ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe human rights historiography often assumes that pre-colonial African polities were democratic and that colonialism was a complete denial of human rights. It is also often assumed that Zimbabwean nationalism was essentially a human rights movement and that the liberation struggle overthrew colonial oppression and reinstated both human rights and democracy.

The two volumes on the historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe will inevitably complicate this picture. This volume sub-titled Pre-Colonial and Colonial legacies explores what one might call the ‘prehistory’ of human rights in Zimbabwe. It asks whether there are democratic legacies from pre-colonial polities and what limitations then existed on human rights. It also asks what colonialism contributed to the discourse of human rights and democracy despite its obvious denial of both to Africans. Volume Two will assess some of the ambiguities in the relationship of nationalism and revolution to democracy and will examine the delicate balance between majoritarian democracy and human rights.