

Article

A very Zimbabwean coup: November 13-24, 2017

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Abstract

Toward the end of 2017 Robert Mugabe was convinced by members of his own party and leaders of the military to retire from his 37 year presidency of Zimbabwe. That one report called the process hastening his departure an ‘unexpected but peaceful transition’ suggests that what more impartial observers call a coup nonetheless had special characteristics softening its military tenor. This exploratory article discusses some of the particularities of this ‘coup of a special type’, as well as considering the new light it shines on the political history of Zimbabwe, the party ruling it since 1980, and their future.

The title of the novel *A Very British Coup* (authored in 1982 by a Bennite Labour politician who in 2003-5 became British Minister for Africa, and later made into two television series – Mullin 1982, Gallagher 2009:440) reminds us that just as every country’s politics has its particularities so too do their coups. Coups are a variant of Clausewitz’s dictum (come to think of it, Gramsci’s too – Moore 2014b) about the continuum of coercion and consent in the processes constituting one of humankind’s oldest professions. When accompanied by *d’état* the word indicates a quick and often forceful change of people governing in a state. The successful protagonists are usually rooted in the military. The state remains relatively intact and unchanged, as do the deeper social and economic structures on which it sits, condensing, reflecting, and refracting them while it ostensibly rules. Beyond that, the spectrum hosts many shades.¹

When considering the specificities amidst this political genus in southern Africa, another variant of a tried and true phrase comes to mind. Zimbabwe's was a 'coup of a special type' in a region full of unique varieties. After many months of political faction-fighting (not very violent, aside from rhetoric, public demonstrations being met by water cannons occasionally, and a purported poisoning), members of his own party and military apparatus forced the 93 year old Robert Mugabe to retire from the position of his country and party's presidency. For thirty-seven of those years he had been at Zimbabwe's helm, while nearly two decades more saw him in the top echelons of its nationalist movements' struggles – many involving coupish moments (Mhanda 2011, Moore 2014c and 2016a, Mpfu 2014, Sithole 1979, Tendi 2013, 2017a, Tshabangu 1979, White 2004). The 2017 – successful – one was a soft coup, a con(stitutional)coup, a *souçon* coup, or, as an American Roman Catholic magazine has it, an 'unexpected but peaceful transition' (Pollit 2017). Officially it was a 'militarily assisted transition' – a moniker out of which even the normally unabashed International Crisis Group could barely wiggle (2017:1,4,11, cf Solidarity Peace Trust 2018:3-5). Relatively few people were killed.² Furthermore, its immediate moments – November 6 to 24, 2017, from Zimbabwe's vice-president's firing and escape to his inauguration as president – were remarkably public. This among other factors such as the porous boundaries between military and civilian actors, with the 'war vets' somewhere in-between, the impact of decades-long opposition party and civil society struggles for democratic space, and the coup-maker's reluctance to draw in the regional institutions – hesitant in any case – contributed to the coup's ambiguous and elastic texture (Moore 2017b).

Aside from its importance as the means by which Zimbabwe's first change of ruler was effected, the coup's relatively peaceful nature and its leaders' efforts to understate it warrant serious reflection while the post-Cold War 'democracy-lite' experiments in Africa wane (Moore 2016b). Thus, this short article will attempt three tasks. First, it will sketch the medium-term context of the 2017 coup, noting previous efforts of actors in the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front party-military-state complex (Shumba 2017) to engage in more than persuasion to encourage their ailing leader to retire. Second, the article will trace the specific events leading to the current president Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa's (aka ED and/or 'the Crocodile' – *Ngwenwa*) ascension to power. Third, more briefly, it will indicate some contours of the prospects

for Zimbabwe's post-coup era – a conjuncture altered significantly with the death of Morgan Tsvangirai, Zimbabwe's first opposition leader to mount a serious challenge to Robert Mugabe and ZANU (PF) (Chan 2018, Moore 2018b), not to mention the election of July 30.

The failed coup(s) – the context for 'Operation Restore Legacy'

This coup – labeled by its protagonists 'Operation Restore Legacy' in order to bring back the 'values' of the liberation war, whatever they may be – emerged out of ZANU (PF)'s internal feuds. These emanated mostly from Robert Mugabe's refusal to retire; he said at least once that he would rule until he was a century old (Moore 2005). However, not a few Zimbabweans have indicated he was ready to leave at the end of 1998. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1990s hit Zimbabwe hard (ESAP – Gibbon 1995, Muzondidya 2009). Perhaps they hurt harder than most African countries, because 'the west' allowed an easy ride on both economic and human rights (even genocidal) issues through the 1980s. This was partly to ease the way towards a non-communist end to South Africa's struggle but also to present a beacon lighting the way to resolving other aspects of the regional super-power's future (Cameron 2018, Doran 2017). The 1990s witnessed scores of strikes, stay-aways, and demonstrations led largely by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (torn at the 1980s end from its umbilical cord to ZANU (PF)), students, and human rights and constitutionalist movements such as the National Constitutional Assembly. By September 1999 the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) condensed these discontents into party form (Raftopoulos 2006, Rich Dorman 2016:115-40).

The ESAP moment also led to liberation war veterans' anger. They cornered Mugabe in August 1997, forcing him to grant huge pensions and to stop dilly-dallying about land reform: he promised to get the land as well as huge pensions for them. Aside from the force involved (fairly reliable anecdotes say the war vets held some prominent ZANU (PF) leaders under house arrest while discussing these issues at State House: perhaps this was coup attempt #1, or #0.5) he was spurred to do so because his allies in society and polity had diminished drastically (Moore 2001). The forex index and resultant inflationary spirals (down and up) following the 1997 abrogation of private property rights followed the legislation to retake the 'colonialists'' land, and continued throughout the next decade until the local currency was worthless, and replaced (mostly) by the US

dollar (Chagonda 2012, Southall 2017). Along with the huge expenditure incurred by Zimbabwe's support for Laurent Kabila's side in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's 'second rebellion', this started Zimbabwe's slide to economic oblivion (Nest 2001, Yamamoto 2016). Reports in 1999 say that senior army officers, angry at Zimbabwe's involvement in the DRC war, planned a coup (thus #2) and were caught. The way the journalists who wrote about it suffered indicates the seriousness with which the régime took both the suspected coup and those who reported on it (Ricchiardi 1999, Louw 2001, Tendi 2013:832). On the cusp of a millennium, this foreshadowed the next two decades' fate.

With the MDC's quick rise to popularity by means of a vigorous array of new and old social movements, ZANU (PF) could count on continuous rule no longer. The DRC-inspired coup suggested as many problems within the ruling party and its repressive component. Thus Mugabe's musings about retiring at a respectable age ceased: he and his advisors figured no one else could lead ZANU (PF) through the valley foretold. His belief that *l'état c'est* (more precisely *l'état et la parti ils sont*) *moi et après moi le deluge*³ was augmented once again. (He might have reconsidered a decade later – but only briefly.) Perhaps he was right. Zimbabwe's many-sided crises would have toppled many another leader.

In early 2000, a constitutional referendum, instigated by the ruling party in response to civil society's movements, including speedy land reform and no end to presidential terms – failed. Following that and in advance of a mid-2000 parliamentary election facing the buoyant MDC, Mugabe let the war-vets and soldiers loose to invade (or re-possess?) the nearly 1,500 white-owned commercial farms promised in 1997. In spite of this forceful populism (including over 30 assassinations of MDC activists amidst approximately 5,000 beatings – EISA 2000) the MDC won 57 of the 120 elected parliamentary seats (30 were reserved for chiefs appointed by the ruling party), although many unofficial counts exceeded that and the MDC challenged 36 results (Global Security 2000). This started the military's leading role in Zimbabwe's electoral process. With the 2002 presidential election also indicating weakened electoral chances, the cracks within ZANU (PF) appeared. Coups and near-coups blossomed throughout the 2000s: this essay will start counting from then.

Most observers did not consider the 2002 presidential election very fair (Coltart 2015: 333-54). Even the South African architect of 'quiet diplomacy' subjected it to review, the critical conclusions of which –

largely based around the fact that 107 mostly MDC people were killed prior to the contest, and urban polling stations were in short supply – were released to public view only after years of court battles (Benjamin 2014, Moore 2010). Some ZANU (PF) military and political leaders, including Emmerson Mnangagwa, felt the resultant legitimacy issues combined with the increasingly evident economic problems, would hurt. Retired colonel Lionel Dyck (whose army days go back into Rhodesian history and whose name often surfaces when talk of ‘the Crocodile’ starts) and Mnangagwa instigated conversations about what would now be called a ‘militarily assisted transition’ with Morgan Tsvangirai lined up as a vice-president. However, it did not go far before Tsvangirai went public, decrying such nefarious manoeuvres (Tendi 2013:834-5). This was the first attempted coup in the 2000s.

A couple of years later Mugabe spotted and condemned the 2004 Tsholotsho Pact, made between Jonathan Moyo⁴ and Emmerson Mnangagwa to keep Joice Mujuru out of the vice-presidential spot vacated by Simon Muzenda’s death (Sibanda 2017). They would have filled it with Mnangagwa. However, Joice Mujuru got the job. Moyo may have nursed a grudge because Mnangagwa never acknowledged their pact, nor apologised to Moyo, who was outside the ZANU (PF) tent for a short time while Mugabe appointed Mnangagwa (who lost his seat to the MDC) speaker in Parliament (Mushava 2017). That was near-coup number two.

Attempted (and failed) coup three was ‘Operation 1940’, after the time on June 15, 2007 when Mugabe’s house was to be stormed (Reporter 2007). Some media report that 400 soldiers were involved (Mushekwe 2013), but early 2018 discussions in Zimbabwe surmise about 700 soldiers were killed for their suspected participation and buried at provincial heroes’ sites all over the country (Moore 2018a). Brigadier general Armstrong Gunda, head of One Brigade and before that of the Presidential Guard, led the attempt: his murderers placed his corpse in his car, which they left on a Marondera rail-line to appear to be smashed. Two other highly placed officers were injected lethally. An alleged organiser for a party called the United Democratic Front, that Jonathan Moyo and Emmerson Mnangagwa were suspected to be organising, was arrested and imprisoned for seven years; George Kawuzani, a member of the MDC was detained, tortured, and slain during the same period (Staff Reporter 2014). The officers were buried as national heroes forthrightly. Two years later their memories were further augmented as they joined Gunda in receipt of

posthumous Grand Officer of the Zimbabwe Order of Merit Medals (Reporter 2007). Some of the people involved in Operation 1940 resurfaced in the successful 2017 effort.

Coup four was when the Joint Operations Command took over the run-off presidential election in mid-2008. Tsvangirai had gained just over 47 per cent of the first run, to Mugabe's approximately 43, at the end of March – but those figures, released by a consortium of election NGOs before anyone else could, and subjected to doubt by seasoned number crunchers, were false. Other less officially sanctioned reports indicated at least 52 per cent for the MDC leader (Moore 2008). ZANU (PF) and its friends south of the border differed on whether to let the real count stand, to go ahead with the run-off, or to negotiate a government of national unity with the MDC: they chose the second option (Nolen 2008, Moore 2008). Six weeks of 'counting' later confirmed the NGOs' guess and the run-off ran. Some say that military had made its decision: it could not let Mugabe resign and thus lose its access to the resources allowed by the ruling party in power, but insiders say Mugabe made the decision (~~Blair 2008~~). Nine years later, reports from those witnessing the successful coup process portray Mugabe in tears, blaming the generals for the mess they created in 2008 when they refused to let him resign. As the run-off ensued, the generals' charges killed approximately 200 MDC activists and supporters, beat and tortured approximately 5,000 more, and threw around 36,000 out of their homes and neighbourhoods (Human Rights Watch 2011:3, Moore 2018c). Perhaps it was then that Mugabe realised his *modus vivendi* would be *l'état et la parti ils sont les soldats et moi* hitherto: if there are such things as autumn rains in Zimbabwe, the storms were certainly approaching a downpour (Mandaza 2016, Sachikonye 2017). It was also then, say many Zimbabwean pundits, that Mnangagwa and armed forces head Constantine Chiwenga shook their hands on a deal: when the real thing happens, they purportedly agreed, Mnangagwa would take the presidency for one term only, to be followed by the man who had been referring to himself as #1 for many years (Moore 2018a). A decade on, these prospects reappeared (Gagare 2018).

The subsequent government of national unity (about which much has been written: eg *Bulletin of Concerned Africa Scholars* 2008, Raftopoulos 2013, Aeby 2015) postponed ZANU (PF)'s reckoning. The ruling party had to keep the MDC busy learning the ropes of governing amidst Zimbabwe's fusion of ruling party and state and to acquire the taste for

perquisites befitting any people's servant. ZANU (PF) worked assiduously to win the next contest while the MDC stumbled along. The ruling party/military cabal toiled even harder to keep funds from finance minister and MDC MP Tendai Biti, by siphoning diamond revenues through his counterpart Obert Mpofu in the mining portfolio (Burgis 2015, Saunders and Nyamunda 2016). But if Mugabe had realised he was now at the beck and call of the securocrats, three questions remain about his thinking (and those of some scholars of Zimbabwean politics) as the next decade unfolded. First, why did his eternal divide-and-rule tactics move him away from the faction that was most obviously militaristic and towards a more 'political' one (cf Tendi 2013, 2016)? No more did Mugabe's refrain 'politics rule the gun' bear any relation to reality (Ranger 1980:83). Second, how did the military wing of the ZANU (PF) amalgam of networks (Kriger 2012) keep Mugabe on track – and what happened when he went off? Third: why did some academics who would have known better had they performed any research think that a régime that was becoming ever more a security state had 'considerable popularity' (Mamdani 2008) – but that question will remain unanswered aside from some contemporary interventions from across the spectrum of 'progressive' Africa scholars (*Bulletin of Concerned African Scholars* 2009).

The successful coup⁵

ZANU (PF)'s internal divisions were most evident in the early years of the millennium's second decade. In August 2011 Solomon Mujuru, Zimbabwe's first but then retired armed forces head and spouse of the current Vice-President Joice, burned to death in his farmhouse (Kwaramba 2015). Well known for his many politically related business enterprises and disputes with the then armed forces' commander Constantine Chiwenga (who in mid-2016 changed his first name to Constantino and added Guveya Dominic Nyikadzino to the collection), he had been trying to assist Mugabe to a restful old age since at least 2007. In advance of the 2008 elections Solomon Mujuru wavered in and out of efforts to start a new party led by economic technocrat and businessman Simba Makoni. The inquiry into Mujuru's death ruled it accidental, but, unsurprisingly, that conclusion has been subject to much dispute. This was likely a hard blow to the ZANU (PF) faction named after the pesticide Gamatox. (The name emerged because Didymus Mutasa, much later one of Joice Mujuru's allies, said he would use it to eliminate the youthful 'weevils', purportedly

associated with Emmerson Mnangagwa, attempting to take some of his farms, which in turn he had taken from white commercial farmers – Nyambi 2016).⁶

This simmering tension erupted openly midway through 2014, around the time when Mugabe's much younger spouse Grace (52 years young) gained her controversial Sociology doctorate from the University of Zimbabwe (Helliker 2018). Dr *Amai* (mother) Grace Mugabe became a very public personage and challenged the vice-president Joice Mujuru on many fronts as the party's December congress approached. This was seemingly in aid of minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Emmerson Mnangagwa's campaign for the country's second position. One would think such a promotion would be a logical progression for a man who had been keeping guard by Mugabe's side since the middle of the liberation war. The many loyalty badges accrued since then included his co-ordination of the security transition at the dawn of majority rule in the 1980s, co-operating well with the Rhodesians and British. Immediately thereafter he was entrusted to manage the massacre of thousands of Matabeleland and Midlands people during *Gukurahundi*. (Grundy 2003, Onslow 2008, Moore 2014a, Doran 2017, Cameron 2018). But the politics of divide and rule, honed by Robert Mugabe so finely that they could only end with him, stood in the way of even that minimal level of rationality. It would take more than getting Joice Mujuru side-lined to pave the way for 'the Crocodile'; Grace Mugabe was one of the obstacles.

Mugabe's relationship with 'Gucci Grace' is inextricably entwined with the former president's proclivity to disrupt and then balance the forces about which he was so paranoid. The rather patriarchal media – global *and* Zimbabwean – tended to place all blame and agency on her. The nexus is not so sharp, however, in spite of the facile appeal of focusing on a *femme fatale* (cf Raftopoulos 2017). Peter Godwin's fascination with her moves toward the throne, for example (2017), neglected G-40's role in Mugabe's downfall. Even a combination of a post-modern and feminist analysis, blogged to popular politically-correct acclaim, placed a disproportionate weight on her shoulders and the degree of cleverness on top of them. Uncertain as it was about whether to celebrate her power, worry about her manipulation of cultural stereotypes versus them trapping her, or note the 'castration anxiety' of the men around her, this analytical mode rests its case on the certainty that 'there must always be a harlot who can be brought to heel' (Mudiwa 2017). If this is the case, one wonders what the otherwise

male-dominated G-40 would have done with her had they succeeded in their plans. Given that she had her husband's ears in the last years, however, it is perhaps possible to follow the trail to the end of his road via her path.

Following her taking over the ruling party's women's league, Grace Mugabe launched her full-frontal attack against the comparatively diminutive vice-president Joice Mujuru (who had a Phd much more likely to be real than her competitor's). During the campaign up to the December 2014 ZANU (PF) congress at which Mujuru was deposed and Mnangagwa appointed VP, Mugabe mused that if her husband died Mujuru would 'drag me in the streets, with people laughing while my flesh sticks on the tarmac' (Thornycroft 2014). She feared Gaddafi's fate, but it did not befall her: Mujuru, deposed, went to form her own party with her motley political kin. By the end of 2015, the formations that went into full battle at the end of 2017 took shape: accusations from Grace Mugabe's quarters claimed Emmerson Mnangagwa and Constantine Chiwenga were already planning to dump her husband: the bombing of the Mugabe's dairy farm seemed to be the first foray in that plan (Tinh 2016). Mugabe the younger was seen as the *primus inter pares* of 'Generation-40' (or G-40), more likely directed by cabinet ministers Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere (Youth Village 2015), Ignatius Chombo, Patrick Zhuwao (also one of Mugabe's nephews) and, more loosely given his Gamatox origins, Police commissioner-general Augustine Chihuri. Happyton Bonyongwe, the director of the Central Intelligence Organisation since 2002, was also involved. The Crocodile's faction – no longer the 'weevils' – bore the 'Lacoste' label (borrowed from the French sports clothes company famous for the polo shirts with the green reptile's label, because its founder was nicknamed 'the Crocodile' for his tennis prowess). Its tenor was militaristic in contrast to the seemingly more ideological seeming G-40, with its indigenisation rhetoric high on the Mugabesque scale. By February 2016, the war veterans' element within Lacoste – more unruly than uniformed soldiers – were demonstrating against G-40, meeting flows from water cannons for their efforts (Gagare and Mlambo 2016). Given Mugabe Sr's constant wavering, politicians and pundits were hard put to tell which of the contending factions was ahead, and what it would take to make the veteran vacillator place an imprimatur on a pretender. He found it nearly impossible.

The stress was getting to everyone, as indicated by Dr *Amai's* August

2017 use of an extension cord to whip a young South African model found with her son (Burke 2017). Perhaps it hastened the process of régime change. Also in August, the Crocodile flew from a ZANU (PF) rally to a South African hospital very ill: he was probably poisoned and he certainly believes so (Mugabe 2017). The increasingly power-hungry heiress paced Youth Interface rallies (an indication of the importance G-40 placed on generational issues: ZANU (PF) youth militia would by press-gang schoolchildren to them), insulting Lacoste members. At a church gathering she said that the snake's head (Mnangagwa's) should be hit and removed (Mathope 2017).

Meanwhile, Jonathan Moyo showed the Politburo long videos about Mnangagwa's indiscretions, later distributed to independent media (YouTube 2017a). Mnangagwa could only respond with oft-repeated allegations that Moyo was a CIA agent (2017). On October 10 the cabinet and civilian intelligence services were turned into G-40 redoubts, with the Central Intelligence Organisation's director replacing Mnangagwa as justice minister (Associated Press 2017). Jonathan Moyo, who, it was rumoured, controlled the CIO as well as being higher education minister, would have had more power than before (Moore 2018a). A few days later Robert Mugabe warned armed forces commander Chiwenga that he should desist from anti-Grace moves or he would be killed, but Chiwenga ignored his commander-in-chief (Dzirutwe et al 2018). When, on the fourth of November, Lacoste members of a Bulawayo crowd booed and heckled Grace Mugabe's rude behaviour, the nonagenarian president himself suggested Mnangagwa be fired, saying to the assembly:

We are denigrated and insulted in the name of Mnangagwa. Did I make a mistake in appointing him as my deputy? ... You know nothing ... If I made a mistake by appointing Mnangagwa... tell me. I will drop him as early as tomorrow. We are not afraid of anyone. We can decide even here ... If it has come to this, it is time we make a final decision. (Agence France-Presse 2017b)

It was the last straw for Mugabe. Perhaps it was one too many, though: his response turned out to be inadequate. After sending Chiwenga to China and Chief of Staff (General Staff) major-general Trust Mugoba (in charge of military operations) to a long-delayed appointment as the head of the African Union standby force, Mugabe fired Mnangagwa on November 6 (Mpfu and Mambo 2017), and went to work preparing all the party branches for a congress walkover. But the Crocodile was president by the 24th.

How did the G-40 think they could get away with sending off a man so close to the military, who also had *Gukurahundi*, winter-2008, and much more under his belt? The police forces were on G-40's side, but could hardly be a reliable partner in a contest with a very good military force. Maybe the presidential guard and military police were on their side, and the police support unit was well-armed. G-40 might have figured the army younger soldiers would go with them. Jonathan Moyo's purported control of the CIO did not help. Social media (probably false) pointed to a plan involving Israeli soldiers and \$15 million. Many Zimbabweans thought that the volatile former secretary had gained too much influence over her doddering husband and he should not have taken the bait to fire Mnangagwa. Yet it is clear G-40 had a precise date in mind. Things had to move quickly if ZANU (PF)'s extraordinary congress (a year earlier than usual: Mugabe was *very* old after all) was going to be theirs for the taking and their candidate would be poised for the mid-2018 elections. Perhaps, too, the G-40 thought Mnangagwa's long relationship with the UK would have tainted him, as did an Oxford-based political scientist whose media intervention opined, rather too mockingly for their liking, that the British had backed a loser (Tendi 2017b).⁷

G-40 planned to create three vice-presidencies at the December meeting (Makura 2017). The bumbling Phelekezela Mphoko (formerly ZAPU, keeping in mind the promises of the forced unity with ZAPU in 1987, which included a second vice-presidency to the swallowed party) would have been pushed to third place. Dr Grace was intended to take the second spot. The quiet medical doctor Sydney Sekeramayi, then defense minister, would have been first in line and so next up for Zimbabwe's presidential palace. One presumes the next stage of factional struggles would have followed: perhaps the men in G-40 planned to rid the country of the unpredictable Grace when her husband left the mortal coil (Mudiwa 2017).

None of this was to pass.

The first leg of Mnangagwa's journey was a trip to South Africa via Mozambique, where he consulted with presidents past and present (Mutsaka 2018). He warned the 'minnows ... who plunder public funds and are used by foreign countries to destabilise the Party' and are 'brazenly protected in public by the First Lady thereby making a mockery of our public institutions' that he would be back soon (*News24* 2017). War vets leader (and until 2016 the minister looking after them) and former ambassador

to China Chris Mutsvangwa followed him. He apparently met with members of the exiled white ‘Rhodesian’ community (recall Lionel Dyck’s involvement in the 2003 effort). Mutsvangwa had prepared his colleagues – including the Zimbabwean People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA – the armed wing of ZAPU) veterans for such an eventuality. In his absence the former ZIPRA commander Ben Ncube – who had been involved in the 2007 effort, when he was the armed forces’ spokesman – played a key role in mobilising ‘civil society’ (Mpofu, M 2017). Meanwhile the former head of ZAPU intelligence and current ZAPU leader Dumiso Dabengwa was courted (unsuccessfully) for the vice-president’s position (indeed the overtures started in March: this coup had been in the works for quite some time – Moore 2018a). The eventual coup-master’s presence in China prompted the British press to guess China was helping plan the events (Phillips 2017), in turn provoking suspicion that the British were creating a diversion (Moore 2018a).

The Crocodile and Chiwenga rallied the troops in a week’s time. The police’s efforts to arrest Chiwenga on his return from China failed spectacularly: army troops in civilian airport uniforms surrounded the aircraft and stopped the police in their tracks. More troops immobilised the police force’s special support unit – perhaps eight police officers were killed (Moore 2018a). It was not long until the Italianised general with an Ethics Phd from the University of KwaZulu-Natal took to YouTube (not the state-run ZBC-TV) to deliver a retirement ultimatum to the old President. On November 13 Chiwenga read from a speech said to be prepared by Trust Mugoba, either before or after his Ethiopia posting (Moore 2018a).

This is an intra-party affair, Chiwenga said to the many security forces’ leaders (except police commissioner Chihuri) and the cyber-audience. However, given ZANU (PF)’s intimate ties with the state, this was a big deal (YouTube 2017b):

It is with humility and a heavy heart that we come before you to pronounce the indisputable reality that there is instability in ZANU (PF) and as a result anxiety in the country at large. ... It is pertinent to restate that the Zimbabwean defense forces remain the major stockholder [sic] in respect to the gains of the liberation struggle [and]... it is common cause that any instability within the party naturally impacts on their [the people] social, political and economic lives. ... We are obliged to take protective measures.

Chiwenga told the president (if he was watching) and the people that ‘counter-revolutionary infiltrators’ and purgeists had surrounded Robert Mugabe. If the president and the party would not remove them, the soldiers would – and ‘amicably’, keeping it all in the ZANU (PF)’s ‘closet’ (sic: one dare not speculate on the male bonding inherent in such occasions) – just as they had during many similar moments in the liberation war.

Recalcitrant to the end, the next day Robert Gabriel Mugabe and his party apparatchiks accused Chiwenga of treason (BBC 2017). Thus Operation Restore Legacy began in earnest that night. Armed personnel carriers rolled onto the streets. The acting CIO director scooted to Mugabe’s house but was stopped and beaten by army officers. The royalist couple were arrested under the palatial Blue Roof (Dzirutwe et al 2018). Soldiers rounded up various G-40 cabinet ministers – shooting an Israeli security guard and reportedly finding \$15 million at the finance minister’s house, but failing to catch Jonathan Moyo and Saviour Kasukuwere. It is said they escaped to the Blue Roof (Mpfu, B 2017, Thompson 2017).⁸ The armed forces announced their actions via the recently overtaken state television broadcaster. Major General Sibusiso Moyo – respected veteran of many UN missions around the continent and soon to take over the foreign affairs portfolio – denied that the operation (soon to be shed of its name) was a coup. It was just a quick attempt to target ‘criminals around [Mugabe] who are committing crimes’, and to keep him safe (Mashavave 2017).

Many of Mugabe’s colleagues and friends (if that word can be used: Mugabe did not have friends) visited the Blue Roof over next few days. They included long-time confidante Father Fidelis Mukonori, information secretary George Charamba (the recipient of Grace Mugabe’s public barbs at a rally whilst her husband slept on the podium), Gideon Gono, former governor of the reserve bank, and Zambia’s guitar-playing past president. They all tried but failed to persuade Mugabe to give up the ghostly apparitions of power – until the last moment, when it was probably something else (Dzirutwe et al 2018, Munusamy 2017, Muzulu 2017).

By the 18th, a Saturday, the war-vets gathered thousands to the streets to cheer the coup-makers and jeer Mugabe out of power: the scenes were reminiscent of American anti-war rallies in the 1960s, excepting the happy soldiers – with many whites, too (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2017). Professionally printed posters exclaimed ‘Goodbye Lady Gaga’, ‘Leadership is not sexually transmitted’, ‘Mugabe NOTE that:

Zimbabwe can Never Never Never be your Colony’, and ‘I want my son to be born into a free Zimbabwe’ (held by a pregnant white woman beside a black man). Less perfectly printed ones announced ‘I am a history maker’ and ‘18 November New Independence Day’ (ENCA 2017). The police were conspicuous by their relative absence. Since the coup started, their services had effectively stopped, thus relieving all motorists from the constant fear of bribe-gathering roadblocks (a good proportion of the proceeds having gone directly to the commissioner and then on to Grace Mugabe), although they took some vengeance on targeted individuals on the side streets (Moore 2018a).

However, the Saturday demonstrations – and some at the University of Zimbabwe campus on the following Monday – indicated tensions between ‘the people’ and their guardians. The war vets had hoped to march directly into State House demanding Mugabe’s resignation but the soldiers stopped them (Moore 2018a). Thousands of students on campus marched, demanding the delay of examinations and that the university rescind Grace Mugabe’s PhD: along with that would come the Vice Chancellor’s arrest. The coup-makers were quick to respond: go back to your studies, they ordered – ‘REMEMBER THAT ONE DAY OF EDUCATION LOST IS DIFFICULT TO RECOVER’ – and by the way, Operation Restore Order was finished (York 2017). Also on Monday Mutsvangwa announced that the war vets would hold a sit-in until Mugabe saw the light (Kamhungira 2017) – but time would tell that this would not be necessary.

While the military and ‘popular’ events were unfolding, Mnangagwa’s comrades were turning the party’s memberships around from their recent G-40 shuffling: by Sunday evening, the party had voted Mugabe out. Yet in what might be the world’s most bizarre political press conferences ever, to the assembled armed force commander’s shock and horror Mugabe refused to accept his party’s (probably unconstitutional) verdict. After mumbling through his speech – live, after some argument over the generals’ preference for a pre-recorded version (Moore 2018a) – he acknowledged that ZANU (PF)’s handling of its disunity left something to be desired (YouTube 2017c).

Open public spurts [sic] between high ranking officials in party and government exacerbated by multiple conflicting messages from both the party and government made the criticisms [of lack of unity] leveled against us inescapable The way forward cannot be based on swapping by cliques that ride roughshod over party rules and procedures.

Perhaps with his young spouse in mind, he continued with a plea for the party to come to terms with generational transitions. The party must go back to the guiding principles ... of traditions ... served by successive generations who have shared ideals and values which must continue to reign supreme in our nation. ... [ZANU (PF) needed a] new ethos ... nourished by an abiding sense of camaraderie [to override the recent] era of victimization and arbitrary decisions. Our inter-generation conflict must be resolved through a harmonised melding of old established players as they embrace and welcome new ones through a well-defined sense of hierarchy and succession.

Minutes later, after dropping some of the papers he or a ghostwriter had prepared, he told viewers and soldiers that he would see them at the December conference and apologised for 'a very long speech'. However, this feint would prove to be Mugabe's last. The coup-makers had other plans up their sleeves – and their last gambit would prove the prominence of parliament.

While the generals were utilising their force of arms as quickly and quietly as possible and the war vets were moving the masses, the parliamentarians were planning Mugabe's impeachment. The drivers for Plan C were Douglas Mwonzora (MDC) and Paul Mangwana (ZANU (PF)), the two co-chairs of the Constitution Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) that had held hundreds of public meetings leading to the 2013 constitution (Nielson 2014). There was never a formal pact: the MDC would co-operate if Mnangagwa signed an agreement that included guarantees of internationally observed free and fair elections in mid-2018. But Mangwana said that his principals would not agree to such an infringement of sovereignty. In any case, Mnangagwa himself – still south of the border – had not signed (Moore 2018a). Plans were in motion nonetheless, but if the impeachment process had gone on, Mugabe might have taken many legal options to slow it down (some MDC MPs relished the thought of his total exposure – Moore 2018a). Mnangagwa told the world that he would return to Zimbabwe when it was safe for him, but in the meantime the people had spoken and that was equivalent to the voice of God (Bornman 2017).⁹

In any event, Mugabe rolled over before the signature was set or the parliamentary impeachment procedures started. On Monday morning, no one came to the cabinet meeting he called (Murwira 2017). Mugabe resigned. The Crocodile swam home, praising his 'father' all the time. Rory Stewart, the then British minister responsible for Africa, rushed to

Zimbabwe excitedly to discuss ‘the need for an all-inclusive political process and elections which meet Zimbabwean and International standards’ in this country that had once been ‘one of the wealthiest ... in Africa ... [and] where there could be an opportunity for progress’ (Gov.UK 2017). At his neatly prepared inaugural on the 24th President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa promised to revive the economy in a Paul Kagame-Deng Xiaoping sort of way, if everyone would work hard. The opposition parties’ members (and the British, seemingly – Brock and Cropley 2017, Moore 2018a) who had been drooling over the chance of a Government of National Union similar to that of 2009-2013 were left with mouths agape when they heard that ZANU (PF) would go into elections as soon as possible.

Other actors, ranging from the ZANU (PF) approved Chief Justice (Laiton 2017) to a SADC and AU only too happy to accept a soft coup if it rid them of the Mugabe thorn, wiped their hands (Solidarity Peace Trust 2018: 9). It would have been simply too inconvenient for SADC to admit this had been a coup: if labelled a coup, something would have had to be done about it, and there was neither the stomach nor capacity for any of that. Besides, an intervention from inside the ZANU (PF) had accomplished something a semblance of electoral processes could not. And thanks to a couple of decades of social movement and MDC struggles for democracy – from the media to demonstrations to parliament – the coup-makers faced constraints that ended up acting in their favour (Moore 2017b). Furthermore, the sheer frustration with Mugabe shared by the vast majority of Zimbabweans would have legitimised his removal by just about any means possible. Thus the way was clear for a new cabinet packed with the sorts of people one would expect after a coup: soldiers – even before they were retired, although that little error was fixed a week or so later. Mnangagwa, one-time justice minister and claiming to be a lawyer, perhaps in a rush to pacify the already restive generals, had not read the constitution’s clauses regarding non-parliamentarian appointments (Africa News Agency 2017, Deutsche Welle 2017). As well, he had to assure Chiwenga that his vice-presidency did not mean loss of oversight over the armed forces: so, unconstitutionally but unchanged, Chiwenga is both a VP and Minister of Defense (Coltart 2017). Intelligence and Politburo changes also altered the balance towards the military.¹⁰

By the end of 2017 and 2018’s start, Zimbabwe’s soft coup left its people with as many questions about the future as the past.

Post-coup prospects – toward a future foretold?

Neither the Bretton Woods Institutions, Beijing Consensus advocates, nor social justice activists are likely to be satisfied by the economic activities of a party-state complex networked into a military-business conglomerate structured by skimming off mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and at home (Solidarity Peace Trust 2018:9, Shumba 2017, Moore 2017d). The régime's current rhetoric slips between a born-again market fundamentalism, compensation to white farmers who had their farms taken in the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, and some sort of eternally subsidised Paul Kagame-Deng Xiaoping authoritarian productivism along the lines of the maize-increasing but financially suspect 'Command Agriculture' (Scoones 2017, Reuters 2017). However, aside from former Rhodesians wanting to return to their land and businesses under any government other than the nearly-late Mugabe's, much of the foreign thumbs up will be determined by the way in which the mid-2018 elections go.¹¹ Therefore, this article's conclusion will ignore the economic mess and ideas for its betterment: meanwhile its non-recovery stretches people's patience with the new régime. It will instead indicate three political issues to watch over the next few months, as the mid-2018 election looms and then fades.

First: as indicated above, many observers recall Mnangagwa and Chiwenga's 2008 'handshake' when their excessive brutality saved ZANU (PF) from its helmsman's loss of will. It is said that when strategising the next coup, they agreed that Mnangagwa would take the presidency for the first term (if he is now 75 – and there are doubts about his age – he will be 80 in 2023 while Chiwenga will be a sprightly 66), and then hand over to Chiwenga (Moore 2018a). If successful in the mid-2018 elections (free and fair or not),¹² will Mnangagwa hand over to Chiwenga in 2023? What other civilians in the party are emerging to challenge the securocrats? If Chiwenga gets impatient or worried, will there be another soft coup (Gagare 2018)? Will Mnangagwa (perhaps weakened by a revived G-40, now named the New Patriotic Front [Magaisa 2018], with a Zezuru base opposed to Mnangagwa's purported Karanga one) forge a pre-, mid-, or post-election pact with the leader of the next strongest party (there are now 76 or 77 of them: the next largest contender would be the MDC faction led by Nelson Chamisa)? Would such a 'democratic' civilian-made deal weaken the military? Will Chiwenga and his cohorts allow a restarting of the democratic project to endanger the deepening of the

securocrats' state? Added to the tensions between the soldiers and the civilian securocrats are those between the un-stripped war veterans and their commissioned peers: the well-decorated and degreed officers appreciate the veterans' unruly behaviour on sufferance only. Their public face and once minister with their remit, veteran of the late-1970s' struggles in the liberation war camps Chris Mutsvangwa, has slipped down the totem pole to be a 'special presidential advisor' and party secretary for science and technology, apparently due to pressure from the uniformed military (Moore 2018a). Are the war-vets 'kingmakers' for politicians or soldiers?

Second: preliminary meetings regarding reconciliation about *Gukurahundi* have not been promising. This observer witnessed what could be called the Lacoste Lumpenintelligentsia disrupting one of the first civil society meetings on this issue (SAPES Trust, 2018), and reports from the parliamentary commission's initial foray indicate that unless great care is taken these could be the wounds that, when re-opened, will sever the country.

Finally, with the death of the Movement for Democratic Change's leader Morgan Tsvangirai, one realises that long before he passed the working class and other social movement organisations that gave substance to the party had all but dissolved. One wonders what social forces can orient the party away from the solipsism of Zimbabwe's ruling networks and to at least a solid constitutionalism. Ninety per cent of Zimbabwe's urban economy is informal. Its organisers seem to be less representative of the traders and workers in it than of the 'NGO class'. If the 'new' peasants emerging from the rural transformations enabled by Mugabe's 1997 Faustian pact with the 'war vets' are the protagonists of a new mode of agrarian accumulation, it will take many decades before a form of politics beyond patron-client relations and religious modalities will emerge (Zamchiya 2011, 2013). In the shorter term, the results of the mid-2018 election will present a slight indication of whether or not the post-coup ZANU (PF) portends democratic or authoritarian inclinations.

For the next decades in Zimbabwe, politics will veer and vacillate among variations of special types and textures of coups and democracy.

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Notes

1. As Hamill (2017) put it, ‘if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck then the chances are it’s a duck’. There are many breeds of duck, ranging from American to Egyptian (the latter being a goose, but apparently they, and swans too, are ducks). This essay will not delve deeply into academic distinctions, although its author will do so when he later pursues the topic at length.
2. News reports of various repute suggested at the time one to three Israeli security guards were killed when the military attacked the finance minister’s house – and also, apparently, found US\$10 to 15 million. Field-work discussions suggested over 20 deaths at most, mostly when the military took out the police force’s well-armed special unit during the attempted arrest of armed forces head Constantino Chiwenga on his return from China (wa Afrika and Ndlovu 2017; Staff Writers 2017); this number has not been mooted in the media however. It could be noted that in KwaZulu-Natal at least 40 political deaths were recorded in the months preceding the ‘democratic’ leadership transition in South Africa’s ruling party, the African National Congress (Agence France Presse 2017a).
3. A rough translation, with historical license, is: ‘I am the party-state and after me the storms will come’.
4. Moyo was once a liberal professor of Political Science at the University of Zimbabwe. He moved to the Ford Foundation in Kenya where his hand found its way to the pot. His next post was as a well-funded researcher with Wits University. He did not end his contract before Mugabe called him back to Zimbabwe to take on the task of managing communications for the 1999 constitutional campaign, and later ZANU (PF)’s 2000 election campaign. After that he became the party’s main propagandist (Thornycroft 2000, Moore 2007: 201, 203-4; Mukure 2017) – and as this paper will continue, the G40’s *éminence grise*.
5. This section bears some resemblance to previously developed media interventions and a presentation to a civil society conference (Moore 2107a, b, c, d, and e).
6. Mutasa, 83 years old, is one of the earlier nationalists emerging out of Christian Socialist Guy Clutton-Brock’s (who, like many idealists of that era, must be turning in his grave) Cold Comfort Farm. Mutasa is notorious for saying in the

midst of a famine that Zimbabwe only needed six million (ZANU (PF)) people, killing contenders within his own party in addition to meting such punishment to MDC members, and visiting a spirit medium in hopes of tapping into her promised oil well (Jakes 2010, Nehanda Radio 2010).

7. Dr Blessing-Miles Tendi's department head received a letter from the British embassy in Harare protesting his public criticisms of UK policy *vis a vis* Zimbabwe, and denying that they supported or were allied with Mnangagwa (Tendi 2018). Mugabe spewed venom toward the UK ever since Tony Blair's regime spurned Zimbabwe's post-1997 land reform plans: suspicions that Blair was involved in the 2007 coup surely exacerbated the bad feelings. However, Julia Gallagher's (2017) intriguing analysis of Zimbabweans' feelings about British and other 'others' indicates an ambivalence about the colonial (and UDI) interlude that might surprise Mugabe and indeed decolonial thinkers all over.
8. At the time of this article's final draft in May 2018 Moyo was resident in places unknown but with a large presence on social media and television. Kasukuwere sent a letter to his enemies asking to return to the party (Staff Reporter 2018).
9. Mnangagwa also said that 'parliament is the ultimate expression of the will of the people outside an election': it follows that parliamentarians must be even closer to God. This equation ignores soldiers.
10. Lieutenant-general Engelbert Rugeje – who in September 2017 joined Chiwenga as a University of KwaZulu-Natal Phd graduate – was appointed ZANU (PF)'s political commissar. He was also a key player in the 2007 coup attempt.
11. All indications were that the British would have been happy to see Mnangagwa engineer a government of national unity soon after the coup (the chances of a free and fair election that the MDC might win being slim, anyway) and there were hints that some sort of Anglo-Chinese aid package could have accompanied it. As indicated above, there were certainly plenty of feelers out for such an arrangement inside Zimbabwe, too. None of has happened.
12. The election occurred just as this was going to press. For a preview see Moore (2018d).

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