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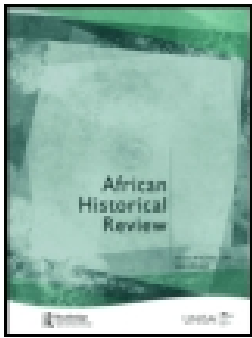
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“BY WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY!”: SURVIVING IN POST-2000 ZIMBABWE

The Death of Rex Nhongo

C. B. George

Quercus. 2015. 327 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-7842-9234-8

The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe

David Coltart

Jacana Media. 2016. xv + 647 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-4314-2318-7

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Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Zimbabwe has experienced rapid economic decline. Many commentators and scholars have attempted to account for the developments of this era.¹ They all seem to concur that the period has been characterised by a series of crises, or at least one over-arching crisis. Two points of convergence emerge from these commentaries. First they cite the impact of the Fast Track Land

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- 1 J. L. Jones, “‘Nothing Is Straight in Zimbabwe’: The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000–2008,” *Journal Of Southern African Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 285–99; L. Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: Institutionalised Violence and Political Culture* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2011); J. McGregor and R. Primorac, eds, *Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); I. Phimister, “‘Rambai Makashinga (Continue to Endure)’: Zimbabwe’s Unending Crisis,” *South African Historical Journal* 54, no. 1 (2005): 112–26; B. Raftopoulos, “The Crisis in Zimbabwe 1998–2008,” in B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo, eds, *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2008), 201–32; B. Raftopoulos, “The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 203–19.

Reform Programme and its consequences.² Second, they argue that the descent into political tyranny by the Zanu PF government was a major factor underpinning events.³ However, while these factors certainly accelerated the economic decline, signs of disaster had begun to show from the early 1990s when the government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), compensated liberation war veterans in 1997 with unbudgeted payments, and participated in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1998 to 2002. All these factors read together help explain the current Zimbabwean crisis.

Two recent publications add to our understanding of the political economy of Zimbabwe and its crisis. There is a crucial point to note about these books. One is a work of fiction and the other is an autobiography. Yet their illustration of the country's economy, politics and citizens' lived daily struggles is captivating and surpasses some celebrated academic scholarship. It is this theme of political economy from these two publications that is the subject of this review essay.

THE DEATH OF REX NHONGO

The first point to note about C. B. George's book, *The Death of Rex Nhongo*, is that it has nothing to do with the mysterious fire that burnt Solomon Mujuru to ashes at his farm house in Ruzambo, Beatrice in 2011.⁴ Mujuru's death dominated local headlines and to this day remains a highly contentious issue among Zimbabweans. It is also eerily reminiscent of the mysterious deaths of other Zimbabwean liberation leaders, Herbert Chitepo and Josiah Tongogara.⁵ It is with Mujuru's death that George prefaces and

- 2 A. Hammar, B. Raftopoulos, and S. Jensen, eds, *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, Nation and State in the Context of the Crisis* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2003); C. Richardson, *The Collapse of Zimbabwe in the Wake of the 2000–2003 Land Reforms* (Lampeter: Edward Mellen, 2004); R. D. Groves, "Fast-Track Land Reform and the Decline of Zimbabwe's Political and Economic Stability" (B.A. Honours diss., West Virginia University, 2006); J. McGregor, "The Politics of Disruption: War Veterans and the Local State in Zimbabwe," *African Affairs* 101, no. 402 (2002): 9–37; L. M. Sachikonye, "From 'Growth with Equity' to 'Fast-Track' Reform: Zimbabwe's Land Question," *Review of African Political Economy* 30, no. 96 (2003): 227–40; R. Pilossof, "The Land Question (Un)Resolved: An Essay Review," *Historia* 53, no. 2 (2008): 270–79. For an alternative explanation on Zimbabwe's economy, see G. Gono, *Zimbabwe's Casino Economy: Extraordinary Measures for Extraordinary Challenges* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 2008).
- 3 Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens*; D. Blair, *Degrees in Violence: Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Continuum, 2002); A. Norman, *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004); M. Meredith, *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002); M. Meredith, *Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2002).
- 4 Rex Nhongo is the *nom de guerre* of Solomon Mujuru, the first black Zimbabwe Defence Force Commander after independence in 1980.
- 5 D. Martin and P. Johnson, *The Chitepo Assassination* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985); L. White, *The Assassination of Hebert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); M. Sithole, *Zimbabwe's Struggle within the Struggle (1957–1980)* (Harare: Rujeko Publishers, 1999).

foregrounds his fictitious and imaginative story about five crumbling marriages and families facing variegated daily-life struggles in Zimbabwe. There are the British expats Jerry and April; their maid, Bessie, and her eccentric and overly ambitious husband Gilbert, both separated by distance; Gilbert's sister, Fadzai, married to Patson, a taxi driver, who inadvertently got involved in the Nhongo mystery through a gun left in his taxi. There is also the unlikeable American Shawn, a former Wall Street banker, married to a Zimbabwean woman, Kuda. Their marriage is full of neglect, deceit and cheating. Lastly, there is Mandiveyi, a notorious and reckless intelligence operative and yet a responsible father. Another point to also note is that the author used a pen name. The book publisher's note that George "spent many years working throughout Southern Africa and now lives in London" raises the suspicion among many Zimbabweans that the author could be an ex-British Ambassador to Zimbabwe.⁶

Also crucial to note is that George's fictional and imaginative story about Zimbabwe's situation in the post-2000 period is not new. There are several other literary works which deal with the Zimbabwean crisis. Novelists such as Chenjerai Hove, Tendai Huchu, Brian Chikwava, and Shimmer Chinodya have all published literary fictional stories and novels that are critical of Zimbabwe's government with its calamitous policies.⁷ All these works embody and portray the disillusionment that have characterised the post-2000 developments in Zimbabwe. Themes of corruption, human rights abuse, media censorship and political anarchy recur in these novels and poetry. For instance, Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon* subtly raises a deep political displeasure at the state's atrocious violation of basic human rights such as freedom of expression and association. Equally, Chikwava's *Harare North* narrative aptly represents the reality affecting many Zimbabwean economic migrants, not only in London ("Harare North") but also generally in the diaspora.⁸ The novel also brilliantly captures how the political and economic crisis in post-2000 Zimbabwe led to high levels of emigration by locals in search of survival in perceived greener pastures such as "Harare North".

Whilst one can draw parallels between the fictional narrations and experiences of actors in these works and real lived experiences manifesting in Zimbabwe, the portrayal is not as meticulous and incisive as that in George's novel. Perhaps one novel that comes close to George's is Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*. Huchu's story centres on the life

6 One may want to read a book by Philip Barclay, *Zimbabwe: Years of Hope and Despair* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) and draw one's own conclusions. Barclay is a former British diplomat to Zimbabwe. He has written several articles, under a pseudonym, about Zimbabwe for the *Sunday Times* and the *Guardian*.

7 S. Chinodya, *Strife* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2006), *Chairman of Fools* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2005); C. Hove, *Homeless Sweet Home: A Memoir of Miami* (Lebanon, NJ: B&B Press, 2011), *Palaver Finish* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2002), *Blind Moon* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2003); B. Chikwava, *Harare North* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009); T. Huchu, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2010).

8 The plot of this novel is centred on the experiences of an economic migrant in the diaspora (London). What takes place in this diaspora typifies the political crisis taking place in Harare, Zimbabwe, hence it is titled *Harare North*.

of a single mother – Vimbai – who works in a hair salon to make ends meet. However, what is unique to this book is the setting in which Vimbai's story unfolds. This lady has to cope in an environment of hyperinflation, 90 per cent unemployment, ubiquitous corruption, perennial shortages, illegal seizures and brutal eviction of white commercial farmers from their farms and other properties. This setting ceases to be fictional but is rather a realistic manifestation of the day-to-day existence in a beleaguered country where people have to survive by whatever means necessary. But even then, the narration in Huchu's novel is not as graphic and incisive as that in George's.

This is perhaps because of the fact that these authors are Zimbabwean and as such engage in self-censorship for fear of intimidation, persecution and retribution from the government. Moreover, the reason why these authors end up using fiction to portray the real manifestations of crisis in Zimbabwe stems from the fact that the public sphere and ordinary platforms such as media are heavily monitored and even censored by the state. Such a reality thus has seen most fictional works which are more overtly critical of the Zimbabwean government being produced by writers who are non-citizens or based in the diaspora but with strong previous connections with the country. More often, these works are published outside of the country and have very limited open circulation and readership in Zimbabwe due to either censorship or outright banning by the state. But because of their vivid portrayal of lived experiences, daily struggles of Zimbabwean society, and the shenanigans of the public officials, these works become topical compared to local ones. It is in this light that George's novel is a cut above the rest. I therefore unpack below the curious setting in the *The Death of Rex Nhongo*.

The book is full of political and economic innuendos. To begin with, George advances a conspiracy theory that the death of Rex Nhongo was not accidental but that he was killed by Central Intelligence Operatives (CIO) and that a gun, which is also central in the book, was the one that fired the fatal bullet at Nhongo before the house was set ablaze. Also, the context in which the author's fictitious story pans out is a curious one. It is set against a background of Zimbabwe's lived socio-political economy in the post-2000 period (although the book's plot curiously covers the years between 2011 and 2014). During this period, Zimbabwe went through a crisis: violent crimes, poverty, corruption, economic meltdown, political tyranny and fear of the omnipresence of intelligence operatives. All these are subtly reflected in the daily lives of the characters central to George's story.

As a means to cushion themselves against a worsening economic situation, many Zimbabweans ventured into a number of informal activities. A typical *kukiya-kiya* economy is observable.⁹ This is reflected in the family life of Patson, with whom the book opens. Patson is a taxi driver (Chapter 1) and his wife, Fadzai, operates a small stall (open kitchen) at Magaba, a popular open market in Harare's Mbare high-density suburb (pp. 37–38). Patson and Fadzai's businesses are an example of many mini-projects going on in Harare. One of the booming activities is transport services. The

9 *Kukiya-kiya* means multiple forms of survival strategies usually accompanied by desperation.

growth of unregulated and unlicensed taxis and commuter omnibuses (*mishika shika*)¹⁰ in the city has added to the woes of an already over-serviced public passenger transport sector. Others are involved in vending commodities of all sorts but particularly airtime and vegetables, selling second-hand and cheap Chinese clothes and pirated music and video discs on the pavements and intersections of every street in the Central Business District. Then there is rampant illicit mining business, especially illegal alluvial gold panning. Common to these sprouting small businesses was/is that they are mostly unlicensed and illegal. Owners and participants in these activities are always at risk of apprehension and persecution by the authorities.

The *kukiya-kiya* environment has now bred unprecedented levels of corruption and political thuggery, which others have referred to as "thugocracy."¹¹ This is vividly captured in numerous scenes in the story. For instance, at Fadzai's open kitchen, she has to pay some dues (a sort of protection fee) to a group of youth militia – Chipangano (pp. 146–148). Chipangano is a notorious Zanu PF-backed youth militia that terrorises citizens, especially supporters of opposition political parties. They are based in Mbare, but their operations are not limited to that area. Chipangano are involved in heinous crimes but are allowed to operate with impunity because of their connection with ZANU PF. Fadzai's brother Gilbert's experiences at the hands of Chipangano bears testimony to their thuggery. Gilbert was entrapped, tortured and robbed by Chipangano (pp. 174–180, 252–253). Noteworthy here is that Fadzai and Gilbert's encounters are but one example of the brutality of Chipangano. Chipangano wantonly invades all these places and demands payments from occupiers, yet it neither has the mandate nor the authority to do so. In some instances, this is done in collusion with City Council authorities, especially those with Zanu PF links.

The extent and complexity of corruption in the country is also revealed in the encounters of Jerry and Shawn. Both characters find themselves involved in corrupt and fraudulent adventures. Jerry tried underhand dealings in a bid to get a working visa (pp. 19–20). Shawn bribed his way through police roadblocks (pp. 303–305) and was involved in illicit gold dealings (Chapters 37, 38, 53). Although cases of corruption are rampant across the board, it is in the Home Affairs and Judiciary departments where most incidences are noticeable, particularly at the Registrar General's office, police stations, magistrate courts and the Attorney General's Office.¹² The experiences of Jerry and Shawn with some of these institutions are therefore not imaginary but in fact reflect reality.

10 Initially this term was used to reflect the disorderliness of the public passenger transport which is found anywhere in the city despite the existence of designated ranks or pick-up and drop-off points. However, the term is also now used to refer to other unregulated activities taking place in the city.

11 "Thugocracy" means rule by a group of thugs. In this essay, it is extended to cover thuggish behaviour displayed by individuals or groups in the name and under the protection of the Zanu PF.

12 See for example S. Verheul, "'Rebels' and 'Good Boys': Patronage, Intimidation and Resistance in Zimbabwe's Attorney General's Office after 2000," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, no. 4 (2013): 765–782.

Jerry and Shawn's first encounters at their "work places" or "businesses" reveal the magnitude and entrenchment of poverty among the local people. Life is so difficult in the rural areas where gold panning is taking place to an extent that basic groceries would earn one numerous ounces of gold. Shawn and his business partner Nyengedza's dealings with gold panners in Mazowe demonstrate this poverty (Chapter 26). Such extreme poverty is equally noticeable in urban areas, particularly in illegal squatter camps on the outskirts of Harare. Jerry's experience at Epworth Clinic, where he ended up using personal money to assist out-patients, is reflective of this (Chapters 6 and 45). Epworth is one of the squatter settlements on the eastern outskirts of Harare with high rates of crime, prostitution, political violence and extreme poverty. This dire picture would be equally valid in other squatter settlements like Hopely, Caledonia Farm, Ushewokunze and Tongogara that surround Harare. Families in these illegal locations barely earn sufficient income and many survive on less than a dollar a day. Thus, Jerry and Shawn's experiences as shown in the book are true reflections of the daily struggles that are faced by many ordinary citizens as the economy implodes.

Also quite revealing about the setting of the book is the extent to which Zimbabwe's intelligence operatives are ubiquitous in the socio-political life of many Zimbabweans. They are well informed on almost every activity taking place (pp. 237–238). Their omnipresence has created an environment of fear among citizens. The public fears discussing matters or subjects that are "sensitive" for fear of being spied upon or even abducted. Their *modus operandi*, as discussed by George, clearly demonstrates this. As a result, this has shrunk the democratic space, especially in the public sphere. Noteworthy is that the Zimbabwean Intelligence Service operates in this manner with full backing by the government. This prevailing environment is akin to rule by tyranny. Thus, the author's setting resembles the typical political environment that characterises Zimbabwe since the year 2000. This political environment is well illustrated in David Coltart's autobiography.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

In his autobiography, *The Struggle Continues*, David Coltart, who worked for both the colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwean government, gives a very detailed account of the political and economic history of Zimbabwe since 1957 through a personal narrative of his life. In 29 chapters, Coltart meticulously narrates and analyses the complexities and tragedies which Zimbabwe has undergone under Ian Smith and Robert Mugabe's regimes, whom he both describes as tyrannical – "Rhodes begat Smith and Smith begat Mugabe" (p. 599). Notwithstanding its start date, Coltart's book competes with other recently published academic expansive histories of Zimbabwe.¹³ Personal memoirs are

13 Raftopolous and Mlambo, *Becoming Zimbabwe*; A. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); M. Bratton, *Power Politics in Zimbabwe* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014).

by nature self-glorifying, but the exception with Coltart's is that it transcends this to become a national history. The book is self-introspective to the extent that it does not whitewash some of his brutal past in the British South African Police (BSAP). However, snippets of self-praise are discernible in accounts of his role as an activist, human rights lawyer, and opposition parliamentarian, and of his stint as a cabinet minister. Civil society, fellow activists and opposition politicians are celebrated in the book, too. Coltart's adoration of Garfield Todd as the Prime Minister is not surprising. During his reign as the Premier of Southern Rhodesia, Todd attempted to introduce liberal reforms and multi-racialism to allow for the advancement of Africans in the social and economic spheres of Rhodesian society.¹⁴ For this reason, Nathan Shamuyarira (the late former Zanu PF leader), just like Coltart, believed that Todd's ouster from office was a missed opportunity to change the course of Zimbabwe's history.¹⁵

Also crucial to note is that the narrative he gives in his autobiography, using his personal experiences and new details and evidence, extends our knowledge about the last years of the Federation, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), African nationalism and the liberation war, Gukurahundi, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and opposition politics. In this light, Coltart's account is neither new nor original. Coltart should be credited for engaging with existing historiography in his analysis of the phenomena as reflected by his comprehensive references.

Coltart's account contributes new knowledge about the nefarious activities of intelligence operatives. Secondly, his analysis of the Zimbabwean economy and politics since 2006 is replete with perplexing and horrifying details that have not been satisfactorily examined by scholars, with only Alois Mlambo beginning to do so.¹⁶ Here Coltart benefits from being an insider. He served as a BSAP operative under the Smith regime, and he has experience as a human rights lawyer and opposition parliamentarian in the post-colonial period, and more importantly as a Cabinet Minister during the Government of National Unity between 2009 and 2013. In these capacities and portfolios, he had access to information which is ordinarily unavailable to researchers and academics. Therefore, apart from being a history of Zimbabwe, the book is also a great source for researchers.

Other important themes in Coltart's book are corruption, violent crime, political thuggery and dictatorship, economic crisis, and poverty. His factual account provides a lived manifestation of the fictional portrayal of these issues in George's novel. The usurpation of judiciary independence and the resultant partiality are vividly elaborated upon with examples. Coltart also discusses how the judiciary, the law and intelligence

14 R. Blake, *A History of Rhodesia* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), 290–92.

15 See N. Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965); see also H. Holderness, *Lost Chance: Southern Rhodesia, 1945–58* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985).

16 See A. Mlambo, "The Making of a Nation of Vendors: Over Two Decades of Economic Decline in Zimbabwe," paper presented at the Stanley Trapido Seminar Series, International Studies Group, University of the Free State, September 12, 2016.

services were used by ZANU PF to persecute political opponents and others with dissenting views. Tapiwa B. Zimudzi's work examines this tendency by the colonial state.¹⁷ Coltart gives detailed, harrowing accounts of political murders, arrests and incarcerations, prosecution and persecution. These practices have a long history in Zimbabwe. Coltart shows continuity of this practice from the Smith government to the present Mugabe regime. This *modus operandi* is reinforced through promotion of political violence usually perpetrated by Zanu PF's Chipangano, or youth militia, which also appears in George's story. Violent political crimes by these political thugs have been investigated academically, but the extent to which Coltart presents them is compelling as he substantiates his claims with irrefutable recorded cases.¹⁸ Political violence increases during and after elections. All elections in Zimbabwe since 1980 have been marred by violence, with the worst recorded in 1985, 2000, 2002 and 2008. Coltart gives detailed accounts of electoral violence during these periods. The effect of this thugocracy is that it has rendered Zimbabwe characteristic of a pseudo-democracy. Hence, Coltart asserts that Zimbabwe needs real democracy whereby "a new birth of freedom in which government of the people, by the people, and for the people is cherished" (p. xiv).

Coltart also shows the extent and magnitude of economic collapse in Zimbabwe since 2005. The state of the country was such that Zimbabwe was "in more danger than ever of becoming a failed state" (p. 485). Between 2005 and 2009, Zimbabwe experienced hyperinflation which peaked at 87,5 sextillion per cent, acute shortages of basic necessities, the collapse of basic services, company closures, and extreme poverty. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and the government intervened with a number of quasi-fiscal stopgap measures. The hope was to salvage the situation, but instead the economy plunged deeper into crisis. The printing of money by the central bank in a bid to combat the parallel money market catapulted inflation and speculation: "ZANU PF, ably assisted by the governor of the Reserve Bank, Gideon Gono, was busy fuelling inflation, primarily by printing money in ever increasing volumes" (p. 445). The populist decision by government, through the National Incomes and Price Commission, to freeze price hikes and backdate it three months crashed the few surviving retailers and manufacturers (pp. 455–457). Government's revenue collection and tax base shrank

17 T. B. Zimudzi, "Spies and Informers on Campus: Vetting, Surveillance and Deportation of Expatriate University Lecturers in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1954–1963," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 193–208; Zimudzi, "African Women, Violent Crime and the Criminal Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900–1952," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 499–517. On the use and abuse of law and judiciary see also Solidarity Peace Trust, *"Subverting Justice": The Role of the Judiciary in Denying the Will of the Zimbabwean Electorate since 2000* (Johannesburg: Solidarity Peace Trust, 2005) and IBA Human Rights Institute, *Partisan Policing: An Obstacle to Human Rights and Democracy in Zimbabwe* (London: The International Bar Association, 2007).

18 M. Rupiya, "An Examination of the Role of the National Youth Service/Militia in Zimbabwe and Its Effect on the Electoral Process, 2001–2005," *Journal of African Elections* 2, no. 2 (2005): 107–22; S. Dombo and V. M. Gwande, "Gateway to National Economic and Social Development? An Analysis of the Uses and Abuses of the Zimbabwe National Youth Service in Relation to the African Youth Charter," *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 14, no. 1 (2016): 65–77.

significantly. Inadequate revenue crippled government operations and severely affected social services like health and education, with national public hospitals and schools shut down. A major health crisis loomed and inevitably manifested in 2008 with the outbreak of cholera and other water-borne diseases across the country. Coltart revealed that "[i]t is estimated conservatively that around 98 585 people were infected and some 4 287 died during the epidemic" (p. 485). In the education sector, everything halted with school teachers either on strike or deserting the profession. He summarised his experience at the Ministry of Education that "from the first moment I walked into the headquarters of my ministry ... it was apparent that a catastrophe awaited me" (p. 489). He concludes that "the education sector was close to collapse" (p. 493).

It took the donor world, Western and SADC countries' intervention and the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 to stabilise and remedy the crises. It is interesting to note that assistance came from stakeholders whom Zanu PF incessantly castigated as puppets, neo-colonialists or outright enemies – what irony! Not quite so, because this was a major economic, political and humanitarian crisis that required suppression of any enmity and acrimony in order to avert any further deterioration. The abandonment of the worthless Zimbabwean dollar in favour of the adoption of a multi-currency system also helped the situation. The participation of the Movement of the Democratic Change parties (MDC-T and MDC-M) gave legitimacy to the government of Zimbabwe in the aftermath of a disputed election in 2008. Legitimacy then attracted international confidence in Zimbabwe. Despite the view by various commentators that by participating in the GNU, the MDCs sustained and salvaged the Mugabe regime from sinking, Coltart believes that joining the coalition government was the noble thing to do for the sake of Zimbabwean people. He posits that, "for all its imperfection, the GNU remained the only reasonable way ahead" (p. 503). Even Morgan Tsvangirai, the opposition MDC-T Prime Minister during the GNU, holds the same view as Coltart. Asked about his reflections on the MDCs joining the coalition, in light of the criticisms, he contended that:

It was a very strategic move. We served the people. We cannot always serve politics, we have to consider: what we are doing is it helping or not? I think we did help the people. If anyone asks me I will say yes, the agreement might have been skewed against us but it was an agreement that we committed ourselves to but Zanu PF was not committed to it. I think people have a reference point of how we dealt with the economy, health, education and other sectors like water and sanitation. We also gained as MDC the governance experience that is necessary for any future reference point.¹⁹

But with the benefit of hindsight, the criticism of the MDCs was warranted if one considers developments during the GNU and the 2013 elections. And as Tsvangirai

19 Morgan Tsvangirai, interviewed by Wongai Zhangazha of the *Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper, October 7, 2016. See also M. Tsvangirai (with W. Bango), *At the Deep End* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2011).

correctly pointed out, Zanu PF was never committed to the GNU. Throughout the GNU, Zanu PF remained intransigent and reluctant to implement provisions and reforms as provided for in the global political agreement. Parties bickered over small matters, which almost paralysed the government. Allocation of cabinet posts and appointments of officials (Attorney General Tomana, Central Bank Governor Gideon Gono, and provincial governors) are cases in point. More squabbles were to come in the Constitution-making process but political compromises helped overcome these.

While there were political challenges, Coltart also portrays a semblance of economic stability and recovery during the GNU. Here he differs with George's characterisation of the same period. George's setting is the period between 2011 and 2014, which is also the period within which the GNU existed. Yet in *The Death of Rex Nhongo*, this period is blighted by a number of economic challenges. In contrast to George, Coltart's account of the economic performance during the GNU sheds a different light. While Coltart's point generally stands, the country remained in the doldrums. Manufacturing capacity remained very low, salaries were way below the poverty line, and unemployment levels soared. Whatever positive developments were achieved, they were generally cosmetic as they were not underpinned or supported by any comprehensive long-term planning and financial backing. The foolhardiness of the economic plans of the GNU lay in the fact that they were all premised on external financial support and pledges, especially from the SADC countries and other donors. In fact, very little of the promised support materialised. Even as basic services and commodities become available, they are either generally expensive, or the majority of people have limited economic capacity to access them. With industries still underperforming, the majority of citizens remain unemployed. In fact the *kukiya-kiya* economy still dominates. In light of this, George's characterisation of the period is a better representation. This is, however, not to discount Coltart's appraisal but rather to suggest that it be qualified.

Equally significant to observe is the pervasiveness of corruption, especially by public officials. Coltart illustrates this using examples of high profile cases. For instance,

In 1982 Zanu PF leader Kumbirai Kangai was implicated in a corruption scandal involving the Grain Marketing Board (the Paweni Scandal), followed by the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) housing scandal in 1986, a US\$100 million fraud involving the unlawful procurement of Fokker aircraft by Air Zimbabwe, and an exposé regarding ZISCO steel blast furnace in 1987. *All had been brushed under the carpet with none of the bigwigs involved being held to account* [my emphasis] (p. 184).

The same can be said of the Willowgate Scandal (pp. 185–187), the looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund (pp. 246–247), and many other cases, especially in the diamond mining sector and Community Share Ownership Schemes introduced during the implementation of the indigenisation programme. It is this mismanagement and maladministration via tolerance of corruption that have contributed significantly to economic disaster. The reluctance, particularly by the Presidency, to root out graft has

set the wrong precedent. It is therefore not surprising that the general public is involved in it as reflected in *The Death of Rex Nhongo*.

The two books reviewed here illustrate the complexities and tragedies that Zimbabwe has experienced. Both books add fresh dimensions to the historiography of Zimbabwe. However, their revelation of the brutality of the post-colonial Mugabe administration is also the source of much criticism. In Coltart's case, his race rather than the content of his book becomes the tool of criticism. Much of this criticism predictably has come from pro-government and Zanu PF officials.²⁰ This is not surprising since it has become a habit of the governing Zanu PF party to attack any dissenting views about Zimbabwe's history. Zanu PF has monopolised and privatised the history of the country. Therefore any interpretation of the country's past which challenges the Zanu meta-narrative is met with harsh and unwarranted criticisms. Coltart's book thus has not been spared such criticism.

In both texts, there seems to be a strong focus on the darker aspects of Zimbabwe's development. Admittedly, although these darker experiences are part of the country's history; some attempt to balance the story would have given a better appreciation of Zimbabwe's past. For instance, the analysis of land reform and indigenisation could have been contextualised within the genuine demand by blacks/Africans to redress the imbalances of the colonial past and the limits of the Lancaster House constitution. Really, the need to empower the previously marginalised Zimbabweans was inevitable and this fact should have been appreciated. Equally, the positive developments in the manufacturing sector during both the UDI and the first decade of independence, as well as in the education and health sectors, could have been highlighted. Rhodesia/Zimbabwe's performance in these areas is impressive. The point to be made here is that all has not been doom and gloom in Zimbabwe's historical development, as both books seem to reflect.

Nonetheless, in different ways, these two books bring to life the twists and turns of simply surviving in Zimbabwe. *Rambai Makashinga!* [Continue to Endure].

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20 See for instance an article in the *Herald*, May 11, 2016, titled "My Turn: Coltart Whitewashing History, Seeking Relevance." Jonathan Moyo and George Charamba, both high ranking officials in Zanu PF, also made disparaging remarks about the book.

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