

House of Stone - The True Story of a Family Divided in War-Torn Zimbabwe
by Christina Lamb.
Harper Press, 2006.

Christina Lamb is a courageous journalist and war correspondent with an eye for the essential detail and a determination to tell the stories that need to be told. House of Stone is one such story, and although its overall subject, the destruction and depredation of a prosperous Zimbabwe by the evil regime of Robert Mugabe, may be familiar, the microcosm at its heart, of the experience of the white farmer Nigel Hough and his family at the hands of Mugabe's hoodlums, and the story of their black nanny Aquí, is not.

House of Stone is a tale of prosperity turned to utter poverty, of richness turned to devastation, of trust turned to hatred, and love to bitterness. Christina Lamb tells both stories with scrupulous fairness, and although the twists and turns that it takes provoke differing responses, the resolution at the end, in spite of its surrounding and continuing uncertainties, confounds prejudices and demands a reappraisal of one's approach.

What remains outstanding overall, however, is the ghastly nature of the Mugabe dictatorship, its unremitting cruelty towards its own people, and its added racism against its white citizens. As the West postures on the world stage and talks about intervention here, there, and everywhere on 'moral' grounds, the state of Zimbabwe, and its toleration by every civilized country, shows up its hypocrisy and emptiness.

Christina Lamb makes clear that the price that is paid, while the world watches Zimbabwe slide into chaos, is greatest for those poor men and women, black and white, decent, patriotic and honourable, who are trying to survive.

This is a haunting book.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh