



Introduction

The history covered in this book focuses on the decolonization process that brought majority rule to the colony of Southern Rhodesia. The white minority settlers tried to delay decolonization, deciding to declare their own Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, forming a republic in 1970, and then trying to create a new hybrid state called Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1979. They finally relinquished control back to the British in 1979, temporarily returning to the official status of a British colony. The British governor oversaw the return of liberation war armies and the first real majority universal election in February 1980, which led to the lowering of the British flag and raising of the Zimbabwean flag on April 18, 1980. Bob Marley was in Zimbabwe for the festivities, playing his hit song “Zimbabwe,” which contained the prophetic lines:

No more internal power struggle;
We come together to overcome the little trouble.
Soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionary,
'Cause I don't want my people to be contrary.

It seems, at times, that much of the writing and talking about Zimbabwean modern political history has revolved around defining “who is the real revolutionary.” This “purity” test was at the heart of interparty rhetoric since the split between the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963, and it is still part of the larger questions about liberation war histories. This book's motivation has been to see what the archives can reveal through words used during the decolonization process. In addition to leading the nationalist movements, many of Zimbabwe's leaders also had to serve as diplomats, negotiating the terms by which Zimbabwe would become a sovereign nation. The goal of this book, written some forty years after the transition of power, is to provide readers access to the arguments used by the many different

diplomats and leaders who contributed to the diplomatic record of decolonization. I use these archives to examine a series of simultaneous struggles. The first is the struggle and competition between Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and Robert Mugabe's ZANU. That competition is what originally brought me to research in diplomatic archives, wanting to test if I could write a history of this rivalry through mostly Western and African archives.

There are other struggles and competitions explored in this book as well. Among them was the competition among the presidents of the Frontline States – a loose coalition of African countries committed to ending apartheid in South Africa and white minority rule in Rhodesia – over who would be able to assist their preferred candidate to become the leader of the new Zimbabwe. Another struggle was between the Western powers and the Soviet Union/China over who would succeed in putting their sponsored liberation movement into power in Zimbabwe. The United States and Britain together went up against South Africa in deciding the fate of Zimbabwe's new leadership, while competing between themselves over who should be their "man in Zimbabwe." All of these different struggles are addressed in what follows, although the central focus throughout the book remains the competition between Nkomo and Mugabe.

Even though the interactions and diplomatic debates described in the following pages may have taken place in embassies and the halls of foreign offices and state departments, the consequences for the ongoing war were real, at times extending that violent conflict, and at times preparing the way to end the conflict. Given the importance of the liberation war itself in defining political rights in Zimbabwe over the last forty years, and the extensive debates over who was, and who still is, "the real revolutionary," this book is an attempt to let some of the historical evidence that is otherwise stuffed away in quiet archives do some of the talking in a pursuit of answers to the questions raised by Bob Marley in his song "Zimbabwe." Zimbabwe's principal "flaw" as a new nation was that it was created hastily and forced two competing liberation parties and armies to merge into a national army. The split between ZAPU and ZANU had happened seventeen years before independence and was permitted to continue because of the Cold War funding of both their militaries by numerous states. As the elected ruling party, ZANU would then go on to use the instruments of state coercion to punish the losing rival party, ZAPU. My research interests

have also concerned the roles of the American and British diplomats through those years of terror for some Zimbabweans, otherwise known as the *Gukurahundi*, from 1983 to 1987. In researching this book, I deliberately wanted to move the chronology beyond the usual diplomatic history that ends or begins the story in 1980. This is also made possible given that archived documents from the early 1980s are now unclassified and shared by the US State Department's FOIA Library, or available in hard copy at the British National Archives.¹

Cold War Race States

I have deployed an analytic framework throughout this book that examines Zimbabwe's late decolonization processes through the lens of what I call "Cold War race states." The analytical questions addressed in this book concern the role of race as a central category of action in the Cold War diplomacy regarding decolonization in southern Africa, and in particular Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Much has been written about race and the Cold War, especially about the important nexus between American domestic racism and Cold War diplomacy. Three books, all published in 2001, dealt directly with American domestic race politics and international diplomacy over ending white minority rule in Rhodesia. Thomas Borstelmann's *The Cold War and the Color Line*, Gerald Horne's *From the Barrel of a Gun*, and Andrew DeRoche's *Black, White, and Chrome*, all firmly established the fundamental role of race and racism in US foreign policy related to the ending of one of the last white race states in southern Africa.² Since these important books were written in 2001, there have been a number of excellent books published that further utilize the diplomatic archives in the United States, Britain, South Africa, and the Commonwealth nations, particularly on the American side of the diplomatic history.³

¹ I have included links to the digital US State Department FOIA Reading Room in the notes for these items.

² Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Gerald Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War against Zimbabwe, 1965–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Andrew DeRoche, *Black, White, and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953 to 1998* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

³ See Nancy Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016); Eddie Michel, *The*

The concept of race in “race state” is meant to specifically refer to the white settler state of Rhodesia, and its comparison to other white and black race states in Africa at that time. This concept needs to take into account the transformation of the race state comparison over almost a two decade-long delay in decolonization. Therefore, the race state concept and comparison reflected different meanings of race in a global Cold War context than it had for the earlier independence movements in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. It also meant that world powers interpreted the potential success of a decolonized settler state against the backdrop of their own particular views of recently decolonized nation states elsewhere in Africa. While the concept does connect to American and British ideas of race and racism, the use of “race states” here is not meant in the same way that it usually deployed, as the influence of American or British racism in foreign policy – although the concept certainly builds on that important literature that mostly concerned the early Cold War.⁴

The challenge of applying a “Cold War race states” argument rests in its changing contexts and connotations in different periods over nearly

White House and White Africa: Presidential Policy Toward Rhodesia during the UDI Era, 1965–1979 (New York: Routledge, 2019); Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes and Robert McNamara, *The White Redoubt, the Great Powers and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1960–1980* (London: Palgrave, 2018); Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Andy DeRoche, *Kenneth Kaunda, the United States and Southern Africa* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Stuart Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory: Mugabe, ZANU and the Quest for Supremacy, 1960–1987* (Midrand, South Africa: Sithatha Media, 2017); Sue Onslow, “South Africa and Zimbabwean Independence,” in Sue Onslow, ed., *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 110–29; William Bishop, “Diplomacy in Black and White: America and the Search for Zimbabwean Independence, 1965–1980” (Unpublished PhD thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2012).

⁴ See Penny M. von Eshen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Ryan M. Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Thomas Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: the United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948–1967* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); Philip Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy’s Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

two decades of diplomacy. Starting in the early 1960s, Rhodesia was still part of the Central African Federation, and there were certainly some efforts by the British and other world powers to encourage Rhodesia toward a majority rule government at that time. After the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence, however, Rhodesia lacked international recognition and remained a white minority-rule state. In 1979, the experiment of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia provided a short-lived and imperfect white-minority government with a black prime minister, one that failed to gain international recognition. A new and significant “race state” transformation came only after the election of Robert Mugabe and ZANU and the transfer of power from the original colonial power, Britain, to the new Zimbabwean state on April 18, 1980.

My argument in what follows is that the “Cold War race states” concept helps to better understand the opportunities various projections of racialized notions of a “white state” or “black state” created within negotiation and diplomacy. Inherent in this concept are the notions of what international actors presumed to be the characteristics of a black African state. The literature on this racialized relativism is large, particularly in the theoretical discussion over the limits of sovereignty in an unequal global system.⁵ Zimbabwe’s early years as a “black state” witnessed extreme forms of state-sponsored violence against those supporting ZAPU. Pre-independence diplomacy is not usually associated with explanations of this violence. I believe that it is important to examine closely how the debates and mechanisms of creating a majority-rule sovereign state in Zimbabwe may have contributed to the ways state crimes against thousands occurred in the early 1980s, and how these crimes were interpreted by those very same powers who had helped create Zimbabwe.

The bulk of this book discusses the evidence produced by numerous politicians, diplomats, contacts, journalists, and other odd informants.

⁵ See, for example, Achille Mbembé and Libby Meintjes, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003), 11–40; Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

This evidence in the written archives offers new ways to think and write about the intense diplomacy around solving “the Rhodesia Problem.” For those looking for a more comprehensive perspective on the diplomacy of these years, there a number of books written on it. Political scientists like Stephan Stedman and Mordechai Tamarkin have produced extremely detailed studies of the diplomacy over Zimbabwe’s decolonization.⁶ These works show the complexity of multilateral and bilateral relations in the Zimbabwe case. I am not attempting to treat the evidence I have read in the archives to chronicle the negotiation process. I am more interested in the way information was communicated to, and processed by, different actors in this history. I believe memorandums of conversation, for example, can provide not only a sense of the discussions between key actors, but also offer perspectives on what different state and non-state actors thought of each other and how they predicted or anticipated moves by the other actors. I do think there is value to political scientists and students of diplomacy in having access to this sort of evidence when it comes to learning the art of diplomacy and negotiation. Most importantly, I feel that future generations of diplomats can ask how they would have performed in “real time” as part of a major negotiation. There is also an opportunity here to learn from the mistakes of the past. Not simply in the clichéd sense of not repeating mistakes, but in the sense of considering the banality of diplomatic work and how, over years, that routine performance of intelligence gathering, sharing, and interpreting creates a “group think” that reinforces institutional racism and prejudice toward others in negotiations.

The Zimbabwean decolonization process did, in fact, include very different types of actors. The racial element – not only the race of the actors, but the use of race as a major element in the negotiations – comes out more in the narrative when looking beyond descriptions of the key moments, the turning points, and so on. In that sense, the following narrative is not preoccupied with keeping track of the relative strengths and weaknesses of various bargaining positions. My interest is also in those moments when diplomats expressed sincere doubt about a possible resolution, or when otherwise marginalized

⁶ Stephan Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil War International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974–1980* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991); Mordechai Tamarkin, *The Making of Zimbabwe: Decolonization in Regional and International Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1990).

politicians voiced their own perspectives, usually making claims that their exclusion was unfair. I am also interested in what diplomats knew of the internal conflicts in Zimbabwe's nationalist movements, and how they explained these to their political higher-ups. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) archives have numerous files titled, for example, "The US Involvement with the Rhodesia Problem," or "Tanzania's Involvement with the Rhodesia Problem." Rhodesia was Britain's problem, so a lot of effort went into collecting intelligence to help shape policy.

Organization of the Book

The first section of the book (1960–75) explores the inability of the British and the international community to deliver majority rule and decolonization in Rhodesia in the 1960s, which in turn helped to further differentiate "white African" states such as Rhodesia, the Portuguese colonies in southern Africa, and most importantly South Africa itself. The second section of the race state argument begins in 1976, covered in Chapters 3 and 4, and occurs when then US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, became obsessed with flipping the "race state" definition of Rhodesia into a black African state to avoid the unsavory prospect of having the United States defend a white minority-rule state against the Cubans and the Soviets. The 1976 Geneva conference was organized for this purpose, and although it failed to end the conflict and bring about majority rule, it enabled the two main liberation movements to gain more prominent positions at the negotiating table, with Mugabe benefiting the most from this recognition.

The remaining chapters in this section, Chapters 5 and 6, focus on the late 1970s and highlight the importance of a race state solution for Zimbabwe. The negotiations witnessed many different strategies by the Anglo-Americans and South Africans – some that failed and some that worked – to shape the future "black state" in ways that they thought would be to their benefit. The key African parties, outside of the Zimbabwean nationalists themselves, were the Frontline State presidents, of whom the three principal leaders were Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, and Mozambique's Samora Machel. Botswana's President Seretse Khama and Angola's Agostinho Neto played smaller but at times key roles in the

negotiations.⁷ Other actors in the negotiations were the South Africans, the Rhodesian Front government, and the Zimbabwean nationalists themselves. The Frontline State presidents, the Nigerians and other Commonwealth nations, and the leaders of Zimbabwean political parties themselves all did their best to make the most of the constellation of issues encapsulated in the “Rhodesian problem,” one of the final decolonization processes to be negotiated in Africa. The outcome of this competition was not always one-sided and created a number of opportunities for the Zimbabwean nationalists.⁸

The third and final section of the book covers the 1980 elections, the transfer of power from the British to the Zimbabweans, and the post-1980 attempts by Mugabe’s party to destroy Nkomo and his ZAPU political party. This third stage shows the Cold War powers consistently providing Mugabe and his military direct and tacit support to keep him on “their side” in the resurgent Cold War of the early 1980s.⁹ In this situation, diplomats and leaders categorized newly independent Zimbabwe as a “black African state” to rationalize the high levels of violence which, in the Cold War calculus, were viewed as acceptable in different racialized states at the time.

To avoid anachronisms and stay away from overusing these tropes, it is important to point out that by invoking the use of “race” in

⁷ Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2013); Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Andy DeRoche, *Kenneth Kaunda, the United States and Southern Africa* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Arrigo Pallotti, *Nyerere e la decolonizzazione dell’Africa australe, 1961–1980* (Florence: Mondadori, in press)

⁸ For the Frontline States’ contributions to the creation of Zimbabwe, see Carol B. Thompson, *Challenge to Imperialism: The Frontline States in the Liberation of Zimbabwe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986); and Gilbert Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity: The Frontline States in Southern African Security, 1975–1993* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994).

⁹ See Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (Harare: CCJPZ and LRF, 1999), reprinted in *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980–1988* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007); Lloyd Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); Shari Eppel, “‘Gukurahundi’: The Need for Truth and Reparation,” in Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage, eds., *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2005), 43–62.

diplomacy during these years, I am assuming that Rhodesia and Zimbabwe are two different race states, and I confront how all actors racialized negotiations. It is, of course, debatable to say that race was the only category of analysis separating Rhodesia from Zimbabwe, but from the perspective of international, regional, and domestic diplomacy and negotiations, race was *the* fundamental category of difference used to justify various positions in the negotiations. The reality of racial categories and essentializing in this diplomacy is quite stark. Representatives from all sides in the negotiations spoke instrumentally in terms of “the blacks” and “the whites.” These were not simply anecdotal references: these racial categories were integral to the rhetoric and, more importantly, the power relations reflected in the peculiarities of race states during the Cold War.

One racialized theme throughout the negotiations to end the liberation war and to transition to majority rule was the commonly held notion that “black African states” were not equal to “European states” – a euphemism for white settler states – on a number of criteria. The most important for Western powers was the assumption that once whites left or were forced out of a former African colony, the economy would suffer severe shocks. Therefore, one of the main goals for Rhodesia, which was such a “late decolonizer,” was to negotiate safeguards including large-scale financial compensations to keep whites in Zimbabwe after independence. Much work has been done on this topic, especially as it relates to the post-independence land issue in Zimbabwe, but the history of how this concern was racialized throughout the negotiations from 1976 to Lancaster House in 1979 is an important element of diplomacy to explore.¹⁰

Another major theme found in the following chapters is the ability of African states and liberation movements in the region to take advantage of Kissinger’s attempts to force a settlement. This important intervention by Kissinger and the United States provided the Zimbabwean nationalists a new advantage in the otherwise stagnant regionally driven negotiations of the mid-1970s. Although Kissinger

¹⁰ Sue Onslow, “Race and Policy: Britain, Zimbabwe and the Lancaster House Land Deal,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 5 (2017), 844–67; Timothy Scarnecchia, “Proposed Large-Scale Compensation for White Farmers as an Anglo-American Negotiating Strategy for Zimbabwe, 1976–1979,” in A. Pallotti and C. Tornimbeni, eds., *State, Land and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 105–26.

represented the most powerful nation on the world scene in these years, American power was open to numerous forms of manipulation by those leaders in the region, who suddenly found themselves receiving greater attention than usual from the Americans. When the Americans wanted help with solving the “Rhodesia Problem,” opportunities for development aid and military aid opened up. This was very important for Zambia and Mozambique, the two countries bordering Rhodesia that would host the Zimbabwean liberation armies. Rather than seeing this period as one of imperial power being deployed in a region where it was otherwise lacking, it is useful to see American power in southern Africa as attempting to use economic leverage, military aid, and international prestige in ways that would help legitimate and even create national leaders and movements. This was especially the case for those nationalist leaders like Nkomo and Mugabe outside of Rhodesia, the Patriotic Front leaders, but also for the white leaders of South Africa and Rhodesia. Constantly wanting to avoid falling into what they viewed as imperialist traps, Nkomo and Mugabe had a great deal of room to maneuver. That space became much smaller in late 1979, however, when a combination of factors and pressures forced both of them to accept a fairly extreme version of a decolonization constitution that included safeguards for the white population of Rhodesia.¹¹

The potential for a “race war” in Rhodesia had diverse meanings depending on who invoked the concept and in what context. It meant something different to Rhodesia, South Africa, Tanzania, Britain, and the United States. Nevertheless, all parties in the negotiations invoked the concept of a potential race war to help strengthen their own positions in negotiations. Some might ask whether or not the liberation war for Zimbabwe was itself a race war, but it is difficult to make this claim given denials of the racial intentions of the belligerents. Neither side was bent upon the destruction of the other based on race. The Rhodesian army certainly relied heavily on black Rhodesian soldiers to fight the war, as they tried to make the war about upholding “civilization” against communism. Such a view cannot overlook the oppressive

¹¹ See Luise White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 172–205. For valuable comprehensive Zimbabwean histories, see especially Alois S. Mlambo, *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); B. Raftopoulos, ed., *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009).

racial order of Rhodesian society. Perhaps it is difficult to understand the nonracial elements of the liberation war: fundamentally, it was without a doubt ideologically and literally a war against a racist system, and not a “race war” in the way white settlers often referred to as the “ever present danger,” as white settlers have done historically. Fundamentally, the liberation war, while shaped by racial divisions, can be characterized as a war fought against the white minority-ruled Rhodesian state bent upon maintaining white privilege enshrined in minority rule. The liberation forces were fighting to destroy this brutal and unequal system and create a majority rule sovereign state that would put an end to white privilege and all the inequalities that were associated with such a system. Whether or not such a goal was achieved is a different question. The liberation struggle also focused on historical land theft and appropriation by white settlers as a central element of white minority rule, so getting back the land was a major motivation for the war itself. As will be discussed, negotiations had a difficult time reconciling the liberation party’s claims for the return of land with Western powers’ preoccupation with keeping whites in Zimbabwe after the transition.

Mugabe versus Nkomo

A main question in what follows is the long and divisive competition between Joshua Nkomo of ZAPU and Robert Mugabe of ZANU. It may seem like this competition was simply a question of personal power, and that certainly is a large part of it. But the divisions between ZANU and ZAPU and Mugabe and Nkomo became a fundamental part of Zimbabwe’s decolonization process and would have a major impact on post-independence Zimbabwe. The way in which this division was, and continues to be, explained as one of ethnic difference remains one of the most troubling legacies. This book attempts to offer a more nuanced history of this competition in order to move away from the predominance of an explanation of ethnic competition, or what was then referred to by diplomats and nationalists as “tribalism.” Yet, the challenge to privilege the political rivalry is made difficult as much of the diplomatic discussion of differences between personalities and rivalries were made through references to this ethnopolitics. These narratives, or storytelling, created a conformation bias, which developed over years, of relaying ethnic rivalry as the primary explanation of

the competition between Nkomo and Mugabe, ZAPU and ZANU, and many other politicians and political formations. These institutional “archives” were then used to rationalize violence after 1980 in ways that distanced the Anglo-Americans from responsibility for what happened in the “sovereign” state of Zimbabwe.

It would be fairly easy to invoke a “character is destiny” trope when analyzing the Nkomo–Mugabe rivalry. I am not interested in doing that here. By emphasizing the Nkomo–Mugabe competition during the decolonization phase and after independence, the narrative is not so much concerned with explanations based on “character” as to why they ultimately failed to integrate their military and political organizations, but more with the larger implications their rivalry would have on a series of important elements in diplomacy, as well as the culmination of their rivalry after independence. It is also true that there exist strong loyalties to Nkomo or Mugabe, so I am aware that by avoiding the “character is destiny” trope, I may be disappointing both audiences. A goal in writing this book is to avoid praising one side and demonizing the other; however, like with ethnicity, there is a large amount of “demonizing” to be found coming from both sides to be found in the sources cited in the following chapters. To draw a direct line to more recent events would be anachronistic, which is an easy trap to fall into when discussing Zimbabwean nationalist history. The act of writing history in Zimbabwe became even more politicized in the 2000s, especially with the call to write history that would serve the ruling party, the “patriotic history” that Terence Ranger described so well in his critical article of this development. Since then, a school of more critical writings about Zimbabwean political history has developed to counter patriotic history.¹²

¹² Terence Ranger, “Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2005), 215–34; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Rethinking Chimurenga and Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Critique of Partisan National History,” *African Studies Review* 55, no. 3 (2012), 1–26. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Introduction: Mugabeism and Entanglements of History, Politics, and Power in the Making of Zimbabwe,” in S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ed., *Mugabeism: History, Politics and Power in Zimbabwe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–25; and S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Introduction: Writing Joshua Nkomo into History and Narration of the Nation,” in S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ed., *Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo of Zimbabwe: Politics, Power, and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1–49;

One note on “truth” and evidence in diplomatic history. Readers may, or may not, be aware that an older-style diplomatic history was originally built on a functionalist foundation that assumed words in diplomatic archives and records could be used to construct a reliable narrative of events simply because they appear in an “official” archive. I am not suggesting that the location of the evidence in state archives makes it more truthful or objective than other forms of evidence. Rather, I am interested in revealing how this evidence, which was used to make decisions, helped create consensus within foreign relation bureaucracies, and among political leaders who received their information from these bureaucracies. What follows contains a great deal of direct quotes from the archives. At times, this evidence is used to demonstrate that not all of the intelligence used by governments was reliable or correct. All the same, the collecting, classifying, and dissemination of gathered intelligence at the diplomatic level was key to decision-making, however “untrue” the evidence, or descriptions of the evidence, may have been. Much of what is quoted from the archives is done to show the sort of arguments and theories that were considered as evidence by those making decisions, not as pure facts or truths. Luise White’s work is especially influential to my methodology. Her work established that “truth claims” are better treated as competing texts and that it is not the historian’s role to try and privilege one over the other, but rather to explore how conflicting truth claims can be viable parts of creating a plausible historical narrative.¹³ This approach, of course, does not mean that I am somehow more “objective” in the narrative. The decisions made over what evidence may have been more significant than other evidence gets to the heart of the historian’s skills. It can take years of reading thousands of documents to begin to

James Muzondidya and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatssheni “‘Echoing Silences’: Ethnicity in Postcolonial Zimbabwe, 1980–2007,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 7, no. 2 (2010), 257–97; Blessing-Miles Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010). For a critique of Ranger’s formulation, and recognition of a more critical school of Zimbabwean history, see Ian Phimister, “Narrative of Progress: Zimbabwean Historiography and the End of History,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30, no. 1 (2012), 27–34.

¹³ Most relevant to this book is Luise White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); however much of her approach is articulated in Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000).

understand what may or may not have been important in reconstructing how decisions were made as well as why some ideas and theories were discarded along the way.

Most importantly, the words diplomats and politicians said to each other are not meant to represent an objective truth because these words appear in the archive. All of the quotes in this book should be seen rather as an opinion or argument used to try and persuade another individual or state to act in a certain manner. It is this art of persuasion that is so fascinating to examine. Diplomatic historian David Painter once related to me an old adage about diplomacy: “that a soldier’s job is to die for his/her country, while a diplomat’s job is to lie for her/his country.” That certainly holds true in what follows. In addition, the recorded words themselves are, of course, only part of the story, as diplomats were susceptible to numerous influences beyond the textual record left to be read by historians years later in archives. There were personal relationships, considerations of national interests, opinions of other foreign diplomats – all of these elements influenced the way diplomats chose to interpret the words and actions of ZANU and ZAPU leaders during these years. To say that what they related back to their governments represent an objective, sole, or a privileged truth is unrealistic. What the diplomatic record does help historians to do, however, is to present a particular system of knowledge, however incomplete, which was molded by local conditions, the quality of their information, and the personal prejudices and biases of those involved.¹⁴

There are limitations to a strictly archival approach, and some readers will undoubtedly feel that the narrative around key figures should have been given more attention. I decided, however, to base this book almost entirely on sources from the archives. Recent works on Zimbabwean decolonization have shown the value of extensive interviews with military and political leaders.¹⁵ There are also very

¹⁴ A very useful formulation of this process can be found in Charles Tilly, *Why? What Happens When People Give Reasons ... and Why* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Blessing-Miles Tendi, *Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Gerald Mazarire, “ZANU’s External Networks 1963–1979: An Appraisal,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017), 83–106; David Moore, *Mugabe’s Legacy: Coups, Conspiracies and the Conceits of Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Hurst, 2021); Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*. See Jocelyn Alexander and

strong collections of interviews with diplomats who were part of these negotiations.¹⁶ My approach here, however, is to work primarily with evidence left in archives, to the extent that this material helped to inform and shape policy and opinions of the multiple parties and states involved in the Zimbabwean negotiations.

In addition to official state archives, I have also used some evidence from the papers of the American activist George Houser. Houser's papers are based on his notes from his trips to southern Africa in the 1970s. George Houser was a significant figure among those Americans involved in solidarity work with African liberation struggles. He was the director of the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), an influential policy group committed to challenging American support for colonial and settler states in Africa. When Houser retired from this directorship, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere and other African leaders wrote statements in honor of his service. Nyerere described Houser as one of those key figures in history who worked "quietly in the background of events, devoting their skill, their commitment, and their lives to causes they believe in." Nyerere wrote, "George Houser is such a man, and his service has been given whole-heartedly and without reserve to the cause of human freedom and human equality, with special reference to the struggle against colonialism and racialism in Africa."¹⁷ This was very high praise coming from Nyerere, indicating the level of trust and respect anti-imperialist African nationalists had in and for Houser. Houser's personal notes on the conversations he had with Zimbabwean nationalists are therefore particularly helpful because African nationalists shared different information with

JoAnn McGregor, "Adelante! Military Imaginaries, the Cold War, and Southern Africa's Liberation Armies," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62, no. 3 (2020), 619–50.

¹⁶ See especially Sue Onslow and Anna-Mart van Wyk, eds., *Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974*, Critical Oral History Conference Series (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013); The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project; Michael Kandiah and Sue Onslow, eds., *Britain and Rhodesia: The Route to Settlement* (London: Institute of Contemporary British History Oral History Programme, 2008).

¹⁷ ACOA Tribute to George Houser, "Messages to George Houser," 8. Other messages came from Robert Mugabe, Kenneth Kaunda, Oliver Tambo, Sam Nujoma, and Henry Isaacs, African Activist Archive, <http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-132B-84-GMH%20ACOA%20Tribute%20pro%20small.pdf>.

Houser compared with what they said in conversations with official state diplomats.

As much as what follows may contain some controversial evidence, I would ask the reader to remember that I have included such materials, with citations, that may contain untruths, as well as characterizations of individuals that are harsh and unkind. I include this because it helps to better understand the atmosphere of multilateral negotiations. It is also possible that “bad intel” may have, at times, helped to shape the policy recommendations within the foreign relations bureaucracy, although such inconsistent reports rarely sustained major shifts in policy. As will hopefully become clear, my main argument about the evidence in this book is that as it continued to accumulate it came to define fairly narrow interpretations of possibilities. This led eventually to an interpretation that turned what should have been a recognizable political competition and subsequent political acts of revenge into something unrecognizable, something monstrous, that the foreign relations bureaucracies and political leaders were then able to rationalize into their own understandings of what was not only possible, but acceptable.

The historical narrative that follows will likely disappoint some readers, mainly because I have tried to avoid categorizing individuals in the story as either purely revolutionary or as “sell-outs,” as is often the way this story has been told. As the reader will hopefully see, these commonly held biases do not reflect the full story of many years of diplomacy by Zimbabwean leaders. To paraphrase Fela Kuti, I would therefore ask for some patience from Zimbabwean readers, and an open mind from non-Zimbabwean readers, as I have tried my best to present the evidence through the eyes of the participants rather than through the culmination of events over the last forty years.