

HOME Book Discussion Group

June-August 2021: Emmanuel Mbolela's *Refugee: A Memoir*

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Reading Guide and Discussion

Beginning to Part 2

- What about Mbolela's writing style that strikes differently than the other books we have covered? What is your first impression?
- What is Mbolela's purpose and message in *Refugee*? Why do you think he has come to write the book?
- As evident in the books we have covered, including Mbolela's, why is the urge and motivation to tell a story seemingly strong -and powerful- for refugee authors?

Part 3-5

- In Part 3-5, Mbolela describes his experience escaping from the Democratic Republic of Congo, up to founding ARCOM in Morocco. Here, are we receiving a sense of his personal emotions and internal journey as he relays 'the story'? How is he conveying them? How may one describe his style of writing, and what might be the reason for this style in a memoir?
- With the books we've covered, including Mbolela's *Refugee*, the memoirs are seen as both personal and collective. How does Mbolela's book relate to refugees and the refugee issue globally? Is it successful? And what might make, or what makes Mbolela's book more widely understood or relatable? How, and why, has Mbolela intertwined the personal and the political?
- What are the pros and cons of refugees writing their own stories, rather than a journalistic and outsiders point of view? What is easily understood in Mbolela's work, and what might be the particulars or narratives that could be missing, if any?

Part 6 to End

- What makes Mbolela's book compelling? Is it his writing style, content of his story (real and undisputed, vs believability), or his track record on his activism and advocacy? Or is it not very compelling?
- For each book we cover, we question each author's memoir style and writing. How is Mbolela's book a memoir, or not a memoir? Or are there parts that are memoir-like, and other parts that are not?
- In memoir writing, writers move between truth telling and storytelling. How might Mbolela be balancing the two? Is it easy to dispute the facts *and* his personal story? (For long-time book group members, how might this be different from the other books we've covered by Nayeri and Kao?)
- What are the nuances that the reader is able to grasp from reading this type of work? Compared to reading a journalistic news article? How would one type of writing (or authorship) be more important than the other?