

One of the prominent features of a demonstration in Harare on April 1 was that scene in which a white man, injured and with blood streaming down his face, is hoisted above the crowd, with the obvious intention of highlighting, in the most visible way possible, the shocking horror of violence on that day.

These were scenes replayed over and over again in some sections of the local media, including *The Farmer* magazine, the publication of the predominantly white Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU).

Likewise, most of the foreign correspondents – including those from the BBC and SABC – gave 'eyewitness' accounts of the demonstration, of 'bloodied' white victims; of blood 'spurting from the head of a white lady ... and then from the head of her husband'; of 'Another white man' who was 'set upon' as he came out of the bank; and of the white farmer in Marondera who 'was so red' with his wounds, 'you couldn't tell that he was white'.

So, many readers in Zimbabwe will have been shocked more by the photograph, in one of the daily newspapers, of Ian Kay the white farmer from Marondera, than by the news about a black policeman killed in the same violence. The BBC report on the same incident mentioned the death of the black policeman almost as an afterthought. The account on the white victims was newsworthy enough!

The image of a white minority under persecution from a black majority is sustained in the

# white heroes & bêtes noires

orchestrated TV footage – particularly on the BBC, Sky News and SABC – of white-owned commercial farms being invaded by black war veterans and peasants. It is a distressing sight to say the least, especially given the predicament of any individual – and his family – caught up in this crossfire over the land question, and the white settler colonial legacy in Zimbabwe.

It is this picture that provoked the inevitable feelings of racial affinity in European Union circles, including the attempt by some therein to suspend non-humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe "until it is seen to respect democracy, the rule of law and the right of minorities within its borders".

The British were even more hysterical, and unveiled plans to evacuate some 20 000 of the 40 000 former white settlers. "But we would not turn our backs on them (the whites)," asserted a British Foreign office spokesman.

However, it is a picture that is incomplete until the historical details are filled in and the current reality highlighted:

■ The fact that the real land grabbing of the white settler colonial era has bequeathed a situation in which about 4 000 white farmers own 12 million hectares – or more than 50 percent of Zimbabwe's prime agricultural land – while about two million black peasants occupy 16 million hectares, "often in drought-prone regions", acknowledges a BBC reporter, Joseph Winter;

■ And the fact that this 'land question' was glossed over at Lancaster House 20 years ago, with neither the EU, Britain nor any significant actor in the northern hemisphere making the kind of noises that would be expected of champions of 'democracy' and 'justice', about this historical and socio-economic obscenity.

But amnesia and downright blindness to social and economic realities also arise out of the myth of 'white indispensability' to Southern African economies.

Not until the realisation that black labour has been indispensable to the development of both the agricultural sector, and the economy in general, does the notion of 'white indispensability' begin to dissipate into the myth that it is.

It is part of colonial historiography, including the view that without whites there could have been no development in Africa.

The answer for all those who share this warped view of history, is simple: imagine the white settlement without such material and human resources as the land itself, minerals, and the enormous black labour reserves.

There are hardly any black heroes or heroines in history; I mean in that 'history' in which race and white liberalism are part of the dominant paradigm. Likewise in the media that is so dominated by the same throughout Southern Africa, and in the West.

With reference to Zimbabwe, there is the preoccupation with the *bête noire* on the part of white journalists in our midst, a tendency not seldom reflected in the uncritical parroting on the part of some of our own in the media in particular.

For, it is the white hero and the *bête noire* that makes news; therefore, it is as impossible to caricature a white fascist as it is possible to demonise a black nationalist.

Not surprising, white fascists like Ian Smith and Piet Botha have been allowed to retire almost victoriously to the end under post-independence and post-apartheid, their glaring atrocities and the political and economic consequences thereof virtually concealed under the flimsy cloak of so-called reconciliation; while black nationalists like Robert Mugabe are being demonised beyond recognition, their historic sacrifices almost forgotten in societies now punch drunk with the fad of 'new democracy' and phony 'multiracialism' that speaks more about concealing blatant historic injustices and economic inequalities.

Indeed, contemporary Southern Africa – and the world at large – is a history obscenely rewritten by white liberals and their black cronies, and then scrawled across our media, in language and images that glorify white over black, might over struggle, myth over reality.

Events in Zimbabwe in particular, and in Southern Africa generally, are beginning to expose such myths and lay bare the realities of the political and socio-economic dynamics.

■ Ibbo Mandaza is editor of *The Zimbabwe Mirror*.

A warped view of history lies behind the coverage of the recent turmoil in Zimbabwe, writes **Ibbo Mandaza**. White has been glorified over black in language and in images.

## NOMATHEMBA TANA b. 1953

Uyob' uyakwaz' ukuphuma nomlil' emanzini – You will indeed be clever to come through water with fire.

It is said that Nxele told his warriors that the British bullets would turn to water and therefore the warriors would not be harmed.

In my image I have divided my story into two parts that link to each other.

The top half of the image shows the warriors going bravely off to the battlefield with their spears. The bottom half of the image shows the women clapping for the brave warriors to spur them on to battle, because they also believed that the warriors would be safe from the bullets.

But then, as history tells us, the warriors were shot down by the guns and cannons of the British and they had to run away.

History says that many warriors tried to hide in the river near the battlefield. Here they drowned and the water turned red with their blood.

Therefore the bottom half of my picture also shows the people drowning.

