



2009

ZIMBABWE IN PICTURES



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EDITION 17



Listen to the Voice of the Youth

On 27th February I had an opportunity to attend a show by one of the young voices on the poetry/music scene in Zimbabwe. Comrade Fatso aka Samm Farai Munro is representative of the radical voices that have come into being due to the governance crisis. Whereas in the '80s we had permed hair and spoke through the nose trying hard to be English (we actually used to believe we were as British as they come), these youths assert their Zimbabwean identities in language, words, clothing and symbols...

To be in a Comrade Fatso concert is to be in some one bubble of energy and inspiration. But he is not the only one...Outspoken, Godobori, Ronald Jongwe, Poetic Angel and more are names you shall soon know. Beneath the broken pieces of our dream there is a wind that is gathering speed and it will be a hurricane by the time it hits the global stage...

So in this issue, with the help of my sister, Ethel, I give you the low-down on the protest poetry rocking Zimbabwe.

I wish to thank HIVOS who invited me to a groundbreaking workshop on Arts, Culture and Freedom of Expression on 26 February in Harare. With the uncertainties of the next two years till another election, artists, journalists and activists cannot be lulled into a false sense of security. Strengthening the voice of artists should be a priority for organisations that understand how arts and culture percolate our whole social being.

In the beginning was the Word...

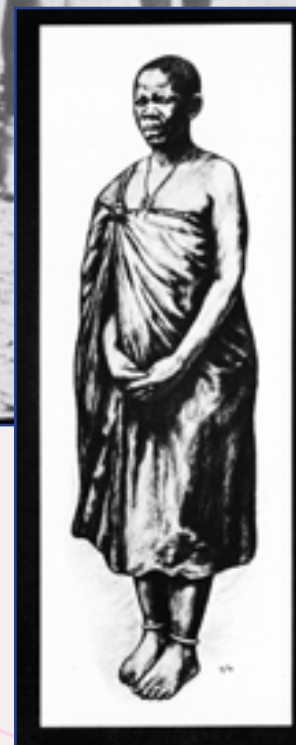
Chris Kabwato
Publisher

STOP PRESS:

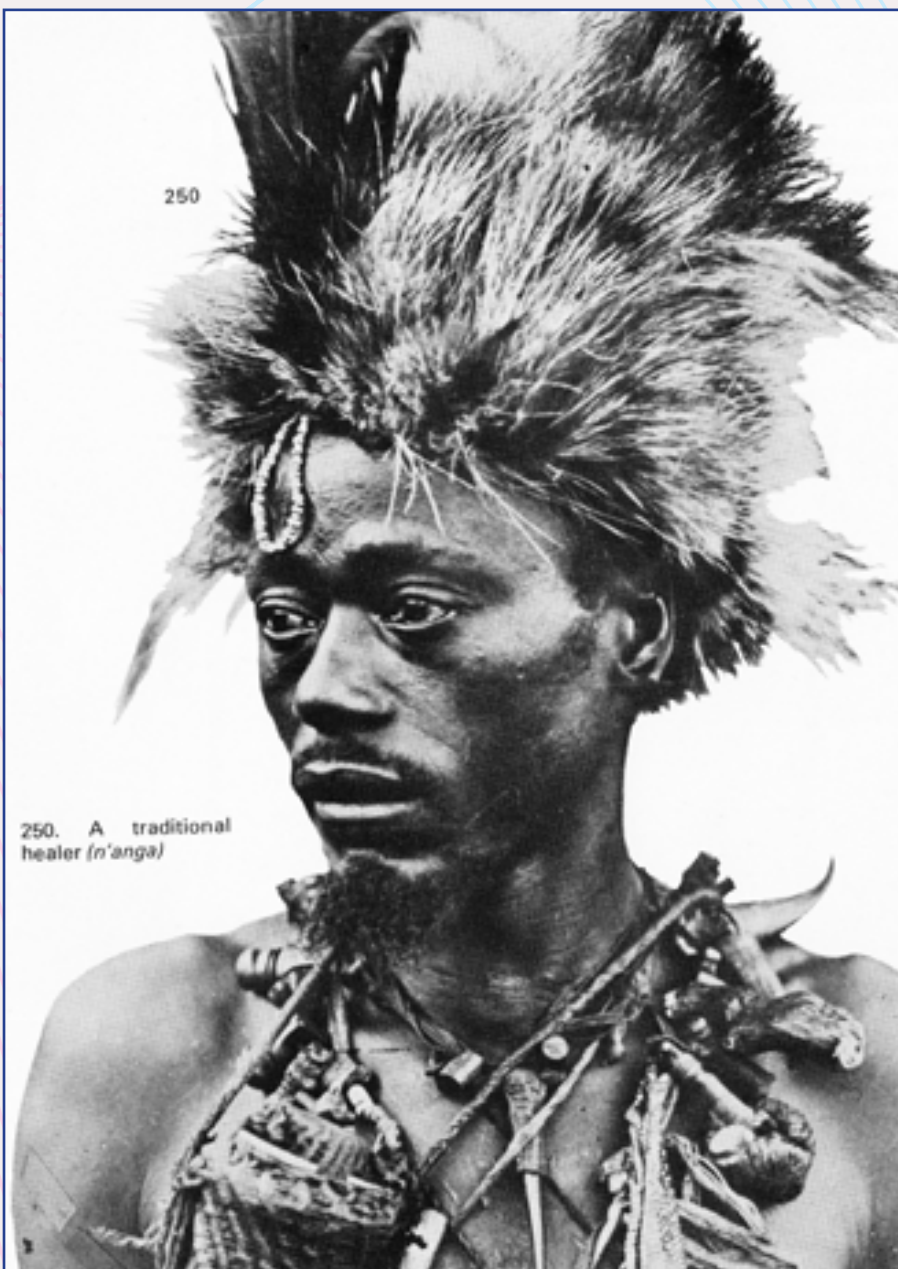
Just as we went to print we received the news that Mrs. Susan Tsvangirai had been killed in a motorcar accident. We salute this unsung gallant fighter for a free Zimbabwe.



Mbuya Nehanda (Source: Zimbabwe Epic)



ZANU PF has perfected the art of rhetoric and the acts of appropriation. The party links its ideals to those who fought colonial domination and goes further to claim those same people as if they died members of ZANU PF. Mbuya Nehanda, a spirit medium, who played a key role in the anti-colonial struggle of 1896-7 has become the symbol of ZANU's 3rd Chimurenga. So they the militia have committed rape and murder in the name of a woman who stood against subjugation. Consummate irony.

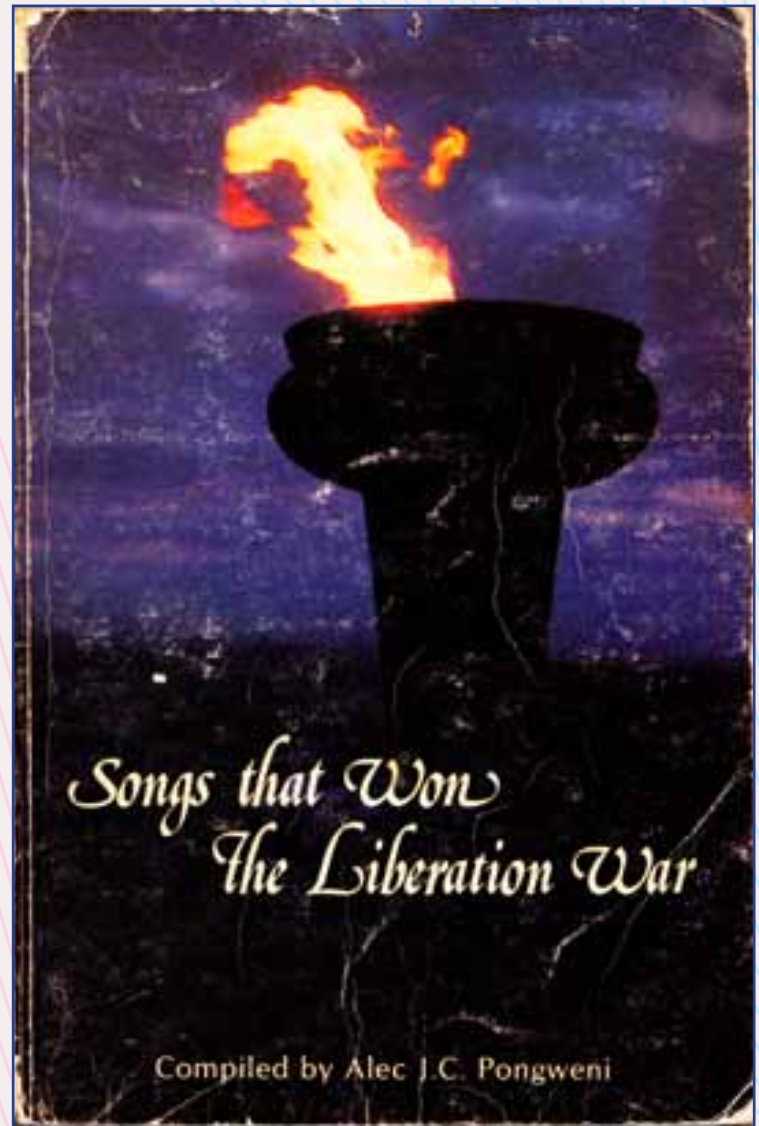
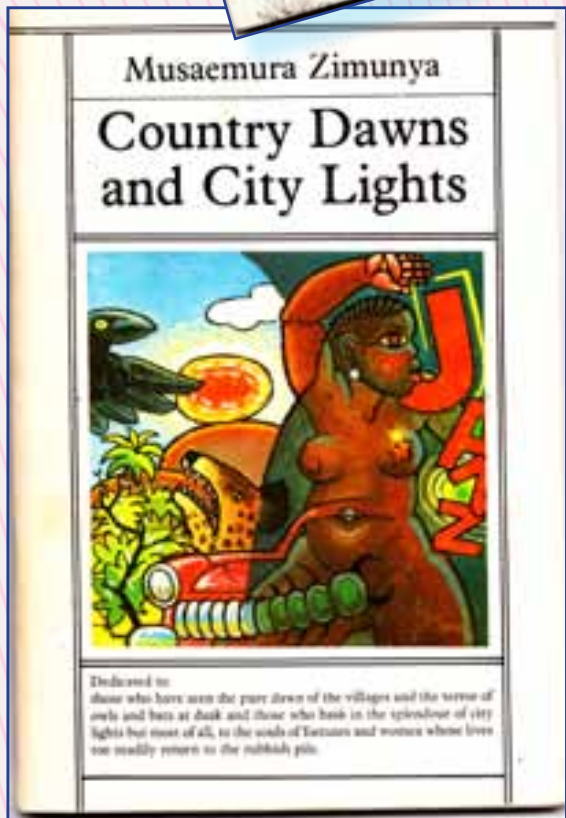


250. A traditional healer (*n'anga*)

A traditional healer
(Source: Zimbabwe Epic)

The following text was written by poet, writer and teacher, Ethel Kabwato:

True to Nguni traditions, Ndebele praise poetry in Zimbabwe was always alive and well throughout the period of colonialism and beyond. Because this genre was a live performance characterized by hard-hitting innuendos where necessary, it never failed to arouse keen interest in those who understood what the praise-singer was actually saying. In what was probably a spiritually uplifting experience, audiences, at public occasions in the city of Bulawayo and elsewhere, were often entertained by praise-singers reciting 'Izibongo ZikaShaka or Izibongo ZikaMzilikazi.' The performers appropriately made use of traditional garb and paraphernalia including skin aprons (*amabhethshu*) cowhide shields and knobkerries. Elsewhere around the country poetic performances were enacted at funerals, weddings and other occasions. Thus performance poetry is neither new nor unique to twenty-first century Zimbabwe. Recent developments are no more than a re-affirmation of this vivid genre.



In the period spanning 1980 to about the year 2005 performance poetry in Zimbabwe took on a fresh impetus with the likes of Freedom Nyamubaya, Christina Rungano and Valeria Chaukura. These three can be said to belong to the older generation of women poets in Zimbabwe. Nyamubaya's poetry was inspired by the liberation war of Zimbabwe in which she was a combatant. Rungano's poetry anthology received critical acclaim as a distinct voice of the emerging new poetry. Although Valeria Chaukura, before her untimely death, did a lot of poetry performances using the Shona language, thereafter there seems to have been a gap until the rise of the current crop of performance poets.



Between 2006 and 2008 the Zimbabwean literary scene has witnessed the birth of new voices in poetry performance. The likes of Sam Munro aka Comrade Fatso, Leslie Tongai Makawa (Outspoken), Godobori, Cosmas Mairosi, Batsirai Chigama, Anesu Banda, My Brother's Keeper, Primrose Dzenga, the Muchemwa sisters, Teresa and Elizabeth aka ERS and the group that calls itself Poets For Human Rights which is led by Michael Mabwe.



Outspoken – Words as Bullets



In general, the works of the poets listed above is informed by the harsh socio-political and economic realities that have bedeviled Zimbabwe in recent times. Leslie Tongai Makawa aka Outspoken's poetry can, therefore, be classified as protest poetry. What makes him stand out is his ability to compose lyrical content that has global appeal and significance beyond the borders of his homeland.



Meet the real Comrade.
Fatso doing his thing.



**COMRADE FATSO
AKA SAMM FARAI MUNRO**

*Toyi Toyi Poet, Freedom Fighter,
MAGAMBA! Artistic Facilitator,
Grassroots Blogger*

"OUR WORD IS OUR WEAPON"



Samm Munro, stage name Comrade Fatso, performs with a band aptly named 'Chabvondoka.' The revolutionary overtones in the name of the band can be traced to the warning cries of police raids made by illegal street vendors who survived by subverting the system. Comrade Fatso has taken part in several poetry slams and competitions around the world and in mid-2008 reached the semi finals of one such competition. Outspoken and Fatso are big voices on Zimbabwe's re-awakening Hip Hop scene.

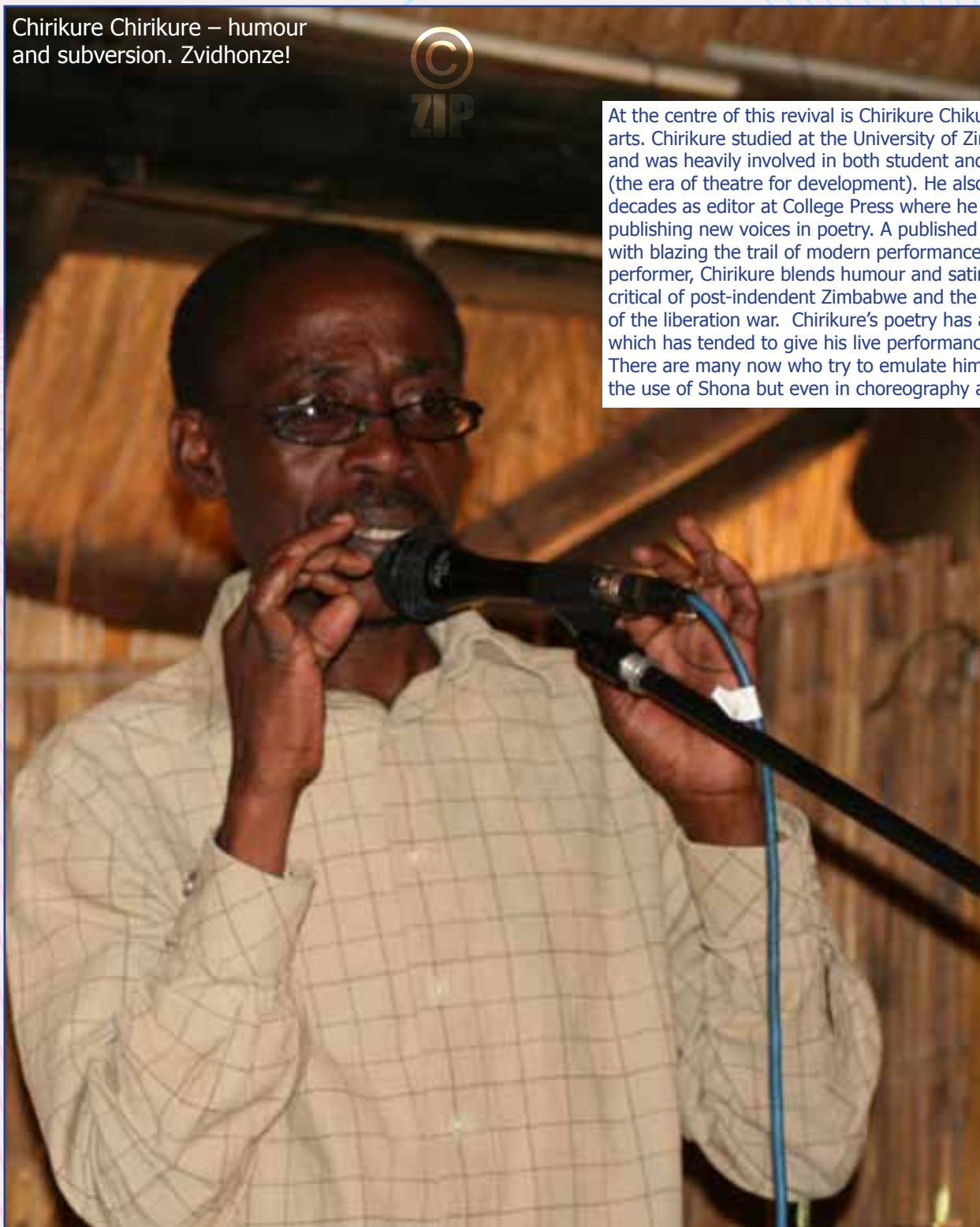




Chirikure Chirikure – humour
and subversion. Zvidhonze!



At the centre of this revival is Chirikure Chikure – a stalwart of the arts. Chirikure studied at the University of Zimbabwe in the 1980s and was heavily involved in both student and community theatre (the era of theatre for development). He also worked for close to two decades as editor at College Press where he was very influential in publishing new voices in poetry. A published poet he can be credited with blazing the trail of modern performance poetry. A consummate performer, Chirikure blends humour and satire in his work which is critical of post-independent Zimbabwe and the betrayal of the promise of the liberation war. Chirikure's poetry has a metaphysical streak which has tended to give his live performances surprising little twists. There are many now who try to emulate him, not only in terms of the use of Shona but even in choreography and elocution.





Godobori reminds one of the 90s ragga dance-hall scene and he has the booming voice to match.

Godobori is a fresh new poet with a huge cross-over potential and appeal. His deep voice mirrors the mysticism implied by his name. He has managed to explore modern issues using deep Shona, something hardly expected of someone his age. He is a favourite at poetry performances.





Then there is Chris Mlalazi, a poet with a bagful of ironies such as those depicted in his enigmatic Christmas poem. To this list can be added the names of Mzana Mthimkhulu and Nqobile Malinga, that innovative performer with more than a passing grasp of several languages. Innocent Mpofu shows great stage presence and has performed in South Africa and Senegal. If we further add My Brother's Keeper, POY and others it becomes clear that performance poetry in Zimbabwe has a promising future.

Ronald Jongwe and the Contradiction Arts crew are a live-wire group – they call a spade a spade. Nyoka musango!

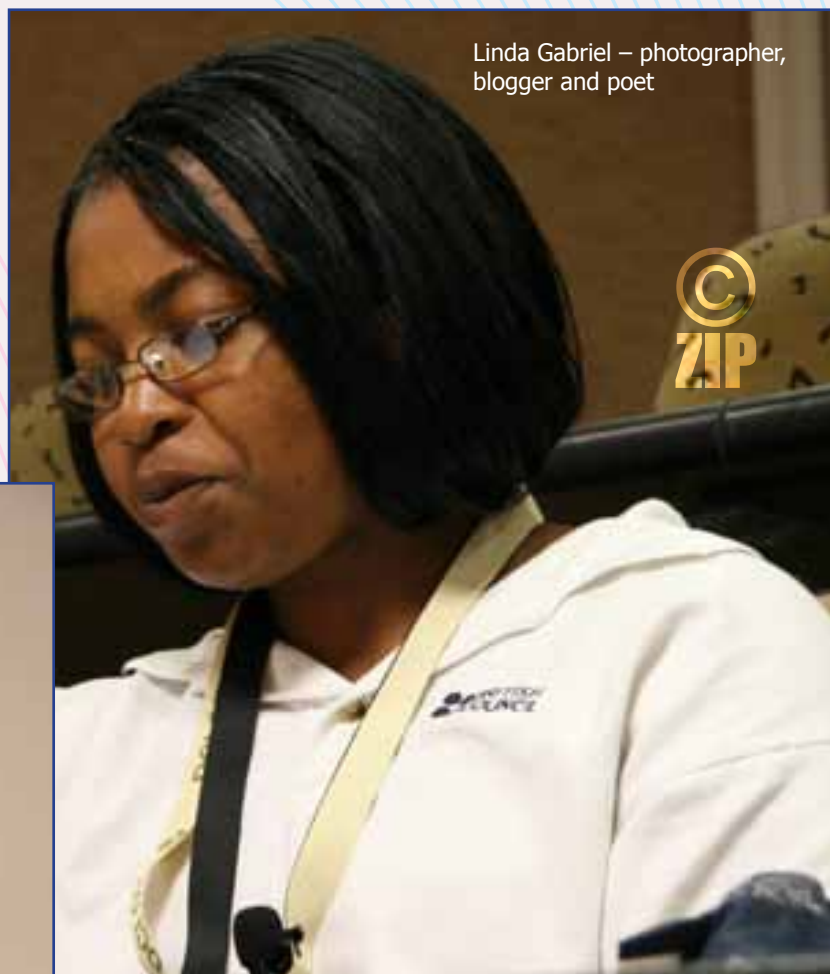




Among the current crop of female performance poets in Zimbabwe are Batsirai Chigama, Primrose Dzenga, the Muchemwas sisters, Ethel Kabwato and others. Batsirai has shared the stage at HIFA with international acts such as Napho Mashiyane in 2007 and Ndabi in 2008 and is a regular at the Book Café's Sisters Open Mic gigs. She can rightly be described as Zimbabwe's answer to Maya Angelou. Her feminist sensibilities demand no less.



Linda Gabriel – photographer,
blogger and poet



Poet, writer and
teacher, Ethel Kabwato
at a reading



Primrose Dzenga who is having her first poetry anthology published in Northern Ireland soon, has performed in Serbia and the United Kingdom. Primrose writes distinctive love ballads that have helped cement her international appeal and standing. She also has a social conscience and has demonstrated it in her poetic eulogies on the life of Auxilia Chimusoro, an AIDS activist who became the first Zimbabwean woman to go public with her HIV status. Linda Gabriel, now doing photography at a South African college, is known in performance circles as Poetic Angel and is a founder member of Sisters Open Mic. Linda is a vibrant performer who writes on topical and other issues. The Muchemwa sisters, Theresa and Elizabeth, aka ERS are new voices knocking on the door of recognition.



Mambo Rusere and Raymond Majongwe represent an older generation but they have come into their own in the last decade

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ZIP



Performance poetry in Zimbabwe keeps beckoning and as the governance crisis persists despite recent political developments the poetry will assume even greater significance. Watch this space.



But as the poets called for a different Zimbabwe life was grinding on with its fine ironies...

The charade in Zimbabwe is amazing. Last week ZTV showed horrifying images of how ZANU PF has destroyed the health system in Zimbabwe. Of course they showed the images rather inadvertently. The subject was the visit of Morgan Tsvangirai to Harare Central Hospital. What ZTV showed as Tsvangirai toured was shocking. Our images here give you a glimpse of the total collapse that has come to our beloved nation.









I chose not to go to Mugabe's obscene birthday bash that seemed to have been inspired by Marie Antoinette ("Let them eat cake" – the French Queen said in 1789 when confronted by the desperation of the people). If the queen was in Zimbabwe she would just say to Gideon Gono, "Yes. Print more money".

Having not gone to Mugabe's do I was confronted by this pothole on a street in Harare called – you guessed it – Robert Mugabe Avenue.



ABOVE: Trust Me Tavern on Bree Street, central Johannesburg

RIGHT: Obama Hair Salon in Newton, Johannesburg.





Zimbabwe in Pictures Campaigns for 2009

We have started moving from just being a newsletter that gives you some interesting pictures into something much more. We believe in Zimbabwe and we will play our part in the creation of a new society. Here is how:

1. **Training:** we are starting a photography training programme in Harare. We have already identified young women and men that we would like to invest in. Watch this space for their amazing work once they start rolling from May onwards. The training workshops take place in April, courtesy of Free Voice and Pro Helvetia.



2. **Take Back the Flag Campaign:** this is the one campaign that will shake ZANU and its compradors. Stay tuned for the launch on 18 April 2009 (Zimbabwe's Independence Day). It is all about taking back our birthright!

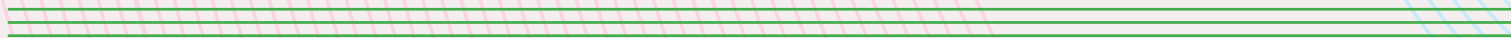
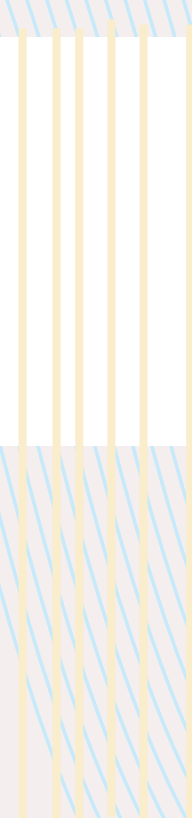
3. **Books for Zimbabwe Programme:** Zimbabwe in Pictures will initiate this programme in May 2009 and we are calling on anyone, and that means ANYONE, who wants to come and be part of it. It's a simple project – donate a book to any school you know in Zimbabwe. We will get the book from you and get it to that school. If you just want to donate books that's also good – we will get them to Zimbabwean schools directly. We won't accept cash donations. Just books - mabhuku. Write to Chris Kabwato, kumbirayi@gmail.com.

A lot more is store for you. Keep it locked here.



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