's side.

Despite the detailed commentary, there is a nagging feeling that we never sense, any more than we do in Nyembezi's collection,<sup>5</sup> the presence of Dingane, the usurper who, history has shown, was able to maintain the Zulu martial culture that Shaka had built.

This book is, however, important as a contribution to the literary studies of Zulu.

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T. NKABINDE

<sup>1</sup> E. Gunner, 'Forgotten men: Zulu bards and praising at the time of the Zulu kings' *African Languages/Langues Africaines* (1976), II, 72-3.

<sup>2</sup> J. Mapanje and L. White, *Oral Poetry from Africa* (London, Longman, 1983), 7.

<sup>3</sup> J. Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> R. Kunene, 'An Analytical Survey of Zulu Poetry, Both Traditional and Modern' (Pietermaritzburg, Univ. of Natal, MA thesis, 1962), quoted in *Isibongo: Zulu Praise-Poems* coll. James Stuart, trans. D. Malcolm, ed. T. Cope (Oxford, Clarendon, 1968), 53.

<sup>5</sup> C. L. S. Ngembezi, *Isibongo zamakhosi* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1958).