

**COLONIAL STRUCTURES & POST-INDEPENDENCE AUTHORITARIANISM IN
ZIMBABWE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is meant to examine how Zimbabwe became an authoritarian nation. A country is not predestined toward democracy or dictatorship. Rather, there are multiple complexities throughout a country's history that need to be addressed in order to assess what led to the nation's current state of affairs.

ZANU-PF is currently the ruling party of Zimbabwe and it has been since the country's independence in 1980. Although the country is constitutionally democratic, Robert Mugabe ruled the country for nearly thirty years, only to be ousted in a military coup. Mugabe oversaw a number of questionable policy moves and guided the country through constitutional reform wherein he was able to secure more power. Fellow party member and former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa succeeded Mugabe. The political future of the country still remains unclear.

INTRODUCTION

The image of the modern nation of Zimbabwe contains brutal depictions of the consequences of authoritarianism. To understand how authoritarianism did not cease with the end of the formal colonial era, one must examine the history of the Zimbabwean nation. Cecil Rhodes — whom the nation was named after in its colonial period — colonized the land and, like many Europeans, was engaged in a quest that resulted in economic exploitation. Rhodes once stated,

“I contend that we [the British] are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence, look again at the extra employment a new country added to our dominions gives.”¹

This quote reaffirms the understanding that Southern Rhodesia was established with a clear racial hierarchy. The British — the so-called bearers of civilization — were the governors, and the indigenous African peoples — the majority — were the subjects. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the nuances of the Zimbabwean colonial experience in determining the causes of an authoritarian regime in its post-independence era.

It is impossible to determine the motive of every colonizer that settled in any of the colonies. However, the views of colonial founders and later political figures reflect sentiments that undoubtedly existed throughout the society. Rhodes stated,

“Africa is still lying ready for us it is our duty to take it. It is our duty to seize every opportunity of acquiring more territory and we should keep this one idea steadily before our eyes that more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race more of the best the most human, most honourable race the world possesses.”²

¹ Cecil Rhodes, "Confession of Faith," *European Imperialism*

² *Ibid*

Rhodes, among others, was concerned with economic advancement. He sought to create a society in which a class structure based on racial hierarchy existed. Like in other cases throughout history, such a hierarchy would allow for exploitation of this second class of people.

Rhodes allied himself with German diamond-buyer Alfred Beit who granted him access to Lord Rothschild and therefore the necessary means to fund the economic endeavor of nearly monopolizing the diamond mining industry through the De Beers company.³ Rhodes' economic ambitions were not purely for financial gain, however. He envisioned a vast British Empire that dominated the African continent. He wanted to establish a telegraph and railway system that connected Cairo to Cape Town. He wanted white South Africans to play a role in expanding the Empire throughout the continent. Rhodes believed that the British, allied with the Germans and the Americans, could establish a world dominated by what he believed to be a master race — the Teutonic race.⁴

³ J. D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, 122.

⁴ *Ibid*, 123.

FORMATIVE COLONIAL INTERACTIONS

Before examining the interactions of European settlers and African natives in the colonial state, one must first examine some of their earliest interactions. An important historical question to ask is how these groups first established a relationship. In 1889, the British South Africa Company was granted a charter by the British government to colonize Matabeleland, Mashonaland, and nearby regions that would together make Rhodesia.⁵ This charter essentially gave the Company free reign over the African territory. The British would be free to pursue their mining of, most notably, diamonds.

Cecil Rhodes encountered conflicts with the Boer state with regard to his mining endeavors. This economic reality served as another reason for him to push further north toward Cairo. The acquisition of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi would serve as not only sites for mining expansion, but territory for the Empire — a piece to British Africa. Reports of vast gold deposits in Zimbabwe made that territory particularly appealing for Rhodes.⁶ In addition to expanding his empire of capital, Rhodes would also be able to ensure that it would be the British (and not the Boers) who would dominate southern Africa.

Lobengula, King of the Northern Ndebele, came to power amidst early political interaction with Europeans. Missionaries already stationed themselves in Zimbabwe and served as a channel to European power. Lobengula understood that he could not do much in the face of European military power. He once stated, speaking of the way in which a chameleon stalks a fly before swiftly snatching it with its tongue, “Britain is that chameleon and I am the fly.”⁷ He had to work with a power that was vying mineral wealth. The Portuguese had colonized eastward

⁵ Eshmael Mlambo, *Rhodesia: The Struggle for a Birthright*, 2.

⁶ Omer-Cooper, 131.

⁷ Ibid, 132.

lands and the British and Boers had colonized southern lands. Other African peoples now, too, had access to firearms; so, Lobengula no longer had the advantage of military strength in any capacity.⁸ In 1888, Lobengula agreed to the Rudd Concession that granted the British certain mining rights within his nation. It was conveyed to Lobengula that no more than ten white men would be brought to the country to work in the mines. However, this was clearly not the case. Rhodes and his associates had no intention of limiting the number of white people in the newly chartered land.⁹ Although not ordered by Lobengula to do so, many Ndebele became disillusioned with the exploitation of their land and rebelled in 1893 and again in 1896. Both times the Ndebele were met with defeat — and stronger British hold, including by way of taxes. The Ndebele found themselves subject to what was essentially forced labor — employment in the mines.¹⁰ Though these Africans were not slaves, they were working to satiate Britain's hunger for precious minerals. At some of Rhodes' mining sites, African workers set up camp and were subject to exceptionally poor living standards.



Figure 1: African Workers in a Northern Rhodesian Copper Mine

⁸ Robert Blake, *A History of Rhodesia*, 44-45.

⁹ Blake, 47.

¹⁰ Franklin Parker, "Education of Africans in Southern Rhodesia." *Comparative Education Review*, 28.

Due to the demand for African labor, living conditions became regulated and workers lived in compounds tied to their workplace — essentially living in slave-like conditions.¹¹ It should be noted, too, that the Rudd Concession was not made based on a genuine transfer of authority. Aside from the blatant disregard for Ndebele sovereignty, Lobengula did not have the complete authority to relinquish control of the entirety of Matabeleland. The Shona people were independent of the Ndebele kingdom. Though, Rhodes not wanting to have his treaty called into question, disregarded their status. Individual whites had what appeared to be mostly free reign on these territories.¹² In a letter addressed to Queen Victoria from King Lobengula, he wrote, “It was proved to me that I had signed away the mineral rights of my whole country to Rudd and his friends. I have since had a meeting with my indunas, and they will not recognize the paper as it contains neither my words nor the words of those who got it.” He went on to express his desire for a copy of the text; though, one was never brought to him.¹³ The British acquiesced the territory of Rhodesia, legally speaking, through swift and deceptive means.

Following the Rudd Concession, Europeans formed a monopoly on formal education. The colonial government was interested in producing workers and it offered minimal education to Africans. Missionaries, on the other hand, sought to convert as many Africans as possible and therefore missionaries taught Africans the English language in order to provide religious instruction.¹⁴ The colonists had economics interests, and in anticipation of industrial growth, African education was provided as a means to construct a workforce. African students grew

¹¹ Omer-Cooper, 122.

¹² Ibid, 140.

¹³ Stanlake Samkange, *Origins of Rhodesia*, 115.

¹⁴ Sara Talis O’Brien and Renée Schatteman. *Voices From the Continent: A Curriculum Guide to Southern African Literature*, 35.

resentful and came to view this practice as a structural method of perpetuating European supremacy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Franklin Parker, "Education of Africans in Southern Rhodesia." *Comparative Education Review*, 31.

THE EARLY STATE AND LAND DISTRIBUTION

On the 1st of October in 1923, Southern Rhodesia formed “responsible government” — becoming a colony of the United Kingdom as opposed to being administered by the British South Africa Company. Although the state was nominally free from company control, businessmen had a particularly strong influence on the government. Ian Phimister, professor of international history and a native Rhodesian stated,

“ By 1925, 'the General Manager of the British South Africa Company, the Manager of Wankie Collieries, the Manager of Rhodesia Railways and others from the Chambers of Mines' were all backbenchers on the Government side of the legislative assembly.”
Phimister argued that the government at the time was willing to work with big business so long as they expressed willingness to respect the party’s stance against a union with other British colonies.¹⁶

The founding colonial constitution did nothing to warm already strained relations with the native community. Section 39 accounted for “Native Administration”.¹⁷ Section 43, Part 2 read,

“The Government of the Colony shall retain the mineral rights in the Native Reserves. If the Government should require any such land for the purpose of mineral development or as sites for townships or for railways or other public works, the Governor in Council may upon good and sufficient cause shown, with the approval of the Board of Trustees, order the natives to remove from such land...”¹⁸

The constitution of Southern Rhodesia guaranteed white settlers rights to indigenous land. The colonists secured rights to mining within the colony. And this constitution provided for even greater appropriation if it could be justified, by the government’s own standards, as being for the

¹⁶ Ian Phimister, "Accommodating Imperialism: The Compromise of the Settler State in Southern Rhodesia, 1923-1929." *The Journal of African History*, 280

¹⁷ "Colony of Southern Rhodesia Constitution Letters Patent of 1 September 1923," xlii

¹⁸ *Ibid*, xliv

common good. The issue of inequitable land distribution would become a key issue in Zimbabwean politics — and it remains so until this day.

In order to better grasp this particular subject of land, one should refer to the steps the government later took to expropriate native lands. Land expropriation did not begin with the proper government. Previously, the British South Africa Company built the structures that allowed for inequitable land distribution. Nominally, under Company rule (and under the 1923 constitution), Africans had the same rights as Europeans in purchasing land. Europeans did not like African competition and the Company understood that it would fall into the white public's disfavor if it started selling land to Africans. By 1925, 17,000 acres or 19 farms were sold to Africans, while 31,000,000 acres were sold to Europeans. Many private sellers, like the Company, decided to sell only to Europeans.¹⁹ Europeans' dislike of African competition, coupled, of course, with other prejudices, created an ever-widening socioeconomic gap. As the economy continued to grow, Europeans could participate in the economy as they pleased, but Africans faced a number of barriers.

Premier Coghlan stated that white Europeans had every intention of remaining on the land and in order to prosper, European would carve themselves out an exclusive piece of the territory. According to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, of the country's 96 million acres of land, 49 million was allocated to European settlers, 29 million was allocated to Africans, and the rest was either undesignated or made into some type of natural reserve.²⁰ With the passage of the 1951 Native Land Husbandry Act, the government took the radical step of buying up African reserve land in order to hinder African migration and massive property fragmentation. The

¹⁹ Blake, 200-201.

²⁰ Machingaidze, 558

government intended to purchase the land using funds from taxes levied on Black farmers.²¹

African reception to this move was understandably negative and Black leaders used this as an opportunity to mobilize their base. Zimbabwean academic Victor Machingaidze argued that this blatantly authoritarian act, while meaning to disenfranchise the majority in the name of genuine land reform, served as a catalyst for “institutionalized proletarianization” at the hands of the post-independence Black-majority government.²²

²¹ Victor Machingaidze, “Agrarian Change from Above: The Southern Rhodesia Native Land Husbandry Act and African Response.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 557.

²² *Ibid*, 558

MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY POLITICAL STRUCTURES

In 1954, after the Second World War, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland formed the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, also known as the Central African Federation. Southern Rhodesia had the strongest economy of the three colonies. At the time of federation, Southern Rhodesia had a GDP of £54 per person, Northern Rhodesia — £51, and Nyasaland — £11. Northern Rhodesia's economy was largely dominated by copper mining. Southern Rhodesia had an economy that was fueled by gold, chrome, asbestos, and agriculture. Nyasaland's weak economy can be attributed to the lack of funds poured into the country by Rhodes' companies as it was not a strategic area in his quest to expand the Empire or build a transcontinental railroad.²³

Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland had notably less autonomous governments. Their governors frequently exercised power whereas the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, while technically possessing substantive constitutional power, was subject to a largely self-governing parliament. Consequently, Southern Rhodesia's laws were subject to extremists at the hands of the relatively powerful all-white electorate.²⁴ The federation was truly an attempt to sustain white colonial rule in the three territories. The Labour Government in Great Britain, however, was concerned with the continuing oppression of African peoples. Creech Jones, the colonial secretary and member of the Friends of Africa and the Anti-Slavery Society, was opposed to allowing a federation that was totally run by colonial settlers. Though, relative to apartheid policy at the hands of the Nationalist Party in South Africa, the Central African Federation was a more moderate approach to European supremacy. However, in the 1950 general election, Jones

²³ Blake, 244.

²⁴ Ibid, 244-245.

lost his seat. And though the Labour Party remained in power, the new colonial secretary, James Griffiths, was not concerned with African well-being to the same degree as the previous secretary.²⁵ By November of 1950, the British Government allowed for the consideration of federation. A strong federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, at least, would balance out economic power in an area dominated by the increasingly racialized southern African territories. Southern Rhodesia's racial policies would at least be countered by the more-collaborative Northern Rhodesian and Nyasalandian policies. Politicians in these two nations were more open to the eventual incorporation of Africans into political life.²⁶

In the final agreement within the British government, the three colonies were able to retain their own constitutions. While each colony retained its own relations with Britain and the indigenous population, the federal government assumed responsibility for things such as currency, taxation, White education, trade, and transportation. A governor-general was appointed to the territory, but the government would consist of a unicameral parliament. Of the thirty-five seats, no single territory held a majority and there were three seats reserved for African representation from each territory; though only two representatives from Northern Rhodesia, representing Africans, were actually African themselves. And in spite of Britain's advocating for a special minister to protect African interests, it did not become a part of this new federation.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, 248-249.

²⁶ Ibid, 250.

²⁷ Ibid, 253-254.

RESISTING MAJORITARIAN RULE WITHIN THE FEDERATION

The Central African Federation played a vital role in maintaining European economic dominance in southern Africa. Coal in Southern Rhodesia helped to maintain the mining operation in the Katanga region. After the Belgians pulled out of the Congo, leaving its infrastructure in poor condition, the Central African Federation's railroads helped keep the economy afloat. Even with the withdrawal of foreign European officials from that particular region, the Federation worked to maintain white interests. Maintaining white dominance, of course, was important for colonists in the Federation, especially due to the perceived waning of the British Empire that came with Ghanaian independence.²⁸ The Federation's Prime Minister, Roy Welensky, sought to create an African Treaty Organization — a pact similar to NATO wherein settler states in Africa would receive the backing of the United States and Great Britain to prevent African nationalism — or communism, as the colonists claimed.²⁹ Due to British and American disinterest in such a pact, Welensky sought the partnership of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, going so far as to meet with the Portuguese dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar. Welensky, through secret talks with white settlers in the Katanga region, was open to incorporation that region in the Federation.³⁰ Throughout talks regarding the incorporation of surrounding European colonies, the discussions always focused on the maintaining of a white-controlled "Copperbelt".³¹

The United States, Great Britain, and the United Nations were not supportive of Katanga integration because they did hold that Congo should be able to maintain its own autonomy. As

²⁸ Matthew Hughes, "Fighting for White Rule in Africa: The Central African Federation, Katanga, and the Congo Crisis, 1958-1965." *The International History Review*, 596.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 597.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 598.

³¹ *Ibid*, 600.

for the political situation within the Federation, it was not stable. African nationalists were protesting in Nyasaland and in Northern Rhodesia. Governor Robert Armitage declared a state of emergency in Nyasaland, arresting Hastings Banda (who would become the President of Malawi) in the process. Great Britain, in 1960, called a Lancaster House conference to assess the viability of a Central African Federation; white leaders met with black nationalists such as Kenneth Kaunda (who would become the Zambian President) and Hasting Banda, who was released from prison. To Welensky and other European politicians, it was clear that the power of colonial dominance was on the decline.³² The Federation provided military support to the Katanga secessionist, President Moïse Tshombe, in spite of United Nations action meant to prevent destabilization.³³ Once it became clear that white minority rule was not viable in the larger region, Welensky and the succeeding Southern Rhodesian government declared independence as the nations of Zambia and Malawi gained their independence.³⁴

As the Central African Federation was crumbling, Great Britain insisted that a change of racial policy on the part of Southern Rhodesia could help preserve the union. Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, Winston Field, argued that black-white compromises would harm the nation. Great Britain argued that Southern Rhodesia must adopt a majority-rule policy. Rhodesian politicians envisioned a nation that would be populated by more white settlers through mass immigration.³⁵ In negotiating a new constitution, Southern Rhodesia formulated a two-tiered voting system with an A-roll and a B-roll. Education and finances determined where a person, regardless of race, fell. Though, unsurprisingly, most white voters were on the A-roll and

³² Ibid, 601.

³³ Ibid, 612.

³⁴ Ibid, 615.

³⁵ Patrick O'Meara, *Racial Conflict or Coexistence?*, 13.

most black voters were on the B-roll. Due to the way that the constituencies were parsed out, 50 seats were determined by A-roll voters and only 15 seats were determined by B-roll voters. Originally being open to negotiation with the colonial government, the African nationalist leaders rejected this constitution that reinforced European dominance.³⁶

British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech to the South African parliament acknowledged the unsustainable colonial system.³⁷ This sent chills down the spines of white settlers who worried that their status would be threatened by co-equal Africans. Southern Rhodesia became increasingly divided and this divide is illuminated by the financial disparity that existed between European settlers and indigenous Africans. In 1963, the average African salary was \$315 per year; the average European salary was \$3,300. And only 608,000 of Africans out of 3,700,000 were employed in a paid position.³⁸ With the new constitution of 1961, African nationalists and European supremacists alike were dissatisfied. African nationalists understood that they were being left out of the political process and some decided to be disengaged from the system entirely. Whites feared that giving blacks more rights would lead to racial integration.³⁹

Alarmed by the fact that Prime Minister Winston Field did not take a polarizing approach to relations with the indigenous African community in his negotiations with the British government, the party replaced him with Ian Smith.⁴⁰ Ian Smith's image came to embody the radical imperialist sentiment held by white Rhodesians. He was a war veteran who later came to serve his country in parliament. Smith vowed to reject the democratic principles that the British

³⁶ Ibid, 15.

³⁷ Ibid, 14.

³⁸ Ibid, 16.

³⁹ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁰ Nelson, 44.

urged Southern Rhodesia to adopt. He insisted that, so long as he is in power, no majoritarian rule would come to Southern Rhodesia. In 1964, the Labour government in Great Britain was even more uncompromising with its insistence on majoritarian rule.

In May of 1965, the Rhodesian Front, Smith's party, won all of the A-roll seats in parliament, securing a sound majority within the institution. Though 90% of blacks who could vote decided not to participate in this blatantly racialized system.⁴¹

⁴¹ Ibid, 45.

THE RHODESIAN FRONT & SUSTAINING WHITE MINORITY RULE

With a sound majority within the parliament and the strong backing of the white population, Ian Smith became bolder in his interactions with the British government. He threatened secession if Great Britain did not allow for a minority government. Prime Minister Harold Wilson ruled out the use of military force in the face of colonial rebellion, which empowered Smith. When Wilson came to Salisbury in an attempt to settle the ongoing dispute, Smith was not in a position to make concessions politically. The Rhodesian Front's hardline policy positions pushed his tendency toward independence. On the 11th of November, 1965, the government of Southern Rhodesia passed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

While the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and other cabinet ministers signed the document, the Governor was obligated to serve the British government by virtue of being the Queen's representative. The Governor, Sir Humphrey Gibbs, was ordered by the British government to dismiss the rogue government. The British parliament went on to pass the Southern Rhodesia Act that declared the Smith government's actions illegal.⁴² Although Gibbs formally dismissed the ministers of the Smith government, he ordered that all public services remain in a normal state as if nothing was wrong. He was passive in his order. Smith's government ignored their formal removals and appointed the Rhodesian Front party chairman and Deputy Prime Minister, Clifford Dupont, as the Officer Administering the Government — the executive representing the Queen.⁴³

⁴² Harold Nelson, *Zimbabwe, a Country Study*, 45.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 46.

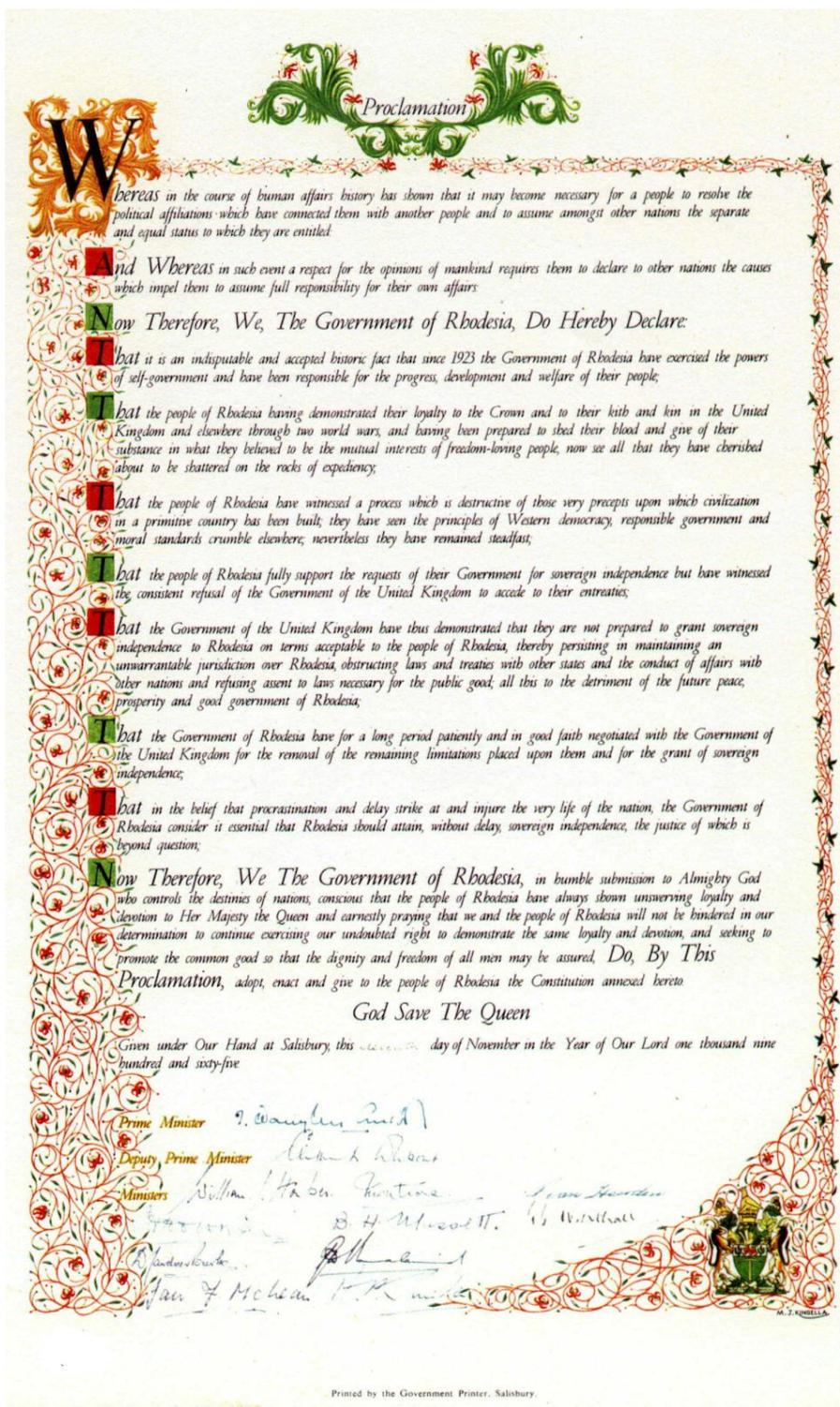


Figure 2: The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965)

Prime Ministers Smith and Wilson met twice post-UDI in order to reconcile the legal issues regarding independence. Wilson appeared to be willing to work with Smith on Britain's demands, but Smith was unwavering in his support for white minority rule. In 1969, Smith's government brought two questions to referendum: one asking whether or not Rhodesia should become a republic and another asking whether or not the country should adopt a republican constitution. Both questions passed with over 81% and 74% support, respectively.⁴⁴ Under this new constitution, the government took an even bolder step toward segregation and codified racism. The Senate would be composed of 10 Europeans, 3 presidential appointees, and 10 Africans (5 for the Ndebele and 5 for the Shona). In the House of Assembly, 50 seats were reserved for Europeans (and mixed-race and Asians who met a certain educational standard), and 16 seats were reserved for Africans. And the process for electing African representatives was complex — some were elected directly and others were elected by traditional leaders. The constitution devised a system by which Africans, when they collectively contribute more to the economy, progressively gain more representation in the legislature.⁴⁵

The new constitution also set up the framework for ethnic homelands within the country. One province would be for Europeans (which was about half of the country), one province would be for the Ndebele, and one province would be for the Shona. Each person would be designated residency in a particular province based on their ethnicity and would only be able to participate in the political processes of their particular province.⁴⁶ In an effort to sustain European dominance, the Rhodesian Front was constructing a system that was headed toward complete apartheid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 48.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 48.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC & LABOR PROBLEM

Figure 3: African Population Growth⁴⁷

In terms of dealing with the African population, European settlers had evolving sentiments throughout history. During the early years of colonization, European entrepreneurs were concerned that there would not be enough Africans to support the growing need for labor. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the waning colonial power had Europeans concerned with their ability to maintain minority rule.⁴⁸ Rumors of sterilization in the pursuit of population control, in part, helped the African nationalist movement. White emigration coupled with a rising black birth rate made “overpopulation” a concern of the Rhodesian Front. Though, this

⁴⁷ Josiah Brownell, *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race*, 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 50.

overpopulation, white settlers thought, was due to their efforts of advancing what they believed to be primitive peoples.⁴⁹ White Rhodesian believed that their benevolence created an overpopulation issue so therefore it was their burden to find a solution to it.⁵⁰ The Family Planning Association of Rhodesia was a nongovernmental organization that sought to reduce the birthrate of the African population. And while it was not an appendage of the state, it did receive subsidies from the Rhodesian Front government.⁵¹

Colonial historian Josiah Brownell stated,

“In matters of education spending, health spending, housing, and employment opportunities, this African growth overcrowded the limited space the white regime had allocated.”⁵²

The white minority government was only interested in sustaining the European population. The indigenous African population served as a convenient source of labor, so long as they could sustain them with as little resources as possible. Despite this growth in population, the percentage of African males participating in wage-based labor decreased from 78% in 1956 to 58% in 1968.⁵³

Phimister and Gwande wrote,

“RF politicians and government bureaucrats intensified state intervention to sustain capital accumulation on a wider scale and to organize the disparate parts of an economy under siege. From 1965, the state focused unprecedented resources on controlling external account balances . . . ensuring labor market stability . . . and subsidizing all manner of white business ventures.”⁵⁴

The Rhodesian Front, in an effort to save the economy in the face of economic sanctions controlled its economy to a large degree. Government intervention in industry is nothing new to

⁴⁹ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 54.

⁵¹ Ibid, 57.

⁵² Ibid, 52.

⁵³ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁴ Ian Phimister and Victor Gwande, “Secondary Industry and Settler Colonialism: Southern Rhodesia Before and After the Unilateral Declaration of Independence.” *African Economic History*, 100.

the nation of Zimbabwe. Its colonial leaders set this precedent before independence. The Rhodesian Front created a state-sponsored capitalist system. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour strategized ways in which the African population could be controlled through labor. African children were discouraged from pursuing clerical jobs and manual labor was encouraged. Smith and his government considered working with South Africa by providing Africans for labor in their mining industry.⁵⁵

In terms of combatting the manufactured overpopulation problem, the government considered measures such as requiring sterilization or contraception for social assistance. The Cabinet considered making a council focused on curbing the African population growth. The legalization of abortion was even floated as a way to reduce the African population. However, none of these plans ever came to fruition. As more Africans moved into urban centers, their birthrates declined. And the growing industry warranted more African involvement in the urban space. The government could not get a handle on the African population because of the complexities of the ever-changing African population.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 65.

AFRICAN NATIONALISTS AND RHODESIAN POLITICS

It should be noted that the white nationalist sentiment in Rhodesia did not come solely from direct British settlers and their children. Rhodesia was also a place in which whites fled their homes post-independence. William Harper, the Minister for Internal Affairs, came to Rhodesia after India gained its independence.⁵⁷ There was a growing polarization between the European settlers and indigenous Africans. Those who could attain executive power would not dare show any openness to multiracial attitudes. Even the slightest reform in the direction opposite of South Africa's apartheid state would be despised by the white voting base.

In July of 1960, Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister Edgar Whitehead had Michael Mawema and Sketchley Samkange — both prominent African nationalists, arrested.⁵⁸ Whitehead, being slightly less conservative than his opponents in the Rhodesian Front, still took an authoritarian approach in order to suppress African nationalism. An authoritarian approach was key in securing the white vote. In the Bulawayo riots, 11 Africans lost their lives in confronting Rhodesian authorities.⁵⁹ Europeans were displeased with any concessions to Africans and Africans were frustrated with the exclusionary practices of the government.

Whitehead sought support from the African community in his election bid because of the disgruntled archconservative white voting base. Despite his authoritarian approach to keeping the social order, he did signal an openness to a multiracial society, something that white voters wanted no part in. Joshua Nkomo, who participated in the 1953 election cycle, at first, expressed a willingness to work with the government. However, Leopold Takawira, head of the National

⁵⁷ John Leaver, "Multiracialism and Nationalisms: A Political Retrospective on 1950s Southern Rhodesia ('Colonial Zimbabwe')". *Journal of Third World Studies*, 174.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 175.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 176.

Democratic Party, an African nationalist party, denounced Nkomo's willingness to work with such a government.⁶⁰ Takawira stated, "We totally reject [the] Southern Rhodesian constitutional conference as treacherous to [the] future of three million Africans."⁶¹ Takawira and Nkomo took two separate approaches to working with the white minority government. Nkomo expressed a willingness to work through gradual reform whereas Takawira took a stance of resistance to any oppressive structures. These sentiments divided the African nationalists.⁶² Since Africans abstained in high enough numbers in the 1962 elections, the right-wing Rhodesian Front was able to secure a majority in the parliament.⁶³



Figure 4: Zimbabwean Vice President Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU Founder

⁶⁰ Ibid, 176.

⁶¹ Ibid, 176-177.

⁶² Ibid, 177.

⁶³ Ibid, 178.

After the 1962 election of the Rhodesian Front government, African nationalists were pushed toward militancy because of their political disenfranchisement. Previously, Prime Minister Whitehead had frustrated the African population with his multiple states of emergency in 1959, 1961, and 1962.⁶⁴ As for the economic sanctions imposed by much of the world, Rhodesia was able to alleviate some of the economic stress by trade with via South African businesses. South Africa gave Rhodesia access to multinational corporations. In a United Nations debate, a British representative estimated that a third of Rhodesian exports found their way to nations that claimed to be participating in the sanction.⁶⁵ Africans could not be engaged politically and, economically, the white settler state was able to function through loopholes.

The 1950s and 1960s were an era of extreme suppression of African nationalist movements on the part of the Rhodesian governments. The National Democratic Party (NDP) and ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) — both headed by Joshua Nkomo — had been banned by the Rhodesian government. At the time of their banning, the organizations lacked strong centralized leadership and there was violence in the form of riots — the deadliest since those in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Figures such as Robert Mugabe and Ndabaningi Sithole distrusted Nkomo as a leader since he spent considerable time abroad, lobbying other nations to support the African nationalist movement. The two aforementioned figures went on to found ZANU. Nkomo's previously banned Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) conducted its business (illegally) while he was imprisoned by the Rhodesian government.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Leaver, 181.

⁶⁵ Nelson, 50.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 54.

Although Nkomo was a militant, he was not as brazen as figures such as Mugabe. However, the government sent a clear message to the African people when it jailed Nkomo: the government was not going to entertain even those who seek change through relatively diplomatic means.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE

While Great Britain and the United Nations sought to end white minority rule in Rhodesia through economic means, these were not the only outside players at work. The Soviet Union was interested in assisting African nationalists in their fight for independence.

In 1957, the Soviet Union, at its Youth Festival in Moscow, brought African students to the country and provided them with the opportunity to study. This was done in an effort to exert influence on non-aligned countries.⁶⁸ Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor of the Universities of Oxford and Sussex, respectively, stated, “Others have cast Soviet and Eastern-bloc support for southern African liberation movements as a route through which perniciously authoritarian practices were instilled, with long-lasting consequences.” Of course, no matter the motive behind Soviet intervention, it still did Africa a great service in fighting colonial structures.⁶⁹

ZAPU’s intelligence wings were trained by the Soviet Union between 1964 and 1979. Throughout the duration of the Rhodesian Bush War, the time wherein Rhodesia was essentially governed by a minority-dominated rogue government, the Soviet Union was actively providing support to the African nationalists.⁷⁰ Dumiso Dabengwa, the current head of the modern ZAPU party, was the head of the National Security Organization (NSO). The NSO conducted “civilian, military and strategic briefs”.⁷¹ Dabengwa, in giving his account of his experience in the Soviet Union, said that African militants were provided with formal military training. He made mention that the travel was done in a covert fashion, having traveled from Zambia to Tanzania to Sudan

⁶⁸ Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, “African Soldiers in the USSR: Oral Histories of ZAPU Intelligence Cadres' Soviet Training, 1964-1979.” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 49.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 51-52.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 52.

and then finally to Moscow.⁷² African soldiers trained in the Soviet Union received stipends and along with their training, received weaponry that was of the same quality as the Soviets' own.⁷³ ZAPU's recruiting techniques were also distinct in that, while drawing from the disenfranchised African population, they drew a number of educated Africans into the fold — some of whom worked well within Rhodesian society.⁷⁴

Speaking of soldiers' experience in the Soviet system, Alexander and McGregor wrote,

“They held that they were encouraged to make choices based on the conditions of their own societies, and emphasized how they absorbed political ideas indirectly, outside the classroom, most notably through learning about Soviet history and through their experience of ‘living socialism’ – that is, their interactions with and observations of Soviet society. In both cases, the views that they formed were powerfully shaped by the comparative frame of their political and social experiences at home in Rhodesia.”⁷⁵

While the Soviet Union had an interest in spreading socialist ideology, it was careful not to overwhelm its visiting students with too much dogma. Though, it should be noted that the students were left, for the most part, with benevolent feelings toward the Soviet Union. Of course, this does not necessarily make one authoritarian-minded. However, one can speculate that governmental practices particular to the Soviet Union may be adopted by these aspiring leaders. Alexander and McGregor note that after learning the experiences of the Russians in ‘The Great Patriotic War’, they were able to understand that commitment to war, for just reasons, would be worth the sacrifice.⁷⁶

The United States and the Soviet Union were constantly vying to assert influence on non-aligned countries. As the Soviet Union provided support to African freedom fighters, the

⁷² Ibid, 54.

⁷³ Ibid, 57.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 58.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 60.

United States became increasingly worried about the spread of communism. Historian Nancy Mitchell asserts that U.S. President Jimmy Carter was, for a time, caught up more on the issue in Rhodesia than with any issues in the Middle East.⁷⁷

Unlike the Soviet Union, the United States did not officially provide any support to direct actors in the Rhodesian conflict (the white settler government and African nationalists). Instead, Carter chose only to deal with Great Britain regarding the issue. And while Carter was able to take a solid stance on the issue, it was a battle in the Congress. Some even proposed lifting the sanctions on Rhodesia. Since the issue in Rhodesia was white-on-black, it was a contentious issue considering the U.S.'s own history of racism.⁷⁸ Clearly, the opinions of the U.S. government were a bit more nuanced. Carter maintained that lifting sanctions would only empower the Soviet Union. However, he did maintain that the best solution would be worked out only with negotiations between both parties — not an overthrow.⁷⁹

Henry Kissinger, after seeing Angola and Mozambique transition into left-wing regimes, insisted that the same must not happen to Rhodesia. In order to do this, he believed it necessary to stop Cuban assistance to African guerrillas.⁸⁰ The United States had a vested interest in orchestrating a peaceful transition of power because further Rhodesian resistance could empower Zambia, Angola, and Mozambique to call on the Cubans and Soviets for troops. Of course, this was a Cold War game that the U.S. could not play because it could not support a blatantly racist regime, especially considering the domestic issues regarding race.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War*, 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 11.

POST-LANCASTER HOUSE AGREEMENT

Political Scientist Mahmood Mamdani stated,

“Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, but the social realities of the newly independent state remained embedded in an earlier historical period: some six thousand white farmers owned 15.5 million hectares of prime land, 39 per cent of the land in the country, while about 4.5 million farmers (a million households) in ‘communal areas’ were left to subsist on 16.4 million hectares of the most arid land, to which they’d been removed or confined by a century of colonial rule. In the middle were 8500 small-scale black farmers on about 1.4 million hectares of land.”⁸²

Although the Lancaster House agreement formally delegated power to a majoritarian government, the massive inequality that existed did not disappear along with the Rhodesian state. White farmers still had the advantage that came with land ownership. The agricultural population of Zimbabwe could not move up in this new country. The colonial structures, economically speaking, were ever-present.

Land transfer, according to the terms of the Lancaster House agreement would only happen if the buyer and seller agree to a sale. Naturally, European farmers content with their business would have no incentive to hand off land to Africans. Mamdani notes that only 19% of new land settled by Africans up until 1992 was arable. In 1990, 40% of the rural population did not own land. African nationalist veterans of the Rhodesian Bush War became discontent with the decolonization efforts with regard to land redistribution.⁸³ With the Lancaster House Agreement terms ending in 1990, the Zimbabwean government passed the Land Acquisition Act of 1992. Instead of having land redistribution take place on a voluntary basis, the state could now demand that white landowners sell to aspiring black landowners. In the Lancaster House

⁸² Mahmood Mamdani, "Lessons of Zimbabwe," *London Review of Books*

⁸³ Ibid

Agreement, Britain promised to support a compensation fund. However, in 1997, the British government claimed it could no longer be held responsible for the actions of the colonizers considering the new dynamics of British society.⁸⁴

The veterans of the liberation movement were deeply upset by the defeat of the 2000 referendum that would have allowed the government to seize land from white farmers without compensation. With enough pressure, Robert Mugabe, despite previously protecting the property rights of white landowners, conceded to the pressures within his own party and initiated aggressive land reform at the turn of the century.

⁸⁴ Ibid

CONCLUSION

With modern images of poverty in Zimbabwe and stories of white landowners facing a repressive government, it is important to understand the complexities of Zimbabwean history when making sense of the country's authoritarianism. The Zimbabwean people have had a long history of colonial oppression, with its effects lasting up until this very day. Zimbabwe's first interactions with the Europeans were based on their desire to settle the land and strip it of its mineral wealth.

Zimbabwe is different from other ex-colonies because of the particular nature of the white settler government. And since this colony existed longer than its neighbors, it occupied an interesting space during the Cold War.

After the collapse of the Central African Federation in the era of decolonization, Southern Rhodesia was the only country to resist, with within this particular union, majority rule. The Rhodesian government suppressed African nationalist movements with leaders like Joseph Nkomo. Rhodesia made it particularly difficult for Africans to participate in the electoral system. And since Africans could not balance the extreme views pushed by the white electorate, those on the radical right, such as Ian Smith, were able to gain power. Increasing political polarization between the colonizers and the colonized fueled the Bush War. This made figures like Mugabe, who were more inclined to use force, come to power. The Soviet Union, for better or for worse, actively sought to support militant efforts in Africa in hopes of exerting its influence as a world power.

After the power was transferred to the modern state of Zimbabwe, the colonial structures scarring the nation did not dissipate. Whites still owned a large amount of the country's arable land. The United Kingdom rescinded on its offer to assist Africans in land redistribution through monetary compensation of white farmers. Even though Mugabe was a militant nationalist, this does not automatically preclude him from being a democratic leader. However, tensions within his own party over the frustrations that came with land scarcity drove him to take drastic measures when it came to land reform. Britain would not compensate white landowners, so Mugabe sought to implement a compulsory buy-back program.

Regardless of the ethics of Mugabe's leadership, one can conclude that economic and political disenfranchisement drove Zimbabwe into its current authoritarian state. The radicalism of white settlers allowed strongmen to rise to power and in the post-colonial era and the government was confronted with the ever-present inequality that still existed between blacks and whites.

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Images

Figure 1:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Rhodesian_African_Mineworkers%27_Union#/media/File:Northern_Rhodesian_Miners.jpg

Figure 2: <http://rhodesians-worldwide.com/imagesx/udi.jpg>

Figure 3: See Brownell.

Figure 4: <https://contribute.pindula.co.zw/images/1/11/Joshua-nkomo1.jpg>