Land, Race and Victimhood in Peter Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*

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Summary

In this article, I discuss different interpretations of Zimbabwean land in relation to the contradictory notions of victimhood in Peter Godwin's memoir *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*. I also explore the concepts of race, landownership and redress in relation to the legacy of colonialism in Zimbabwe. Through the use of the Cultural Interpretive Theory, Genre Theory and the Theories of Autobiographies, I explore how the politics of victimhood are used by both the Black Nationalist elites and the alienated White citizens to project the essence of ethno-racial grievance before local and international audiences for different ideological and political objectives. I show how the politics of victimhood and retribution which engender feelings of resentment and betrayal in Godwin's memoir play into the hands of the Zimbabwe state's anti-Western and anti-Imperialist propaganda. I argue that Godwin's otherwise important memoir on the destructive effects of Mugabe's rule undermined its message through traces of "whiteness", and also by competing on the same turf of victimhood that a politically discredited state had constructed for its own preservation. In the article, I suggest alternative readings of the Mugabe regime's violent farm grabs to the rather one-dimensional one offered by the memoir.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die verskillende interpretasies van grond in Zimbabwe tot verhouding met die teenstrydige begrippe van slagoffers in Peter Godwin se memoir, bespreek: *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*. Konsepte soos rassegroepe, grondbesit en regstellende aksie in verband met die nalatenskap van kolonialisme in Zimbabwe word aangeraak. Die kulturele interpretatiewe teorie word ondersoek, asook hoe die politiek van slagoffers deur beide die swart nasionalistiese elite en die vervreemde wit burgers gebruik word, om die essensie van etno-rassige griewe voor plaaslike en internasionale gehore vir verskillende ideologiese en politieke doelwitte aan te wend. Ek wys hoe die politiek van slagoffers en vergeldings wat gevoelens van wrok en verraad in Godwin se memoir veroorsaak, in die hande van die Zimbabwiese staat se anti-Westerse en anti-imperialistiese propaganda speel. Ek argumenteer dat Godwin se andersins belangrike memorandum oor die vernietigende gevolge van Mugabe se heerskappy sy boodskap ondermyn, deur sy spore van "witheid", en ook deur mee te ding op dieselfde slagveld as slagoffers in 'n politiek gediskrediteerde staat, vir sy eie bewaring bou. In die artikel stel ek alternatiewe interpretasies van die Mugabe-regime se gewelddadige plaasvergrype voor, eerder as die eendimensionele een wat deur die memoir aangebied word.

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Racial Politics, Victimhood and Zimbabwe's "Unfinished Business"

Commentators on the Zimbabwean political and economic breakdown over the past two decades have often marvelled at the rapidness of the country's decline, the spectacular governance failure, the precipitous nature of economic mismanagement and the anarchic if not suicidal land redistribution programme. Alexander and McGregor (2013: 749) note how scholars have cited Zimbabwe's strong state bureaucracies, "its liberation struggle history, its substantial formal sector and its strong post-independence history" as exceptional factors that would distinguish the country from some of the failed states in West and Central Africa. Such strong traditions and institutions, it was assumed, would act as bulwarks against the typical problems associated with postcolonial African states. Peter Godwin's memoir *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (2006) provides a rich cross-sectional view of the country's multi-faceted crisis. This autobiographical memoir is narrated from the perspective of a former Rhodesian Army soldier, who was also a member of the formerly privileged white colonial class. In the unravelling political foundations of postcolonial Zimbabwe, he found himself, a member of a tiny white victim population, facing state repression and political disenfranchisement by a violent nationalist ruling elite. Godwin's memoir is a graphic description of Zimbabwe's multi-layered political, socio-cultural and economic malaise from both insider and reluctant outsider narrative points of view. The memoir benefits from what Di Summa-Knoop (2017: 1) describes to as its "prismatic" aspect; a feature enabling the autobiographical text to morph, "to play, crisscross, and perhaps violate the boundaries and definitions that philosophy and literary criticism have, throughout the centuries, attached to different genres – in fiction and nonfiction alike".

The memoir *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* reflects the author's contradictory relationship to crisis-torn Zimbabwe, whose government had violently sponsored the invasion of commercial farms owned by white citizens. The Mugabe government had authorised the alienisation of white people. It had also redefined their relationship to the state on an adversarial "them and us" binary construct, and consequently rendered whiteness a problematic political concept in the construction of a postcolonial Zimbabwe. Yet the regime's representation of white Zimbabweans as settlers and aliens post2000 was ironically constructed on Mugabe's and his Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front's (ZANU-PF) sense of memorialized victimhood. This type of victimhood dated back to the Rhodesian colonial era and the 1970s war of liberation. Thus while Godwin's memoir laments white victimhood in conflict-ridden Zimbabwe, Mugabe, his party and sympathisers resort to their own historical black victimhood that has Rhodesian colonialism, IMF-led global capitalism and western imperialism as the victimisers.

Mamdani (2003: 43) appropriates the native victimhood discourse to lend moral justification to postcolonial violence against white farmers by defining the term settler as "a libel that natives hurled back at the beneficiaries of colonial rule". Hence, in Mamdani's logic the post2000 violent occupation and grabbing of white commercial farmlands was a natural consequence of correcting the injustices of colonialism. The only difference was that the roles of victim/victimiser had been reversed in the natives' favour. Given that Mugabe cleverly internationalised Zimbabwe's political problems by making black victimisation both a historical wound of encounters with Anglo-Saxon racism, and also a contemporary national question on which the economic prosperity of the black majority depended, Godwin's repetition of white economic losses in his memoir unwittingly feeds into the Mugabe version of black victimhood. Godwin, in his memoir, is forced to contest for sympathy and moral validation as a victim on the same global political platform constructed by Mugabeism's victimhood politics. This article argues that whereas Godwin attempts a fair representation of the state-led post 2000 Zimbabwean political crisis affecting both white and black citizens, and evidently taps from his journalistic skills that require fairness and balance in reporting events, his membership to a white community that suddenly finds its citizenship and property rights brazenly violated by a violent state compromises his narration of a racialised conflict. In addition to a discussion on Godwin's falling into the trap of a racial victimhood narrative, the article teases the questions of authorial objectivity and impartiality in the memoir.

Muponde (2004: 176) states that "the emotional asset base of Robert Mugabe's power is warehoused in bitter remembrance of victimhood". He explains that Mugabe and his party invest in the traumas of the past victimhood "as an insurance policy against present and future power shifts". The emotional asset base of past collective victimhood is memorialised and "privatised by ZANU-PF". It is then passed on to succeeding generations of the party's leaders as markers of qualification for leadership so much that it has become "mandatory for anyone who wants to lead the party or the country, or both, that whoever they are, they must bear the marks of war, or at least flea-bites of exile or incarceration". Thus the article deals with the following questions: (1) Are there limits of using a biographical memoir in narrating events in which one is implicated as a transgressor by his own victimiser? (2) Is it possible for a victim of racial oppression to see a mirror image of his victimiser and vice versa in the toxic world that both history and geographical space have fixed their relations in the Manichean grip of their own unresolved racial contradictions? (3) Within these contradictions, does a beleaguered and repressive postcolonial state in its desperate struggle for reinvention, relevance and survival mirror its colonial predecessor whose image of brutality and self-contrived racial polarisation of society it pejoratively repudiates? In other words, does a postcolonial state born of violence and racial polarisation reproduce an image of its historical oppressor when it

appropriates for itself the custodianship of black racial and cultural authenticity, while simultaneously othering its white and black citizens who have alternative imaginations of the state?

The theoretical underpinnings of the article are the Cultural Interpretive Theory, Genre Theory and the Theories of Autobiography. Berryman (1999: 72) argues that the genre of autobiography is a contested area partly because of the different ways of defining and constructing "the meaning of self and subject". According to Berryman (p. 71), autobiographical works have the linguistic and grammatical features, the identification of self, self-reflection and introspection as their common attributes. Autobiography is essentially writing about the self and its difficult interaction with history. It is complicated by the philological considerations of separating historical fact from fiction. Anderson (2001), defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real development of his personality". Auto-biographical writing essentialises the self's view of history and through deconstruction, subverts established fact to suit a premeditated fallacy. Di Summa-Knoop (2017: 1) explains that memoirs are "both a literary genre and a philosophical tool, a way of actively "doing philosophy". Auto-biographical writing, through its claims as a serious literary genre that incorporates philosophy, fiction and personal reflection, also destabilises history when the narrative point of view assumes the posture of substantive historical truth. In this way, it creates scepticism in the mind of the critic who questions the author's objectivity in the narration of historical events and the relationship of self to history, personal point of view, and personal interest. It also raises pertinent questions about the author's personal identity or self-reflection getting conflated with objective truth when narrating events of experiences in which the narrator is also the authorial voice, as is the case with *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*. Hence, Di Summa-Knoop (2017: 2) asks the question: "Are we autobiographical selves?"

Loesburg (2008: 169), notes that autobiographical writing is problematic for Genre Theory. This is because it is difficult to demarcate its qualities since it has "extra-literary concepts of intention, authorial sincerity and truthfulness, even the author's ability to ordain and control accurately a reader's response to his autobiographical text". He maintains that it is difficult for a text purporting to be narrating an author's truthful account of his life to be distinguished from a fictional text as authorial subjectivity and insincerity seem to always encroach on objective truth. He argues:

> If, for instance, we distinguish autobiography from fiction with the relative straight-forward remark that an auto-biographer intends to tell us the truth about himself or at least intends his audience to believe he is telling the truth, we have said nothing about the text per se but quite a bit about authorial intention, truthfulness, even by implication the relationship between the self who writes and the text written.
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> (2008: 169)

Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* consists of parts tracing Zimbabwean history from the arrival of the white pioneers in the country, the inter-tribal tensions between the Matabele and the "subject Shona tribes", the destruction of the Matabele kingdom by the British South Africa Company, the promulgation of land expropriation laws that gave much of the productive agricultural land to the white minority, the progress achieved by the white-led governments in the provision of better health facilities to the black majority, the successes in productive and efficient land utilisation, the notable pre-independence economic growth and the country's infrastructural development that accelerated in the post war (1945) years. In line with Genre Theory, whose flexibility enables a writer to manoeuvre between different styles of form, to narrate and dynamically memorialise events, Godwin deftly moves from history, to politics, economics, the present, the national and the personal in his memoir. For instance, his biography is interwoven with commentary on the socio-economic and political foundations of Zimbabwe under white rule which has nuanced criticism of the successor postcolonial regime. Di Summa-Knoop (2017: 5) asserts that the Genre Theory "allows us to expand the boundaries of our analysis to a wider range of theories – philosophical and literary – on the nature of autobiographical writing". In *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*, the promise of the Rhodesian state is contrasted with the destruction of its Zimbabwean successor. The destruction is evident in political pogroms like the genocide in Matabeleland, military interventions in some regional countries, violent repression of the free press, political dissent, the independent judiciary and the ruinous land redistribution programme.

The narrator, in prismatic representation of both past events and current ones, speaks from the perspective of an exiled white Zimbabwean journalist covering the breakdown of law and order and the resultant economic meltdown in his native land. He occupies the vantage ground of insider/outsider spectator domiciled in distant New York. Hence, as a New Yorker and a privileged Zimbabwean viewing the national calamity from the relative safety of his adopted country, his newly assumed identity masks his Zimbabwean origins and further compounds the complex nature of his historical self. The reader may justifiably ask: Who is Godwin? Is he a Zimbabwean that is still harbouring a deep yearning for a past Rhodesian identity and white privilege? Is he truly a New Yorker? He says when he is in his New York home, the cost of the socio-political meltdown in Zimbabwe has enhanced the sense of his alienation from Africa making it difficult "to contain both worlds" (Godwin 2008: 118). Furthermore, he adds that when viewed from New York, "Africa immediately seems a fantastical – wildly plumaged bird, as exotic as it is unlikely" (p. 118). This demonstrates his overwhelming sense of alienation from an exotic image of Mugabe's Zimbabwe, which, in a racially condescending manner, extends to the African continent in Conrad-like fashion. Africa and a Zimbabwe wallowing under nationalist despotism are not synonymous, yet the narrator duplicitously

conflates the two in order to accentuate a racial essence to the narrative. Thus, his perspective is permeated with a racial essentialism that places whiteness on the positive side of colonial history. However, the same whiteness essence gets complicated by both history and authorial expedience. Is Godwin's whiteness, in the parochial definition of the concept in colonial contexts, authentically white or is it tampered by Jewishness – a feature that becomes increasingly disruptive as the memoir unfolds?

The narrator himself speaks of his growing sense of unease which has been precipitated by his father's untenable situation in crumbling Zimbabwe (p. 118) when he discovers his Jewish ancestry. This incident occurs at the height of the farm invasions while he is on one of his visits to Zimbabwe. All along, he has carried his hybrid identity as the son of a British woman and a male Briton of Polish origin with a sense of serenity. Suddenly, Mugabe's acerbic politics not only alienate him from the Zimbabwean national identity, but also, destabilise his family and create a "sudden and violent upending of value systems" (p. 119). While he has to grapple with his unstable experience of Zimbabwe, which to him is synonymous with Africa, he is petrified about his father's secret – Jewishness. Thus he is confronted with the reality that the Godwin name which identifies him has always been a deceptive identity in England, where his parents met and also in Africa, where they migrated after the war.

The Goldfarb name, which unmasks his Jewish ancestry, and firmly situates him in the victimhood space as the son of a holocaust survivor and a racial outsider (in NAZI terms), means that his Jewish roots still had to be concealed in Rhodesia under the veneer of a false identity implied by the surname Godwin. His father had assumed this false identity to conceal his Jewish past as well as gain acceptance in his adoptive country, Britain. Residual anti-Semitism and the idiosyncratic nature of Rhodesian colonial identity politics within the dominant white society helped to perpetuate the "Godwin" lie. Thus Godwin, forsaken by Zimbabwean nationalism's narrow racial and ethnic essentialisms, is destabilised by the discovery of the Goldfarb "secret message in a bottle" which felt "like a personal rebuke" (p. 123) during the post2000 economic and political catastrophe. Hence a sizeable chunk of the memoir (approximately thirty-seven pages), is a biographical sketch of Kazimierz Jerzy Goldfarb, the narrator's father. It traces how his father survived the holocaust in Poland, escaped to Britain, married and contributed to the British war effort. It also traces his sojourn in different parts of East Africa and his final settlement in Rhodesia. After this life sketch, the memoir delves into the post2000 political anarchy wherein the invasions of white commercial farms are the focal point. Like Di Summa-Knoop (2017: 2) observes, the memoirist turns the reader into a "confidant who, despite the silence to which readers are confined, is nonetheless asked to believe in the events narrated, to identify the portrait conveyed by the memoirist as authentic, and to eventually judge its content".

A Brief Historical Background to the Land Politics in Zimbabwe

In terms of the Lancaster House agreement of 1980 which ended the protracted civil war and led to Zimbabwe's independence, the Zimbabwean government could acquire white-owned land for the resettlement of the landless black people on a "willing buyer-willing seller" basis. In the years that followed independence, the Mugabe-government's land resettlement programme did little to decongest the former Tribal Trust Lands as it "focused on restitution for past land alienation and promoting equity in land property rights in order to attain political stability. It also sought to enhance economic efficiency through reducing "the size of land holdings for more efficient use by non-absentee, and socially diverse land owners" (Moyo 1999: 3). According to Moyo, "few of these goals were met". To its credit, the government's other priorities like expanding the education and the health systems were more successful, making these services available to millions of the black majority. However, the economic difficulties of the 1990s forced it to adopt the International Monetary Fund-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) by which excessive government expenditure would be curtailed. ESAP necessitated the reduction of the bloated civil service and other belt-tightening measures. The government only half-heartedly implemented the programme, not only limiting its prospects of success, but also, causing immense suffering for the working class. Mean-while, the slow pace of land redistribution which the state blamed on the "willing buyer-willing seller" arrangement, and also on Britain's failure to provide adequate funding created tension in the rural areas. Sporadic invasions of state and private lands by landless peasants occurred. In 1997, when Mugabe decided to pay millions of dollars in unbudgeted funds to the war veterans of the liberation struggle, the Zimbabwean Dollar's value plummeted. The economic problems were further compounded by Mugabe's military intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The restive population, now led by the civic society organisations, student unions and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) demanded democratic reforms and constitutional amend-ments. Their efforts led to the formation of the ZCTU-aligned Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party which spearheaded the campaign that led to the rejection of the government's constitutional proposals in a referendum in 2000. Sensing the threat of electoral defeat in the elections that would follow in 2001 and 2002, Mugabe's government then lurched on to the land grievance for its political survival and triggered the invasions of white commercial farms in its so called "Fast-track Land Redistribution Programme".

Fontein (2015) regards the "Fast-track Land Redistribution Programme" as being directly linked to the issues of land, identity, ownership, sovereignty and legitimacy. He asserts that "… whatever ZANU-PF's intentions, the war

veteran-led invasions of 2000, and the fast-track programme that followed, only found traction in their engagement with a diversity of long-standing, localised aspirations that turned on remembered pasts and imagined futures" (p. 51). The lands around Lake Mutirikwi had been expropriated by the colonial authorities in the 1940s under the Land Apportionment Act, thus making the owners squatters in their ancestral lands. The loss of the land remained a sore point in the minds of the local tribespeople while the government-sanctioned land invasions provided the aggrieved local chiefs an opportunity to reclaim a lost heritage. Fontein states that "traditional leaders" actively participated in the restitution of the land, alongside the war veterans and government officials in scenes Fontein associates with "enduring political materialities of landscape, across diverse regimes of meaning, practice and rule" (p. 21).

The complex forces emanating from the land hunger in postcolonial Zimbabwe were fuelled by genuine grievances over the loss of ancestral lands. These lands signified the economic, cultural, religious and identity-related aspirations of the African people. On the other hand, opportunistic forces represented by the war veterans and the Mugabe regime aligned themselves with the narrative of land restitution in order to squash the opposition's electoral threat and the growing call for genuine democracy which had culminated in the shock referendum defeat in 2000. Thus, four incidents triggered the establishment of what I term "Jambanja politics" and the valorisation of unreason. These were (1) the rejection in 2000 of a government-sponsored constitution in a national referendum, (2) the electoral popularity of the MDC as demonstrated in its impressive performances in the referendum in which it led the opposition to the government's constitutional proposals, (3) the parliamentary elections of 2001 and (4) the presidential elections of 2002. These events occurred in a context of rising national anger against the ZANU-PF government's economic failings.

"Jambanja" was a catchword employed by pro-government militia consisting mainly of party youth, some war veterans from the liberation war and paid thugs to sanitise as a revolution the chaos and violence of the invasion of white-owned commercial farms. Tom and Mutswanga (2015: 56), who celebrate the farm invasions as a programme which "cannot be divorced from the colonial processes of accumulation by dispossession and the post-colonial resistance to change in agrarian structure" use the term Jambanja as an alternative to the state's so called "Third Chimurenga" or the "Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme". Hanlon and Munjengwa (2013: 209) positively appraise Jambanja as an event which created a new black farming class. They claim that this new farming class returned Zimbabwe's agricultural productivity to the 1990s levels and significantly improved the living standards of the resettled black farmers. They hail Jambanja as,

> … the biggest land reform in Africa, 6,000 white farmers have been replaced by 245000 Zimbabwean farmers. These are primarily ordinary poor people who have become more productive farmers. The change was inevitably disruptive, at first, but production is increasing rapidly. Agricultural production is now returning to the 1990s level, and resettled farmers already grow 40% of the country's tobacco and 49% of its maize.

Some of the claims in the above quote are not supported by fact as Zimbabwe, a net maize exporter in the 1990s, has since Jambanja been forced to import its staple food from the same neighbouring countries it used to export to, and also from South Africa. More troublingly, and perhaps in validation of Godwin's concerns about the deliberate political alienation of white citizens in post2000 Zimbabwe, the authors refer to the resettled black farmers as "Zimbabwean farmers". This ethnocentric categorisation rejects the citizenship of the white commercial farmers and their African workers. On the violence that accompanied the farm invasions and the losses experienced by black farm-workers, Hanlon and Munjengwa (2013: 213) blame the workers and the white farmers for aligning themselves with "international donors". On the contrary, Hughes (2013: 203-205) argues that it is the elites who "have benefitted disproportionately", and that the "cost of the programme" for the Zimbabweans in general, has been excessive. Furthermore, he states that the overbearing Zimbabwean state "has transformed itself into a full-blown dictatorship, repressing dissent with every means available". Based on the available facts about the disastrous consequences of Jambanja on the Zimbabwean economy, this article agrees with Hughes' sentiments. Commenting on the Hanlon and Munjengwa's memorialisation of Jambanja, Plaut (2013: 2) remembers images of "farm buildings set alight; white farmers, blood streaming down their faces, their wives and children fleeing in terror". He adds that these "images are burnt into our consciousness". Plaut submits that Hanlon and Munjengwa's book works from an "essentially Manichean perspective, locked into a narrative that relies on heroes and victims".

In unpacking the phenomenon of Jambanja politics, one has to consider its use of symbol, violence, farm invasions/land grabs, rabid nationalism, Afro-radicalism, political mayhem, redefinition of citizenship, stratification of society along binary oppositional lines of enemy/friend, black/white, patriot/traitor, national/alien, hero/villain – and so on. One way of rationalising it is by seeing it in Marxist terms as the logic of false consciousness. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1141) regards Mugabeism as "a populist phenomenon" which is "marked by ideological simplicity, emptiness, vagueness, imprecision, and multi-class character". This ideology relies on a particular national grievance or popular longing for its existence. In the context of Zimbabwe's socio-economic crisis, Mugabeism opportunistically latched on the black people's land hunger. It crudely sacralised the primal need for land through elevating it "to a totality of all the popular longings and demands that provoked the African participation in the liberation war" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni

2009: 1141). Mugabeism, also masqueraded as Left-nationalism in order to mask its "Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme" while winning the support of left-leaning scholars like Ibbo Mandaza, Mamdani, Yeros and Moyo. It was in these politically turbulent circumstances that Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* was published.

The memoir's lamenting of the state's brutality against white commercial farmers, labelled as the "kith and kin" of Western imperialists in Mugabeism, unwittingly shared the identity-based victimhood platform with the unpopular regime. While the memoir documented the violence, mayhem, hate and destruction of livelihoods of both black and white Zimbabweans in the wake of Jambanja, its message risked getting drowned in the cacophony of idealistic scholarship and unrelenting state propaganda, both of which glorified the political chaos as a redistributive economic project. For instance, Mamdani (2004) gave Jambanja politics a much needed ideological boost by rationalising the "Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme" as being the most radical pro-poor property transfer initiative in postcolonial Africa that effectively disrupted the economic legacy of colonial rule. In an article entitled "Lessons of Zimbabwe", Mamdani claimed that the "Fast Track Land Reform Programme" had been successful in economically empowering indigenous people in the rural areas and had revived Mugabe's support in those areas as well as in the urban centres. He stated that Mugabe:

> [h]as ruled not only by coercion but by consent, and his land reform measures, however harsh, have won him considerable popularity, not just in Zimbabwe but throughout southern Africa. In any case, the preoccupation with his character does little to illuminate the socio-historical issues.
>
> (2008: 1)

Mamdani also spoke of Mugabe as a demagogue much like the late Ugandan dictator Idi Amin who violently dispossessed the Indians of their properties and businesses. He said that it is not their demagoguery that marked these two leaders out, but rather that "they projected themselves as champions of mass justice and successfully rallied those to whom justice had been denied by the colonial system". He mentioned that "the justice meted by these demagogues mirrored the racialized injustice of the colonial system" (2008: 2). In other words, Mugabe's demagoguery and violence against the white commercial farmers in Zimbabwe were creatures of colonial rule by which the formerly oppressed colonial subjects dispensed justice in equal measure against their former colonisers. There is a sense in which Mamdani, while acknowledging the evils of demagoguery and native justice, tacitly gives it a moral justification as belated justice. According to Mamdani's logic, nationalist violence, the malevolent creature of colonialism is a native response to the settler's historical viciousness and is what Godwin and other white citizens of Zimbabwe must confront. Godwin in the memoir recognises the imbalance in

land ownership as a cause of Zimbabwe's civil war when he states that "whites possessed over half of Rhodesia's/Zimbabwe's agricultural land, even though they made up barely one per cent of the population". He says that "this land disparity was seen as one of the main causes of the civil war" (p. 55). He instead questions the destructive manner in which the land question was addressed under Mugabe's land redistribution programme. He pinpoints the devastating effects of the programme on social cohesion, the national economy and the serious decline in the quality of life for both black and white citizens. He sees through the ideological falsehood of Mugabeism posturing as a pro-poor agent. In deconstructing Mugabeism's anti-colonialist pretensions and victimhood claims, he uses Ethiopia's experience to delink colonization as a singular cause of Africa's problems. He writes:

> We crisscross the continent, puzzling over this blame game, from South Africa to Sierra Leone to Ethiopia. There, sitting in the Emperor Haile Selassie's lovingly preserved imperial railway coach, I ask the country's leading historian Chifera Aberkelly, what the advantages are of never really having been ruled by the white man. Certainly Ethiopia has been plagued with dictatorship, war and famine as anywhere else in Africa.
>
> (p. 156)

In the above quote, Godwin rejects the reductionist reasoning that blames the West for Africa's underdevelopment. To him Ethiopia is a classic example of an African country that in a metaphorical sense, wounded itself. This particular claim of Godwin may hint at denialism or worse, apologising for colonialism. Godwin is apparently aware of this possibility as he uses his African interlocutor's response to the Ethiopian question to, as it were, preempt his critics and protect himself. He employs the interview style to give balance and legitimacy to the underlying political subtext and commentary on African nationalism and economic decline. In the Ethiopia case, he contends that African intellectuals have the strategy of "dodging the bullet of colonialism" (p. 156) when confronted by the reality of some benefits of colonisation like infrastructural, public sector and other developmental aspects. This is because admitting to the "benefits" would be tantamount to undermining the pan-Africanist ideology and its "blame it all" on the West tendency. He states that his father's (read white Zimbabweans) intellectual, economic and technological investment in African colonies had benefitted the colonised. Hence, he is able to argue that "[t]he water-supply networks that my father came out to build in colonial Nyasaland were never built in Ethiopia". The political subtext is that without Western investment, those parts of Africa that currently enjoy the benefits of modern economies would be as underdeveloped as Ethiopia. Interestingly, when Helen Zille, the former Premier of the Western Cape Province of South Africa made similar arguments on her twitter account, she was heavily censured by critics and political rivals alike. De Vos (2017) condemned her tweets for being "premised on the untenable

(racist) assumption that colonised countries would not have developed without being colonised and exploited". In other words, it is impossible to objectively discuss the colonial experience in postcolonial Africa without stoking the pent-up fires of collective African anger at that historical encounter. The counterpoint is that colonialism was an unprecedented disaster for African people and any mention of its positive features is anathema. The Afrocentric mind sees mentioning the positive aspects of colonialism as extolling the virtues of white supremacism which is aptly captured in Godwin's memoir in Aberkelly's response:

> This is a very tricky question …. We were able to maintain our identity, our national language, our national traditions and institutions, and this kind of independence had a big impact on the national psyche of the people, on our pride.
>
> (p. 156)

To rebut the above Afrocentric argument of preserving African culture, values and traditions Godwin draws on the ideological support of Marechera, a prominent Zimbabwean nationalist author and social activist. Godwin regards Marechera as a typical example of an African intellectual who rejected the idiosyncrasy of a blindfolded race-based African nationalism. Godwin states that despite his Western education Marechera "felt within himself a number of different identities" and an internal conflict which he "mined to good effect" (p. 157). According to Godwin, Marechera resented his Western education for "marooning him on a cultural sand bar from the banks of belonging" while also castigating "himself as 'a keen accomplice in my own mental colonization'". Godwin praises him for his "refusal to trade on blackness as his defining trait, but rather to remain a free literary spirit". Marechera did not hate being black, but was "just tired of saying it's beautiful" and of Pan-Africanists who were "trying to reduce me to some kind of Bantustan writer with all the Boers applauding …" (p. 157). In other words, he was opposed to the reductionism of pan-Africanism and nativism. He preferred to have a hybrid cultural outlook. Here was an African intellectual who refused to imbibe a philosophy that had underpinned Mugabeism which Mamdani, Yeros, Moyo and Mandaza supported. Godwin, thus uses two African worldviews represented by Marechera and Aberkelly to demonstrate the existence of different schools of imagining the postcolonial African experience and to disrupt Afrocentrism's rallying call of Jambanja politics and principally, the sanitization of violence against white farmers in the name of addressing residual colonial legacies.

Cousins, like Godwin, also disagrees with Mamdani's sanitised version of the farm takeovers and the claim that this increased Mugabe's popularity. He points at the use of violence and intimidation in rural areas and the abuse of urban dwellers in the "Operation Murambatswina" (Mugabe's violent cleaning up of urban slums operation) as clear evidence of state violence, an

issue which Mamdani glosses over in his article. Cousins (2009: 2) however, acknowledges Mamdani's recognition of the political effectiveness of Mugabe's land programme. He says:

> However, one key point not acknowledged sufficiently by Mamdani's critics is the highly effective way in which Mugabe and Zanu-PF has used both the land issue and anti-imperialist demagoguery to win support in both urban and rural areas, and across the region. Even in the most recent elections there was evidence of continued support for Mugabe despite the very extreme hardship being experienced by most people.

Flowing from Cousins' observation, what becomes evident about Mugabe's politics was the use of anti-imperialist propaganda and the land question to not only dupe the voters, but to also undermine true democracy. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1141) observes that the violent character of the Zimbabwe state rendered it "an anti-democracy and anti-human rights phenomenon". Raftopoulos (2006: 206) states that the alternative leftist discourses on human rights and the Mugabe regime's disregard for these emanated from "students, workers and some intellectuals" who had "developed a growing critique of the postcolonial state" while paying more critical attention to rethinking "the legacies of the liberation struggles and placing more central attention on the struggles for human and civil rights". More significantly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1141) notes that Mugabeism was in fact a creature of colonialism as it mimicked its terrains of "conquest, violence, police rule, militarism and authoritarianism". Jambanja politics can be classified in Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analysis as "a complex methodology of dealing with the settler-native question through 'conquest of the conquest'". Thus Mlambo (2012: 10) concurs with the interpretation of Mugabeism as a product of colonialism when he states that the legacies of paternalist racism and the violence of the Rhodesian colonial state led to grievances "which contributed to the armed struggle of the 1960s and 1970s". The lingering seeds of bitterness were expressed in the anti-white labels of "the farm invasions period of the 2000s". Mlambo identifies the true origins of the farm invasions as being the rejection of the Mugabe regime's constitutional proposals in a referendum in 2000 and the resultant fear of a potential MDC victory in the elections that were to follow. The result of these fears was "the commercial farm invasions characterised by widespread violence across the land" (Mlambo 2012: 14).

The above analysis of Mugabeism and Jambanja politics is what is missing in *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*. Godwin sees race as a key trope of Mugabeism's land politics and bemoans the lack of appreciation of the contributions made by white people towards Africa's development. He cites the Coetzees, descendants of South Africa's Voortrekkers who had farmed in Zimbabwe before being forced off their land and resuming their farming in Manica Province of Mozambique. He describes how they turned around the fortunes of an unproductive farm that had been overrun by FRELIMO during

Mozambique's liberation war and later bombed out by the Rhodesians pursuing nationalist guerrillas. He mentions how the Zimbabwean couple have been accepted as investors, food producers and employment creators by the Mozambicans and notes that "[o]ther white Zimbabwean farmers have been similarly welcomed in Zambia and Nigeria" (p. 161). He quotes the Coetzees as saying:

> The white people that came to Africa did a lot of things wrong …. But history has proven that the white farmer, the Zimbabwean farmer, is a producer. There's no ways that anybody can tell me that the white farmer in Africa hasn't benefitted Africa.
>
> (p. 161)

The above view is consistent with Godwin's belief that white people's investment and economic skills are essential for Africa's development and without them, Africa is doomed to fail. The view is enhanced by the example of Philip Chiyangwa, a wealthy relative of Robert Mugabe who ironically served in the colonial Rhodesian police force. In a sea of national economic poverty, he bought a successful funeral parlour called Mashfords for cash. About him, Godwin writes:

> Chiyangwa lives in a luxury villa he has built in Borrowdale, which features eighteen bedrooms each with an en-suite bath, "computerized closets" for his three hundred suits, a helipad and a ten-car garage. Initially, he tells the sixty Mashfords staff members, four of them white, "You are the value of the company to me, I want you all to stay on." But, disappointed at profit margins, Chiyangwa soon tries to sack Martin. He sends him disciplinary letters, one for not coming to work by car but instead, "Walking to work, like a beggar, through the dust. We are shocked and surprised and it is going to stop." One for taking a bottle of wine to a Greek Orthodox funeral, which is part of the rite. Finally, the senior staff are snatched from their offices by security guards, who haul them off to Harare central police station while their houses are searched.
>
> (p. 192)

Comparing the productivity of the exiled Coetzees' in neighbouring Mozambique to the conspicuous consumption of the politically connected black business elites like Chiyangwa reveals the true nature of Mugabeism. In other words, the Coetzees exemplify this extraordinary virtue of white people's commercial exceptionalism in Africa and its mutually beneficial aspects, while Chiyangwa, a Mugabe acolyte is a symbol of black commercial incompetence and its debilitating effects. Black governmental incompetence in postcolonial Africa is effectively emblematised by the destruction of a once prosperous Zimbabwe and dramatised in the violence against white people. It is also epitomised by the political and economic morass that is Ethiopia. This

representation is where Godwin misses some salient realities about the violent farm takeovers in Zimbabwe.

The violence in the white commercial farms had less to do with race, nation or ethnicity; rather, it had more to do with retention of hegemonic power and its material trappings. Gramsci (1971: 182) makes it clear that the intellectual and moral arguments of the state occur "not on a corporate level but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental group over a series of subordinate groups". Effectively, ZANU-PF deliberately sacralised Zimbabwean land and conflated it with race and nationhood in order to promote a discourse of the "national question" by which the task of redistribution of white commercial farmlands to some landless blacks and politically connected devotees was equated to completion of the unfinished business of national liberation. Raftopoulos (2004: 162) argues that the strategy of saturating the "public sphere with its particularist message' and to control the flow of information to the majority rural population conveyed the idea of nation in "essentialist and Manichean terms". He also explains that the violent occupations of white commercial farms were "articulated through a Pan Africanist and anti-imperialist discourse" (p. 169). ZANU-PF domination of the Zimbabwean political discourse was accomplished through capturing the post 2000 political narrative and the creation of what Gramsci (1971) terms false consciousness, expressed in the form of "vanguard party" state-making with Mugabe as its embodiment. The reality is that the hegemony-seeking statecraft in Zimbabwe was aimed at achieving the nationalist elite's absolute political domination of the postcolonial society.

The Whiteness Dilemma in the Jambanja Politics of Hegemony

Masilela and Rankin (1998: 12) warned that the long ignored land question in Zimbabwe in which a tiny white minority controlled most of the commercially viable land would be used by ZANU-PF to resolve its own internal political and class contradictions. They referred to the land as the ruling party's "red herring" that would be "used as a political tool to achieve political and sometimes private goals". Godwin concurs with Masilela and Rankin that Mugabe did not prioritise land redistribution at independence as per Samora Machel's (The late Mozambican president) advice not to trigger an exodus of white people like what had happened in his own country where nationalisation caused a "swift exodus of the quarter of a million Portuguese" (Godwin 2006: 55). He notes that Mugabe instead opted for a "policy of racial reconciliation" and appointed a white farmer Dennis Norman as his agriculture minister. This was followed by stability among the white commercial farmers who increased the production of cash crops, with tobacco in particular "bringing in forty percent of the country's export earnings; their food fed the cities; they

employed a quarter of the country's workforce" and the country "became the fastest-growing economy in Africa, and it was the continent's breadbasket, frequently exporting food to its neighbours" (pp. 56-57).

The obvious hint in Godwin's thesis is that as long as white commercial farmers were unruffled by the new government, and their property rights respected, the lessons of Mozambique would not be experienced in Zimbabwe. Instead of analysing Mugabe's disastrous misrule from a class conscious perspective, he muddles up his analysis with laments of white victimisation and black ungratefulness. He bemoans Marechera's death as the loss of a "prophet without honour" who had long foreseen "that there was something of the emperor's new clothes in the spectre of new African leadership, that African post-colonial identity provided a protective fog of black culture to obscure a multitude of sins against the people" (p. 158). Nevertheless, he cannot get over his own entrapment in the self-pitying identity politics of being a white person in a badly governed black majority country. The white Zimbabweans became alienated as the "kith and kin" of the western imperialistic nations seeking to recolonise Zimbabwe in order for Mugabe to divert the black electorate's anger from his party and dupe it into abandoning the MDC. Their farm workers were also stripped of their Zimbabwean citizenship through hateful discourses alienating them as totemless people, alongside the urban dwellers who had overwhelmingly voted for the opposition in 2000 and 2002. Consequently, *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* misses the political essence of Jambanja politics when it dabbles into the discursive space of victimhood which Mugabe's realpolitik constructed. The authorial voice in the memoir is laced with the contradictory views of "bystander, observer, participant and victim" of the unfolding political tragedy (Mafu 2013: 234).

Another of the Mugabe government's main priorities was the consolidation of political power. To this end, it used the existence of a few hundred dissidents in the Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces as a pretext to crash the main opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) party which drew significant support from those parts of the country. The brutal campaign against the Ndebele ethnic minority which the government vilified as enemies of the Zimbabwe state was codenamed "Operation Gukurahundi". The term "gukurahundi" refers to the "early rain that was away the rubbish" (Christiansen 2005: 207) in the Chi-Shona language. Emmerson Mnangagwa, then State Security Minister justified the operation against an "infrastructure that nurtured the dissidents" (Doran 2015). This was the earliest pointer to the Mugabe regime's propensity to employ violence in pursuit of political objectives. Conservative estimates put the figure of the victims of Gukurahundi genocide at 20000 civilians.

While Godwin, to his credit as a journalist and humanist, reported on these atrocities for "The Sunday Times" and narrates them in *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*, it is telling that the western governments, for their own political

and economic reasons largely ignored the crime and continued to fete Mugabe as a great African statesman. For instance, President Ronald Reagan of the United States of America glowingly described Mugabe as a "wise" leader who "has been a crucial factor in healing the wounds of the civil war and developing a new nation with new opportunities" (Scarnecchia 2011: 101), even as the genocide was escalating. Godwin, in his memoir recognizes the Mugabe regime's criminalisation of Ndebele ethnicity in the pursuit of a Shona hegemonic state in Zimbabwe. Thus, he writes that the Matabeleland atrocities gave a hint of "what the new government was really made of" (2006: 22). He states that after investigating the killings, he realised that there was a "full-scale massacre" of "somewhere between ten and twenty thousand" or more in a military operation against civilians whose "sheer scale or ferocity … dwarfed anything that had happened in the independence war" (Godwin 2006: 22). He makes a succinct observation that in 1983, unlike in the Rhodesian civil war, there "was little outcry or reprisals from the international community" (p. 22). Godwin also notes the different responses by the western governments to the Gukurahundi atrocities and the anti-white state violence in the commercial farms. In the Matabeleland genocide, he observes that the world simply turned a deaf ear to Mugabe's brutality. He says:

> The sheer scale and ferocity of the killings dwarfed anything that had happened in the independence war, but there was little outcry or reprisals from the international community.
>
> (p. 22)

However, Godwin fails to explain or even recognise the racial undertones of the frenzied Western response to the violence against white commercial farmers in the early 2000s. The fact is that strident and robust responses to the killings of white people in the form of condemnations, threats of external military intervention and sanctions immediately followed the farm violence implicates the West for uneven application of moral standards. The hypocrisy of the West which ignored the Mugabe regime's massacre of about 20 000 black citizens and vociferously and bellicosely denounced it when fewer than 20 white people were killed is apparent. It suggests that white lives in Africa are far more precious than black ones. The horror with which Godwin views the killings of white farmers is replicated in the West's response to the same event.

Discourse, the Land and Cultural Tropes in Narrating Colonial Legacies

Godwin's analysis of the Matabeleland genocide and the murder of white farmers relies on a cultural interpretive model that assumes the aspects of political chaos and violence as typical modes of African state-craft.

Interestingly, it is his Congolese fellow traveller on the plane who says: "Africans can't do government. We are useless at it" (Godwin 2006: 53). In Godwin's memoir, this cultural stereotype seems to be confirmed by the murder of "a white Zimbabwean farmer, a big bear of a man, sporting a bushy beard", whose "blooded" body is at the back of his magazine. This white man, Martin Olds, is a sort of white conquistador; a pioneer, or perhaps an adventurer in the mould of Mr Kurtz in Conrad's (1889) *Heart of Darkness*. In Conradian terms, Africa is a beast that refuses to be tamed by civilisation, hence it destroys white visitors who fall in love with it. Godwin recounts the advent of white visitors to Africa and their first impressions of the land. He says that the land is "something of a paradox" for Africans, and that it was "not always too precious" as the Africans instead valorise fertility and the payment of dowry for brides (Godwin 2006: 54-55). He adds that the land "seemed almost empty" to early European adventurers thereby impacting on the development of "centralized rule and state building" which Europe and its comparatively bigger populations, and one assumes, more sophisticated cultures experienced. The alleged "emptiness" of the land sustains the colonialist's argument that European settlers did not dispossess indigenous people of their land and therefore, invalidates the land grievance as a rallying point for African nationalist resistance to white economic domination in both the colonial and post-colonial episodes. In broad terms, Godwin asserts that Africa's lack of technological innovativeness before colonisation was predicated on its cultural and numerical inferiority. These factors militated against the development of more sophisticated modes of production.

This thesis of Africa's primordial technological and cultural inferiority is further enhanced when Godwin describes the backward agricultural practices like shifting cultivation which would render the soil unproductive "after two or three seasons". Then astoundingly, he claims that "[T]he idea of land 'ownership' as such was an alien one (p. 54). Appiah (1994: 85) rejects the "erroneous" idea of a group's racial and /or cultural inferiority of the so called "lower" peoples based on the "evaluation of other cultures by the Europeans and Americans". The erroneous idea involves "crucial misunderstandings" of those peoples and seems to rely on what Appiah terms "nothing more than differences of upbringing" underlying "the distaste of some Westerners for unfamiliar habits". Hence, Godwin's claims concerning the cultures of African people and their relationship to the land is misplaced and consequently, problematic. Instead, he identifies some of the benefits of colonisation as improved agricultural methods such as the use of fertilisers, increased access to Western medicine, with "people like my mother carrying out wide-scale vaccinations against killer diseases". He says the white people's innovativeness led to a situation in which from a paltry 600 000 blacks, by "mid-1945, blacks already numbered over four million" (Godwin 2006: 54-55). Godwin is, in a sense, rebuking the beneficiaries of white people's sacrifices for their ungratefulness.

Zimbabwe's dramatic political and economic collapse between year 2000 and 2008 requires socio-anthropological and historical interpretations that do not get conflated with the African continent's governance failures. Alexander and McGregor (2013: 750) attest to the growing body of scholarship that rejects cultural interpretations of the Zimbabwe postcolonial state in favour of historical and anthropological methods of analysis that "favour anthropological explorations of the postcolonial state" and rely on "empirical research into the actual functioning of state institutions and the language and ideas of stateness" instead of "culturalist" explanations of corruption. Godwin unfortunately applies these culturalist theories on the mistaken notion that one African political shoe size fits all. In fact, the culturalist interpretation is shared by a Congolese businessman and fellow passenger with Godwin on a Harare-bound flight at the height of the farm invasions. He tells Godwin "[And] our institutions never work because we never pay our dues (Godwin 2006: 53)." At this point, Godwin states that recent developments in Zimbabwe, and specifically the murder of white commercial farmer Martin Olds in Matabeleland "seemed to have strengthened his thesis". Godwin's "noncommittal" stance on the Congolese businessman's culturalist interpretation of Zimbabwe's anarchy, given the narrative drift of his memoir, is questionable. The Congolese businessman's sympathetic and surreptitious solidarity with Godwin which causes him to "feel embarrassed, humiliated and mortified" (p. 59) as he is used to pitying others and not being an object of pity is another example of a paternalistic attitude that runs through the memoir.

Conclusion

Writing against postcolonial Afro-radicalism's transgressions against white citizens of the continent is as hazardous enterprise. The problem with attempting an objective contemporary analysis of Africa's socio-political and economic issues lies in the continent's history and experience of Western domination. The issues of injustice, poor governance and lack of democracy which Godwin linked to Zimbabwe's decline tend to get muddled in historical memory, resentment and race-based identity politics from both sides of the racial divide. These factors make meaningful dialogue on the continent's paradoxes mired in controversy and entrenched ideological camps. Godwin seems to have failed to objectively memorialise the negative effects of Mugabe's megalomania and ethnic-essentialist policies on the Zimbabwean population, especially in the post2000 human-engineered socio-economic calamity. The problem of articulating historical truths through a memoir about events in which the memoirist is an observer, a victim and also an accused person was apparent in the narrator's sometimes subjective, emotional and patronising tone. Evidently, the memoirist could not adequately distance

himself from the events he was describing, nor could he occupy a truly neutral observer's space. The victim narrative in the memoir is a solicitation of the reader's sympathy, if not an attempt at emotional blackmail. The memoir reflects some of the frailties that Genre theorists have identified in autobiographical texts. The article has demonstrated that Godwin's commentary on Zimbabwean land and nationalism often gets conflated with culturalism and Western liberal paternalism. The memoir *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* shows how difficult it is for African nationalism to confront the ugly image of its colonial predecessor which is supposedly its ideological and political nemesis.

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