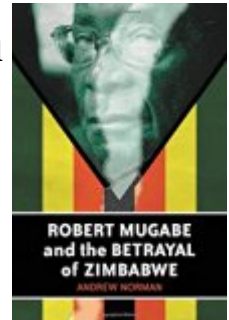


Andrew Norman. *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe.* Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2004. 189 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-1686-8.



Reviewed by Elaine Windrich

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This is not an academic or a scholarly book. Nor is it a memoir of the author's years in Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s. However, those four years as a schoolboy appear to be his only connection with the country he now writes about and none of his previous publications--e.g., *Pride of the Royal Navy*, *Lost Village in Dorset*, or *Unraveling the Enigma* of T.E. Lawrence--is related to Africa at all.

Nevertheless, the mindset of Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s is still there, recalled by his reference to the country's white population as the "Europeans" (p. 13) and his identification of Great Zimbabwe--the magnificent stone structure left by the Shona people centuries ago--as the "Zimbabwe Ruins" (p. 33). But it does seem somewhat of an exaggeration for the publishers to claim (as they do on the back cover) that "having lived in the former Southern Rhodesia, Andrew Norman has had firsthand insight into the circumstances that led to Zimbabwe's present plight."

Also questionable are the acknowledgments, which include a collection of unrelated and unexplained individuals and organizations headed by

former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Along with the "Iron Lady" are Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the South African High Commission in London, and Labour Party Minister Peter Hain (of "Stop the '70 Cricket Tour" fame). But why Macmillan Publishers in London are thanked for a book published by McFarland in North Carolina is not explained; nor is the contribution to a book on Zimbabwe by the Poole and Canford Cliffs Libraries in Dorset (p. 9).

The contents of the book are mostly arranged in chronological order, beginning with "the origins of Southern Rhodesia" (from the "Bushmen" to the birth of Robert Mugabe) and concluding with "Recent Developments", up to the Commonwealth summit on Zimbabwe in December 2003. In between are chapters on Mugabe's early life, "formative years," imprisonment, exile, and electoral victory in 1980. Thereafter (chapters 11-16), "disaster looms," with "the land question," "cricket and coercion," and "the phenomenon of Mugabe".

But almost the entire book appears to be based upon the three existing biographies of Mu-

gabe--by the *Sunday Times* Insight team in 1981 and the journalists Martin Meredith and David Blair in 2002--plus an assortment of newspaper articles (mostly from London's conservative *Times* and *Telegraph*) covering the years from 2000.[1] Except for a few articles from the Zimbabwe press in 2002-2003, no other sources on Southern Rhodesia or Zimbabwe are cited. The bibliography mostly consists of the titles of newspapers, various encyclopedias, and reference books, along with the autobiography of Ian Smith.

Also lacking is any sustained analysis of the problems raised in the book. Instead, events, often unrelated ones, are listed in the same paragraph or on the same page simply because they happened at roughly the same time. For example, one page begins with the statement that "in 1990, the year that Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa, Grace Marufu [described as an 'heiress' with a 'considerable dowry,' (p. 106)] bore Mugabe a second child" (p. 98). The page ends with the claim that "after his overwhelming victory in the 1990 election, Mugabe adopted a humble demeanour," although he also "continued to humiliate and isolate his main rival Nkomo" and "sent the Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland to quell the unrest there". In another typical example, the page begins with the claim that Mugabe "finally banned ZAPU" and "Zimbabwe became a one-party state [sic]" (p. 96). The page goes on to relate that "Zimbabwe joined the [defunct] Front Line States," "Mugabe was elected as chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement," Ian Smith was suspended from parliament, and former prime minister Abel Muzorewa "returned to Zimbabwe from the United States in November 1986".

Unfortunately for the uninitiated reader, some of the events did not happen at all, happened at a different time, or happened under different circumstances. For example, Samora Machel allegedly "came to power in Mozambique in 1986," which is also the year of his death in a suspicious plane crash. There are also inconsis-

tencies in imparting the information, as in the claim that "by the 1950s 90 per cent of blacks in Southern Rhodesia had learned to read and write" (p. 42) and then "literacy rates would rise from 62 per cent to 82 per cent of the population during Mugabe's rule" (p. 103). In addition, the date for the independence elections is given as "April 1980" (p. 87), with the results announced on "March 4, 1980" (p. 89). Zimbabwe is wrongly credited with being "the last country on the African continent to gain independence" (p. 90). Moreover, Joshua Nkomo was not "a Karanga" (p. 49), the genocide in "Ruanda [sic]" was in 1994 not 1993 (p. 170), and Archbishop Desmond Tutu was not "a two-time winner of the Nobel Peace Prize" (p. 171).

Although there is a brief "In Perspective" on "The Phenomenon of Mugabe", this too contains a lot of extraneous matter (such as the independence dates in Africa), leaving only a few pages (pp. 165-168) for an appraisal of Mugabe's two decades in power. Consequently, the book turns out to be less a biography of Mugabe than a selective history of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe with various bits of information or misinformation on the rest of Africa. While it is always unfair to suggest that the author should have written a different book, in this case the most striking omission is that not a single word relates to his experience of having lived, for however short a time, in the "self-governing colony" of Southern Rhodesia. To have related that experience would at least have been a more original contribution to the history of Zimbabwe.

Note

[1]. David Smith et al, *Mugabe* (London: Sphere Books, 1981); Martin Meredith, *Mugabe: Power and Plunder in Zimbabwe* (Oxford: Public Affairs Ltd., 2002); David Blair, *Degrees in Violence: Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Continuum International, 2002).

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