

## Zimbabwe through Multiple Personal Perspectives

Norma Kriger

**Peter Godwin.** *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun: A Memoir of Africa.* New York and Boston: Back Bay Books, 2006. 341 pp. \$14.99. Paper.

**Christina Lamb.** *House of Stone: The True Story of a Family Divided in War-Torn Zimbabwe.* Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2007. xxxviii + 290 pp. Photographs. Map. Chronology. Glossary. \$24.95. Cloth.

**Edgar “2-Boy” Zivanai Tekere.** With an Introduction by **Ibbo Mandaza.** *A Lifetime of Struggle.* Harare: SAPES Books, 2007. xv + 180 pp. Photographs. Index. No price reported.

**Judith Garfield Todd.** *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe.* Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007. Distributed in the U.S. by International Publishers Marketing, Herndon, Va. xii + 460 pp. Photographs. Index. \$28.00. Cloth.

Given contemporary events, these four books represent a fascinating collective testimony, from diverse perspectives, on the postcolonial trajectory of Zimbabwe’s political fortunes. Three of these books were written by different kinds of “insiders.” Peter Godwin and Judith Todd are white Zimbabweans who had different political histories before becoming disaffected with postindependence politics in Zimbabwe. Godwin fought in the war on the Rhodesian side while Todd, the daughter of former Prime Minister Garfield Todd (1953–58), was detained with her father in 1972 by the Smith regime and spent the war years in London working to provision the refugee camps of the liberation movements. Edgar Tekere, by contrast, was a leading ZANU nationalist who became the first internal critic of the postindependence ZANU-PF leadership. Christina Lamb’s book is different: as a British journalist who covered the invasions and occupations of white-owned farms, she writes from the point of view of an outsider.

In *House of Stone*, Christina Lamb traces how the disparate lives of a rich white man and a poor black woman were affected by major historical events in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe from 1961, their respective birth years, until 2005. The lives of Nigel Hough and Aqwi—Lamb does not give her a surname—intersected when Aqwi went to work as a live-in nanny on his farm in Marondera district in 2000, just as the state-sponsored land invasions began. Lamb met Hough on his farm in 2002. He expected the farm to be seized even though he described himself as a “model white farmer” and the farm had not been officially listed for compulsory confiscation. One week later the anticipated event took place. Among the leaders of the farm takeover was

Aqui, shouting in his presence: “Death to the whites.” Hough was devastated by her betrayal. But it transpires that Aqui had joined the invaders mainly to protect herself from being perceived as a “sell-out;” she had used her leadership role to protect as much of “her” family’s property as possible. After the Houghs lost their farm they moved to a small house on the grounds of the school in Marondera where Nigel’s wife was a teacher. Aqui continued to work for them but returned to live in her own tiny home, and over time their relationship—rather surprisingly—became one of friendship.

To Lamb this tale of interracial bonding demonstrates that the state-sponsored invasions of white farms were “never really a racial issue” and that “the real victims were the hundreds of thousands of farm workers like Aqui who lost their homes and jobs” (xxi–xxii). Lamb attributes “the descent into madness” to the lust for power of “one violent man” (i.e., Robert Mugabe) and his efforts “to save his skin even if he destroys the whole country in the process” (xxvii).

Lamb is right to emphasize Mugabe’s determination to hold on to power and his manipulation of racial rhetoric, but she might have drawn out the salience of race by listening more closely to her own characters. Aqui believes that all the land should revert to blacks, but curiously, only to the Shona. Hough knows Mugabe will never accept him as an indigeneous African, and though he is a fundraiser for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, he draws freely on racial stereotypes to express his disenchantment with the MDC. “I thought they were visionless and lazy,” he says. “If we whites didn’t do things for them it didn’t get done. All the money was raised by us and we organized all the logistics” (246). Lamb is also correct in drawing attention to how the land invasions deprived farmworkers of their homes and livelihoods, although she unfairly diminishes the suffering of the white farmers, who were victims, too.

Indeed, while the general argument is interesting, Lamb’s book contains numerous errors. She misidentifies the ethnicity of both Joshua Nkomo and Ndabaningi Sithole (72, 76, 123); Hitler Hunzvi, chair of the War Vets’ Association, assessed war-related disabilities of former combatants for the government and not for the War Vets’ Association (185) (though he used his position as assessor to the advantage of ex-combatants and even noncombatants); the constitutional amendment providing for the compulsory acquisition of land was passed in 1990, not 1991 (157); socialist-inspired cooperatives occupied the smallest share of land redistribution, rather than representing the only form (123, 214); Mozambique closed its borders with Rhodesia (not the other way around) (87); Chikerema (not Mugabe) represented the ANC at the Victoria Falls talks in 1975 (134); ZAPU won twenty seats in Matabeleland and Midlands in the 1980 elections (not only in Matabeleland) (99); the food riots were in 1999, not 1998 (176). Aqui could not have worked for the Houghs for six years (xx) at the time that the farm was invaded in 2002 as she only became their employee

in 2000. Lamb could not have first met Hough in August 2002 (xxi), as her newspaper article about their first meeting appeared in July 2002. In that article, she wrote that the Houghs would be breaking the law if they were still on their farm in August, but the book has Hough saying in August that there was no legal basis for evicting him (247). Embarrassingly, she quotes a pessimistic judgment on race relations by Alan Paton (xvii) that contradicts her own optimistic message on the same topic. In the end, the accumulation of these errors, large and small, undermines the credibility of the narrative.

Like Lamb, Peter Godwin covers key political events under ZANU-PF rule in *When A Crocodile Eats the Sun* and points to Mugabe as the engineer of the country's decline. Unlike Lamb, however, Godwin often shows how official race rhetoric disrupted the interracial bonds between white employers and their workers and left benevolent employers feeling betrayed. Again in contrast to Lamb, Godwin seeks to highlight how white farmers were indeed victims of the land invasions. Descriptions of his elderly parents—retired professionals who are victims of the economic collapse—and of disintegrating hospitals and growing personal insecurity portray the country's shocking “reversal of progress” (314) much more vividly than mere statistics can convey. Godwin's book is also about his own identity issues, starting with his discovery that his father was a Polish Jew who lost his family in the Holocaust. The most compelling part of the book is the story of Godwin's father, originally named Arthur Goldfarb, who was stranded in England when World War II broke out, fought in the war, studied engineering, married Godwin's English mother, and started a new life in Rhodesia with the name George Godwin. He tells his son that he suppressed his identity to protect his children from anti-Semitism, although he remarks that “being a white here [in Zimbabwe] is starting to feel a bit like being a Jew in Poland in 1939—an endangered minority—the target of ethnic cleansing” (176). Godwin tries to draw parallels between his own story—his decision to give up his identity as a “white African” in exile and become a U.S. citizen—and his father's change of identity, although the comparison simply does not measure up. “Like Poland was to him,” he writes, “Africa is for me: a place in which I can never truly belong, a dangerous place that will, if I allow it to, reach into my life and hurt my family. A white man in Africa is like a Jew everywhere—... waiting for the next great tidal swell of hostility” (266). In passages such as this one the comparison sounds melodramatic, and the conflation of Zimbabwe with “Africa”—as in the book's title—grates. Yet buoyed by the multiracial gathering at his father's memorial service, he gushes about “just how color-blind their society has become,” attributing the achievement of “real racial unity” to Mugabe, who has allowed Zimbabweans to share a common experience of victimhood. He realizes “just how African my parents have become. That this is their home” (320). But this conclusion is spoken in his own voice, not theirs; his parents, in contrast,

had likened whites in Zimbabwe to Greek slaves under the Romans, who have all the power.

Edgar Tekere's expressed hope in *A Lifetime of Struggle* is that his life story "will help contribute towards an understanding of the dynamics of the liberation struggle, and what went wrong thereafter" (xxi). As a founding member of ZANU, Tekere was detained from 1964 to 1974; he secretly crossed into Mozambique with Mugabe in 1975 to restart ZANU's stalled war effort, became the party's secretary-general in 1977, and survived an internal coup attempt in 1978. After independence, however, he lost his ministerial appointment, then his secretary-general post, and in 1987 his provincial party chair. He attributes his downfall to the fact that Mugabe found the ethnic group of his deputy, Simon Muzenda, more conducive to advancing his hold on power. But Tekere fails to recognize that he became a liability to Mugabe when he murdered a white man in 1980 and then rejected Mugabe's advice to plead guilty and receive a pardon; the reason, he says, is that he did not want to have to be eternally grateful to Mugabe. (In a high-profile trial he was eventually found not guilty on a legal technicality.) In July 1988 Tekere denounced the corruption of the ZANU-PF leaders and their creation of a one-party state; he was expelled from the party and forced to give up his parliamentary seat, and experienced first-hand the party's repression and violence when he formed an opposition party to contest the 1990 elections. Nevertheless, he wanted to return to ZANU-PF but refused to accept the condition on his readmission in 2006 that he not hold party office for five years.

Along with the political story Tekere provides interesting details about his interpersonal relations during the liberation struggle, with a focus on Robert Mugabe and his alleged leadership flaws. Some of the criticisms seem flimsy: that Mugabe was reluctant to replace Sithole as ZANU's president, a decision voted on by a mere five ZANU leaders from their detention cells in 1974; that unlike the author himself Mugabe had no real interest in fighting; that Mugabe questioned continuing the war when confronted with the high death toll following a Rhodesian attack on a camp. More serious are Tekere's allegations of Mugabe's unilateral decision-making, cult of personality, and manipulation of ethnic factionalism after independence.

Tekere blames Mugabe for 90 percent of Zimbabwe's woes. But he and other founding leaders of ZANU have some responsibility, too; as he tells us, at independence they "forgot to put in place the institutional arrangements that would ensure that the Party was sustained by collective leadership, democratic discourse, adherence to the principles that fueled our struggle for independence, and accountability" (169). To this end, Tekere supported the appointment of Joice Mujuru, a former combatant, as ZANU-PF vice-president in 2004 because she was young; he believed a younger leader would deemphasize the need for "party loyalty" and embrace "genuine" multi-party democracy (180).

For all his criticism of the party, Tekere's identification with ZANU-PF remains deep. He boasts that even after he was expelled he enjoyed the respect and friendship of the top echelon of ZANU-PF's leaders. His acknowledgments indicate that he also received houses, bank account deposits, cars, and other material support from ZANU-PF big men. He portrays Nkomo's ZAPU as having missed an opportunity to check Mugabe's power when it instigated violence against the government in the 1980s—a discredited ZANU-PF line which it now uses to justify its repression of the MDC party—without criticizing ZANU-PF for its indiscriminate violence against both ZAPU and all Ndebele collectively. Depicting Joice Mujuru, a woman who paid youth to attack the opposition in the 2000 election, as a savior really has to be seen within the context of Tekere's support for the Mujuru faction (associated with her husband) in succession politics. Finally, Ibbo Mandaza, the editor, publisher, and the author of the book's introduction—and who, Tekere says, encouraged him “to write” his story (when actually the book is a product of transcribed tapes, heavy editing, and other opportunities for nonauthorial interventions)—is a staunch ZANU-PF supporter, a major beneficiary of party patronage, and deeply implicated in pro-Mujuru faction politics.

Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness* is a first-hand account focusing on the first decade of independence in Zimbabwe, although she covers politics to 2007. According to her narrative, ZANU-PF politicians and fighters, many of whom she knows personally, treated ZAPU with extreme brutality, and when ZANU-PF incorporated ZAPU in 1987, many of those whom she had visited in detention themselves became accomplices in the regime's political violence, repression, and asset-stripping. The theme of victims becoming perpetrators is not new for Zimbabwe, but Todd writes with authority, providing names and specifics that make hers a novel contribution. In 2001 she was arrested without a warrant, only to be released without charges. She refers to her arrest as a “kidnapping” because of the manner in which it occurred, and says it was orchestrated by Mutumwe Mawere, a businessman who himself later fell out with ZANU-PF. Todd was ultimately forced by the regime to relinquish her Zimbabwean citizenship and now lives in South Africa, as does Mawere.

Todd tells an impressive story about her fight for justice in Zimbabwe, although at times her actions seem naive. When she appeals to politicians again and again for the release of detainees, for example, she demonstrates a misplaced faith in their human decency. After encouraging people to vote “no” in the constitutional referendum of 2000—on the grounds that it was more costly to say “no” to the Pearce Commission in 1972—she admits: “I couldn't have been more mistaken.... I still had not begun to fathom the lengths to which Robert Gabriel Mugabe would go to maintain and consolidate his personal power... through his organ Zanu (PF).... Physical suffering was about to escalate in a way that would have been quite unthinkable

in 1972" (412).

Todd finally does come to grips with the ruthlessness of the ruling elite, describing the pass system in force in Zimbabwe as "far worse than anything that had ever existed under South Africa's apartheid rulers." Without a ZANU-PF party card "you couldn't travel by bus in the rural areas, you often couldn't have access to a job or medical help, or even food. Sometimes if you didn't have your pass, you were beaten, hurt and even killed" (443). Because of the severity of repression and the humanitarian crisis in 2007, she concluded that internally driven change was impossible. She now believes that "circumstances and the basic instinct of self-preservation" will eventually push South Africa and other regional actors to take action on Zimbabwe and that "the South African government can single-mindedly and swiftly plan... the return of its neighbour... to constitutional government and the rule of law" (445). The notion that South Africa will act and be able to effect such change, however, may turn out to be another misjudgment.

Specialists on Zimbabwe should find much of value in this meticulously written book: the documentation of postelection violence against ZAPU MPs in 1985, the details of the impact of interparty politics on NGO relations with the state, and the way named individuals in NGOs smeared their own colleagues to powerful leaders are all useful contributions. However, the great strength of the book as testimony means that it is oriented primarily to specialists; the 450 pages of detail may well overwhelm nonspecialists.

The four books under review all point to Robert Mugabe as the architect of Zimbabwe's misery. It is striking that the only apparent shared interest of all the authors in the opposition MDC is connected to its status as a victim of ZANU-PF repression. However, given how victims of the liberation struggle often became perpetrators after independence, the MDC, too, needs to be assessed for its potential in this regard. Finally, while these accounts and the narratives they contain are, each in their own way, undeniably valuable as personal testimony, it is difficult not to notice the disregard for academic writing on Zimbabwe that all four authors seem to share.

*School of Economic History & Development Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban, South Africa*