

## LIBERATING HISTORY

For one writer, the fall of Robert Mugabe prompted a new look at Zimbabwe's liberation legend, writes **Rea Khoabane**

In search of mothers of the nation, Panashe Chigumadzi discovered that black women need to be seen in all their complexity. Her latest book, *These Bones Will Rise Again*, is an interrogation of the liberation movement that was created through the spirit of a woman but led by men and guns.

How did the book come about?

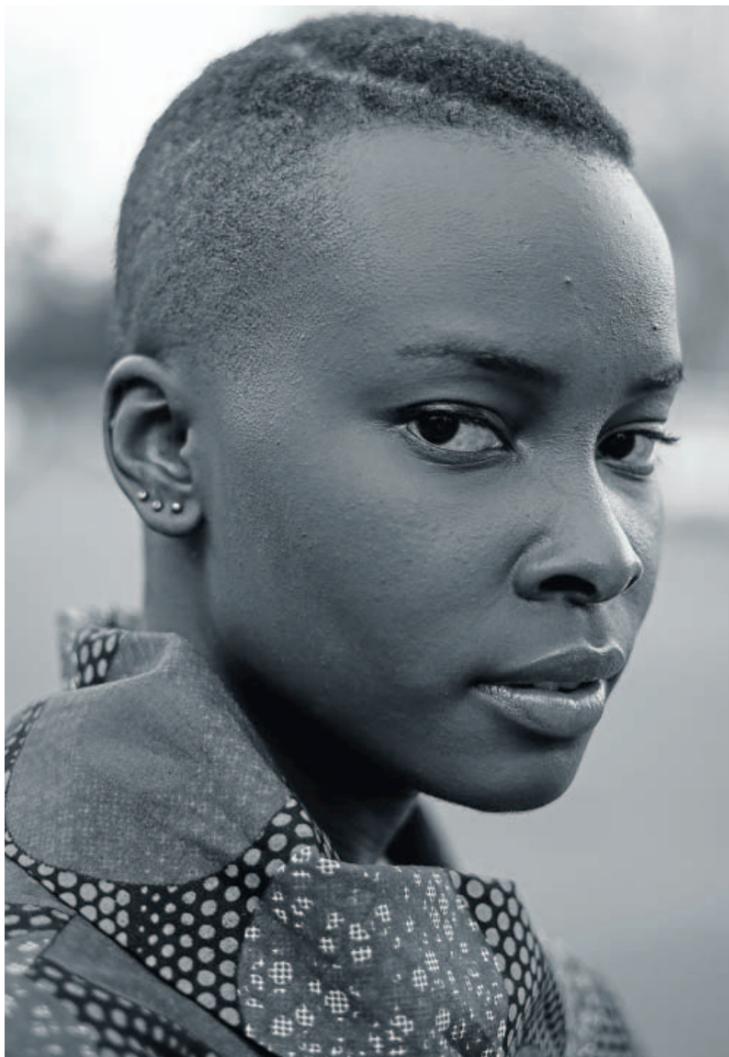
Essentially the book was a commission by Ellah Wakatama Allfrey, the publishing director of Indigo Press. I happened to tell her about the research I've been doing independently at Wits University, about the figure of Mbuya Nehanda, an anticolonial heroine, amongst, if not the most famous person in Zimbabwe's liberation history. She was a spirit medium who was also one of the first leaders of the Zimbabwe liberation movement Chimurenga. At the same time I had been thinking about my grandmother, who'd just passed away, and thought of a photograph of her that I'd lost.

Why did you choose to present this through the structure of a woman?

I was inspired by Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", which speaks to the way that, even as black people, we learn to take on the eyes of the world in the ways that we look at ourselves and in the ways that we look at other black women.

It was difficult for me to see beyond my grandmother as a person, so it was really saying, how do I take on new eyes? It's seeing her and others; I see our humanity, our fullness. I see the complexity of our humanity and that means crafting an image of a strong black woman. It's an image of a rock but also an image of someone who loves, who cries, dreams, prays and can be nasty and nice. Complexities that black women are denied.

The title is from the words that Mbuya Nehanda spoke before she was executed ... The image of her when she was about to be executed is one we continually use within Zimbabwe ... Grace Mugabe last year said she sees herself as Mbuya Nehanda.



Panashe Chigumadzi looks beyond the 'big men and guns' Picture: KB Mpofu



**These Bones Will Rise Again** ★★★★★  
Panashe Chigumadzi, Jacana, R185

She's always present, but it was also important for me to interrogate what this spirit has meant to us as the people. What does it mean that an ancestor who really is an ancestor spirit initially belonging to the Zulu people has now come to be an ancestor of the Zimbabwean nation, and what does it mean if she is the ancestor that is spoken of to other ancestors? To question if there is maybe one primary ancestor ...

You see Robert Mugabe's ousting as a way for Zimbabweans to refer back to history ... Zimbabwe's national history and its versions of history, and this moment of history, are created by a clash of big men and guns. I was interested to speak about this moment that is outside the figure of Mugabe and outside of our usual understanding of Mugabe's Zimbabwe. I wanted to understand this moment through Zimbabwean people and particularly women, using the figure of Mbuya Nehanda, and I thought it was my way of inventing history through her history.

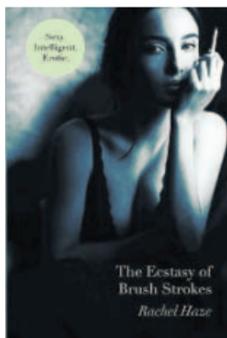
I also wanted to interrogate what is the liberation struggle to me and what does it mean to the Zimbabwean people outside of what we've been taught? I wanted to interrogate the legacy that belonged to me, to my mother and to my grandmother, and that would one day belong to my grandchildren. 🗨️

## The Ecstasy throws up some agony

**The Ecstasy of Brush Strokes** ★★★  
Rachel Haze, MF Books/Joburg, R180

As a child of the Karoo and a closet reader of *hygromans*, can you imagine my delight when I found *The Ecstasy of Brush Strokes* by Rachel Haze (a nom de plume), hailed as *Fifty Shades of the Karoo*?

I loved the deliciously flawed character of Alex, who packs up her art supplies and flees to a small town near Beaufort West to get away from her marriage and her restless mind. I liked how unlikable Alex is – her inner dialogue and feelings are well-crafted and you feel empathy for her self-destructive tendencies. Haze creates a three-dimensional character that grows from a love-struck student to a disillusioned adult struggling to find her place in the world.



The vivid, imaginative and wonderfully over-the-top sex scenes between Alex and her Rhodes psychology tutor are enjoyable, as are those with her S&M-obsessed husband and others. The author clearly knows her art

and uses it to illuminate the inner world of Alex and the lovers she inhabits.

However, the author fails to capture the nuances of the Karoo; it remains dry and dusty, the people in the township are all on social grants, and everyone's suffering. At times it feels like the author tries too hard to be clever, for example when she compares sex to biltong, or in her description of Grahamstown as "a small town in the middle of nowhere, far removed from the civilising hand of urban life" that had a "way of chopping students up into little pieces and then delicately throwing them out into some kind of colonial ether". Huh?

Wayward typos ("throws of passion", "spilt second") and a superficial engagement with the landscape undermine an otherwise sexy and smart novel. 🗨️ Anna Stroud @annawriter\_

## Book Bites

**Perfect Death** ★★★★★  
Helen Fields, HarperCollins, R215



A naked girl freezes to death on a wintry hillside, but her killer doesn't enjoy the actual murder. He is sustained by the grief of those who loved the victim. Readers are soon inside the

head of the serial killer, and stay a step ahead of Edinburgh cop Luc Callanach. He has complex feelings for Detective Chief Inspector Ava Turner. She's equally disturbed by the sexual tension, but both keep their guard up as deaths multiply, and police corruption emerges. The tale accelerates to a violent climax and a twist ending. It weaves a bright new thread into the school of "tartan noir" police procedurals and follows two bestsellers: *Perfect Remains* and *Perfect Prey*. 🗨️ Tom Learmont

**The Tall Man** ★★  
Phoebe Locke, Headline, R265



According to a Daily Express quote on the jacket, Locke's novel is the "must-read summer chiller". But the only chills I felt while reading this "thriller" was that of

Joburg's winter. The premise is simple: in the early '90s three girls pledge their devotion to a mysterious figure known as (yes, you guessed it) the Tall Man. This man (who is lank tall. Like, we get it) promises to make these girls "special". Fast-forward a few decades where the disappearance of a young mother (in 2000) and a brutal murder possibly committed by a teenage girl (in 2018) might just be linked to that one fateful night in an English forest in 1990. The plot drags and Locke's incessant references to the Tall Man's height and pseudo-supernatural allusions make this a tiring and confusing read. 🗨️ Mila de Villiers @mila\_se\_kind

**The Anomaly** ★★★★★  
Michael Rutger, Bonnier, R265



Nolan Moore, host of a struggling online reality show investigating archaeological anomalies, leads his crew to a mythical cavern deep in the Grand Canyon, using

a century-old newspaper clipping as his guide. In a scenario horror fans know all too well, once Nolan and co are deep inside the cave, rejoicing at their scoop, it all begins to go pear-shaped. Within hours, they are trapped deep under the earth with almost no food, light or water. Then they realise they are not alone ... And the plot deteriorates into absurdity – with murders, monsters, and betrayals. But the writing is superb; sharp, witty and intelligent, with refreshingly good grammar. Think one of the more ludicrous episodes of the *X-Files*, but scripted by Oscar Wilde. 🗨️ Aubrey Paton