

ARTS & BOOKS

[Chenjerai Hove: portrait of an eclectic Zimbabwean writer cum political activist](#)

By Magali PASQUALINI

The story of one of Zimbabwe's most respected novelists, currently living in exile in France.



Born in 1956 in Zimbabwe, Chenjerai Hove is a poet, novelist and essayist. He is also an outspoken social critic. He was educated at the University of South Africa and the University of Zimbabwe and has worked as an educator and journalist.¹ Having publicly criticized the Mugabe government and accused it of being close to dictatorship, he was put under pressure to leave his own country in 2001. The Parlement des Ecrivains welcomed him in Rambouillet, where he continues to censure the Mugabe government.²

Chenjerai Hove goes beyond finding fault with the Zimbabwean government. He strongly condemns the education and cultural policies adopted by most African governments. According to him, Africa's reading habits are deteriorating: "African governments have not put in place well-planned book development policies. Books are subject to the same sales and duty taxes as other commodities. Materials for producing books like inks, newsprint are all taxed (...)"³. School- and academic textbooks are also taxed; African colleges and universities increasingly produce what he calls "new illeterates".

Chenjerai Hove's eclectic works, including both poetry and fiction, are very much informed by his political beliefs. His four volumes of poetry, *Up in Arms* (1982), *Red Hills of Home* (1985), *Rainbows in the Dust* (1998), and *Blind Moon* (2003), are imbued with his own experiences of repression during the time of colonial rule, and his feelings of disillusionment and bitterness over the new government's failed promises. His first novel, *Bones* (1988), translated in French in 1997, shows the depth of his empathy for rural people, in particular women in a rural setting.

By means of political satire and his literary works, Chenjerai Hove depicts an often sour picture of the African social and political landscape while never relinquishing his hope to find ways to make it more sweet.

¹ See the Centre for Creative Arts of the University of Kwazulu-Natal's website : <http://www.cca.ukzn.ac.za/images/tow/TOW2004/Hove.htm>.

² "The Zimbabwe Bird now Flies as a Symbol of Betrayed Promise," *The SundayTimes* 1 March 2005.

³ "African Writer Wants Books, Not Bridges," *BBC News* 1 November 2005.