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Countering Unilateral Declaration of Independence: The Rise of Zimbabwean Nationalism and Armed Struggle

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Abstract

This review article examines African nationalist responses to the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Ian Smith's Rhodesian regime, a pivotal moment in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. It draws on published and grey literature, exploring how repression, incarceration, and political exclusion shaped nationalist strategies and ideological trajectories. It analyses the role of media and communication as tools for mobilization, counter-propaganda, and international advocacy. The manuscript examines the ideological divergence between ZAPU and ZANU, highlighting how internal tensions and leadership rivalries hindered unified resistance and complicated efforts toward achieving majority rule. The study further investigates how Rhodesian state repression, including the imprisonment of key nationalist figures, disrupted internal political engagement and accelerated the shift toward armed struggle. The article synthesizes archival sources, oral histories, and contemporary accounts to map the evolution of nationalist tactics and discourse. Ultimately, the manuscript argues that the nationalist response to

UDI not only intensified the liberation war but also laid the foundations for post-independence political culture marked by militarized governance, factionalism, and contested legitimacy. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how liberation-era dynamics continue to shape Zimbabwe's political landscape.

Keywords: *Zimbabwe, Rhodesia, Nationalism, Independence, Unilateral Declaration, Liberation, and Decolonization.*

Introduction

On November 11, 1965, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith broadcast a proclamation to the people of Rhodesia, modeled on the American Declaration of Independence (Smith 1997). The proclamation observed that it was an "indisputable and historic fact" that Rhodesia had enjoyed self-government since 1923, claimed that the people of Rhodesia supported their government's request for independence, and lamented that the British government persisted in "maintaining an unwarrantable jurisdiction" (Watts, 2012). In part, this was driven by fear of communism and the need to preserve White minority rule and the economic interests of the White population (Good 2015).

The decolonization trends of the post-World War II era saw the British government insisting on the implementation of majority rule as a condition for granting full independence to its colonies (Babou, 2010; Darwin, 2013). The UDI was met with widespread international condemnation and resulted in significant economic sanctions. Alongside the UK, the UN General Assembly and Security Council swiftly denounced UDI as unlawful and discriminatory (UN 1966; MacDonald, 1987)). In the days that followed Smith's announcement, the Security Council passed Resolutions 216 and 217, which condemned UDI as an illegal "usurpation of power by a racist settler minority" and urged countries to reject diplomatic or commercial ties (UN 1966). Domestically, the UDI intensified the liberation struggle led by African nationalist movements, notably the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), which escalated their guerrilla warfare efforts against the Rhodesian government (Ngwenya & Molapo, 2018).

Review of the Literature

Southern Rhodesia Media

In the years leading up to Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), the Rhodesian government employed media strategically to reshape public opinion and suppress dissent (Boender, 2023). The Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (RBC), modeled after the BBC but controlled by the government, dominated radio broadcasting. The RBC also acquired Rhodesia Television (RTV) to tighten control over televised content. The media propagated a narrative that painted progressive ideas as anti-Rhodesian and emphasized threats from communism and instability in Black-ruled states (Forums 2013). To ensure this narrative's dominance, the government rushed through the Emergency Powers (Censorship of Publications) Order in 1965 (Chuma, 2004). This censorship silenced alternative voices and cemented pro-UDI sentiments among Rhodesian Whites (Boender, 2023).

The Black nationalists responded by using radio broadcasts from Zambia and Mozambique to counter Rhodesian propaganda, mobilize support, and spread revolutionary messages. These exiled transmissions promoted unity, exposed state repression, and built international solidarity, becoming vital tools for ideological resistance and grassroots engagement during the 1970s liberation war (Kriger, 1992; Chung, 2006).

Political Responses from Nationalist Leaders

The context within which the nationalists operated was complex, fraught with internal and external conflict, suspicion, and outmanoeuvring each other (Stiff 2002). The declaration itself was made when all the identified notable nationalists were in prison after the banning of political parties (Ngwenya & Molapo, 2018). The nationalists found themselves trying to outsmart each other based on regional and tribal alliances, which the Ian Smith government often capitalized on to widen divisions, while regional African leaders tried to reduce these gaps using the carrot and stick strategies (Stiff, 2002). The formation of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963 marked a significant split in Zimbabwean nationalism, with divisions likely influenced by tribal lines. Initially united under the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU),

internal disagreements, including dissatisfaction with Joshua Nkomo's leadership and underlying tribal tensions, led to the formation of a split. ZANU, led by Ndabaningi Sithole, attracted predominantly Shona nationalists, while ZAPU retained a largely Ndebele-Kalanga base. This division intensified factionalism and violence within the nationalist movement, with ZANLA and ZIPRA, the military wings of ZANU and ZAPU, reflecting these ethnic divides (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008).

To maintain and justify their distinct identity, ZANU consistently portrayed leaders like Nkomo and movements like ZAPU as less revolutionary, less committed to armed struggle, and inconsistent. ZANLA guerrillas followed the Maoist strategy of peasant mobilization, whereas ZIPRA left mass mobilization in the hands of the party, with ZAPU preferring a more conventional army outlook (Ngwenya & Molapo, 2018). In turn, ZAPU characterized ZANU as a newcomer to the nationalist struggle, and a party based on tribal affiliations, lacking a commitment to national unity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007).

The Zimbabwe Liberation Council was formed in 1974 to establish a joint military effort against the Ian Smith government, with its leader, Ndabaningi Sithole, choosing his nephew, John Gwindingi, to lead the military wing, the Zimbabwe Liberation Army (Dangale, 1996). The nephew's choice may demonstrate distrust among the nationalists. Regional allies faced significant challenges in attempting to unify the nationalists in order to confront the Rhodesian government (Muzorewa, 1978).

The Nationalists

Joshua Nkomo

In a speech, he referred to the UDI as an "act of insanity" and called for international support to isolate the Smith regime and impose sanctions (Meredith, 2002). Both leaders called for unity among African nations and liberation movements to support the struggle against the Rhodesian government. Nkomo was open to negotiations, and this resulted in serious disagreements with other nationalists, such as Robert Mugabe, who resisted the idea of talks (Rupiya 2002). Regional leaders such as Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Mozambique's Samora Machel, and Botswana's Seretse Khama made concerted efforts to bring the two to the negotiating table, even issuing handwritten notes to the nationalists while they were in prison in 1974. Nkomo was willing to come to terms with Ian Smith (Meredith, 2002). In 1978, Nkomo had

an agreement with the Rhodesian government, which did not go down well with the rival ZANU PF.

In his autobiography, "The Story of My Life", Joshua Nkomo vividly recounts the deep animosity and distrust between him and Robert Mugabe, which dates back to the liberation struggle and his forced exile from Zimbabwe, to Botswana in March 1983, driven out by what he termed "the armed killers of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe"(Rupiya, 2002 p1, Vambe 2009).

Nkomo points to Mugabe, with the support of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, as a key figure in undermining the unity of the liberation forces (p. 144). He describes how Mugabe, backed by figures like Leopold Takawira, stoked the fires of tribalism and resentment against him, labelling Nkomo as "Zimundevere" a reference to his tribal roots (p144). Even Herbert Chitepo, whom Nkomo respected, fell into the pattern of exploiting tribal divisions for personal gain. These tensions ultimately led to violent clashes, such as the tragic events at Morogoro, where over a hundred young ZAPU fighters were killed by ZANLA soldiers (p165). Nkomo's narrative portrays a struggle not just against colonial rule but also against the internal divisions and betrayals that marred the path to Zimbabwe's independence (Vambe, 2009).

Edgar Tekere

Tekere was the Secretary General of Zimbabwe African National Union Party (ZANU) during the liberation struggle (Gonye et al 2017). Tekere was a staunch critic of Ian Smith's regime. His opposition to UDI was rooted in his commitment to the liberation struggle, which later led to his expulsion from ZANU-PF due to his criticisms of corruption within the party (Tekere 2007). He continued to be an outspoken critic of undemocratic practices in Zimbabwe, advocating for a multi-party system and opposing Mugabe's proposal for a one-party state. He advocated for the use of arms to remove the Smith government and was arrested with the other nationalists in 1964. Tekere is noted for assisting Mugabe in crossing into Mozambique to lead the battle from the front (Meredith, 2002).

Bernard Chidzero

Chidzero, an influential figure in Zimbabwean politics, is less documented specifically on his immediate response to the UDI, but as a

nationalist, he likely condemned the move, aligning with other leaders in opposing Smith's regime and fighting for majority rule. Initially, some Middle-class Africans, including Bernard Chidzero, held faith in multiracialism, believing that cooperation with liberal White allies could secure a better future (Mlambo, 2009). However, as the political landscape evolved, it became evident that relying on the goodwill of White liberals would not suffice to protect African interests. Notably, Chidzero and other nationalists decided to confront 'the rightward drift in White politics which was reducing the space for the Black elite to develop in the colony (Masengwe & Dube, 2021).

Abel Muzorewa

Bishop Abel Muzorewa was the first and last Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. He was elected to office in 1979. Muzorewa's leadership marked a pivotal moment in Zimbabwe's history, from the early political upheaval and the liberation war to independence (Kunene, 1981). In summary Muzorewa tumultuous political career can be described as African National Council (ANC) chairman (1971-74) ANC president (1974), Zimbabwe-Rhodesia Prime Minister (1971) and member of parliament Mashonaland East (1980) (Muzorewa 1978, 2005, (Kunene, 1981).

Muzorewa formed the ANC when Nkomo, Sithole, and Mugabe were in detention (Scarnecchia, 2021). In his second autobiography, 'Evangelism That Decolonizes the Soul: Partnership with Christ' (Muzorewa, 2005), he notes that he had long observed that missionary work was good but lamented that the missionaries "later on collaborated with the colonialists (p3). The détente efforts led by Presidents Kaunda (Zambia), Nyerere (Tanzania), Machel (Mozambique), Khama (Botswana), and Vorster (South Africa) pressured nationalists into an uneasy "Declaration of Unity." In December 1974, Muzorewa was appointed as the leader of the former ZAPU, ZANU, FROLIZI, and ANC, however, the Mgagao Declaration issued by guerrillas in Mozambique expressed a vote of no confidence in the leadership of Bishop Muzorewa, Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, and Chikerema, signaling growing internal dissent (Carry & Mitchell, 1983).

In June 1970, Muzorewa confronted Ian Smith alongside other church representatives, leading to amendments in the Land Tenure Act that exempted churches from certain restrictions. However, his banning order remained, as the regime considered him a political threat.

A 1978 accord between Smith's government and moderate Black leaders paved the way for the election of Bishop Abel Muzorewa as prime minister of the state known as Zimbabwe Rhodesia, but it lacked international recognition because ZANU and ZAPU had not participated (Maposa, 2013).

Enos Nkala

Nkala, a founding member of ZANU, was actively involved in the nationalist struggle. He opposed the UDI and was part of the efforts to mobilize against Smith's regime. Nkala's political career was marked by his involvement in key nationalist activities and later by his roles in Zimbabwe's independent government.

In response to UDI, some nationalists agitated for a shift in approach to the Rhodesian government. Edgar Tekere introduced the motion to depose Sithole as supreme leader and install Mugabe in his place while he was incarcerated. Mugabe became the leader when Nkala and Nyagumbo voted in his favour (Martin & Johnson 1981).

Ndabaningi Sithole

Shortly before the UDI, in 1964, at a party Congress in the city of Gwelo, Sithole was elected president and appointed Robert Mugabe as his secretary-general. Sithole, as the first leader of ZANU, was a vocal critic of the UDI (Sithole,1977). That same year, Ian Smith's government banned ZANU. Sithole was arrested on June 22, 1964, along with Mugabe, Tekere, Nyagumbo, and Takawira, for their political activities, leading to a 10-year imprisonment. While in prison, after the UDI, Sithole authorized Chitepo to continue the struggle abroad as ZANU's representative. He was later convicted of plotting to assassinate Ian Smith and was released from prison in 1974.

Sithole joined Abel Muzorewa's transitional government under the Internal Settlement on July 31, 1979, and later participated in the Lancaster House Agreement in September 1979, which paved the way for new elections (Hlongwana, et al., 2013; Maposa, 2013). However, his ZANU-Ndonga party struggled as Mugabe's ZANLA troops targeted its supporters, leading to the party's failure in the 1980 elections.

Robert Mugabe

Mugabe was a key nationalist leader who strongly opposed the UDI. He was instrumental in organizing resistance against the Smith regime and later became the leader of ZANU-PF, leading the armed struggle that eventually resulted in Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Robert Mugabe emphasized the need for an intensified armed struggle, stating that the UDI had made it clear that the only way to achieve majority rule was through force (Raftopoulos & Savage,2004). Two years after his release from prison in 1976, Mugabe was quoted as saying, "Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote we shall have, shall have been the product of the gun (Meredith, 2002).

Appeal to Traditional and Cultural leaders

In response to the UDI, Mugabe sought to mobilize the Africans to remove the Ian Smith regime. Mugabe was known for his capacity to mobilize political support through the use of culture. He witnessed firsthand how Kwame Nkrumah exploited entertainment to elevate his political reputation when he joined the nationalist movement in Ghana. Another outstanding cultural nationalist was Nkomo. During this period, other nationalist leaders increasingly sought traditional ritual blessings, driven by personal ambitions to challenge Nkomo's leadership. Nkomo's visit to the Matopos shrines inspired other nationalists, including Simon Muzenda and figures from Mashonaland, to undertake a similar pilgrimage to Great Zimbabwe in 1962, where they offered beer to ancestral spirits (Fontein 2006).

Despite these emerging rivalries, traditional leaders largely continued to recognize Nkomo's authority. For instance, Chief Sigombe Mathema of Enqameni in Wenlock ceremoniously presented Nkomo with symbolic items, such as an assegai, a knobkerrie, and traditional regalia, affirming their importance in his struggle for political rights. However, Mugabe surpassed him when he snatched all prominent Shona spirit mediums, including Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Kaguvi, and Chaminuka, to imbue his leadership and the ZANU liberation goal with religious solemnity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008).

Advocacy for Sanctions

In his essay entitled "Struggle for Southern Africa," Mugabe shows that he advocated for comprehensive economic sanctions against Rhodesia, arguing that economic isolation would weaken the regime and hasten its downfall. He criticized any countries that supported or traded with Rhodesia post-UDI (Mugabe, 1987). The sanctions ultimately contributed to the regime's downfall (Minter & Schmidt, 1988).

Escalation of Guerrilla Warfare

Despite ideological and strategic differences, nationalist groups made efforts to form alliances and present a united front against the common enemy of White minority rule. The history of the Rhodesian War is subject to debate, including key details such as its start date and pivotal moments.

It is widely accepted that the war started when a group of seven ZANLA freedom fighters, referred to as "The Chinhoyi 7," with a mission to carry out sabotage operations as part of the broader guerrilla warfare against the Rhodesian government, clashed on April 28, 1966, with Rhodesian forces (Hagemann, 2016). The Chinhoyi 7 are revered as heroes in Zimbabwe, and their sacrifice is commemorated as a pivotal moment in the country's struggle against colonial rule (Chari, 2014). The ZANLA attacked Altena farm in the Centenary district on December 21, 1972, marking the beginning of the nationalist struggle's full-fledged militant phase in the 1970s (Chisi, 2019). The ZPRA narrative challenges the mainstream account, suggesting that the war's inception was marked by the 1963 Cold Comfort Conference. ZPRA contends that battles like the Zidube Range in 1964 and the Mburungwe battle of 1965 were significant but are often overlooked in official history (Hagemann, 2016; Chatambudza & Hove, 2019).

However, during the early years of Zimbabwe's independence, ZAPU's history and contributions to the liberation struggle were systematically marginalized by the ZANU-PF government, and ZIPRA records were confiscated, promoting a singular narrative centered around ZANLA and ZANU-PF Key examples include the bombing of the Salisbury fuel tanks on 11th of December 1978 by ZIPRA elements following ZIPRA Operations Turning Point Strategy of 1977. One of the most significant events that convinced the Rhodesian government

they were facing a sophisticated adversary (Chatambudza & Hove, 2019).

In 1979, ZIPRA forces shot down two civilian aircraft within five months, Air Rhodesia Flight 825 and Air Rhodesia Flight 827, events that shocked and angered the Rhodesian government. These events resulted in derailing Smith-Nkomo negotiations that were reported to be progressing well and resulted in covert operations by the Rhodesian Air Force, Operation Vanity, that bombed refugee bases and camps occupied by ZAPU members in neighbouring Zambia (Cilliers, 1984; Nkomo & Harman, 1984). These events and bombings in neighbouring Mozambique resulted in these governments putting pressure on the nationalists to agree to attend the Lancaster House talks that ultimately led to independence.

Cross-border Operations and Support from Neighbouring Countries

In response to escalating tensions in Rhodesia, in 1974, the leaders of Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana formed an informal consultancy body, later called the Frontline states. The leaders of Angola and Mozambique later joined forces to form a 5-nation grouping (Hull, 1977). These members were the ones directly involved in resolving the conflict by negotiating with the nationalists and the Rhodesian government (Houser, 1989). The nationalists utilized this initiative to create rear bases, especially in Zambia and Mozambique (Francis, 1979). These Frontline states were instrumental in advocating for international support against the Rhodesian government as well as coercing the nationalists to fight as a united front, and ultimately, the Lancaster House Conference that gave birth to the elections in 1979, birthing the Zimbabwe nation.

This period saw increased recruitment, training, and deployment of guerrilla fighters, with support from sympathetic African nations and socialist countries (Howard, 2020; Henkin, 2013).

International Diplomacy and Advocacy

Role of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)

A month before the UDI, at the conference of the OAU Heads of State 41 held in Accra in October 1965, African States called on Britain, inter alia, to abrogate the 1961 Constitution; to call a constitutional

conference to be attended by the representatives of the whole people of Rhodesia with a view to agreeing on a new Constitution; and to ensure the release of political leaders and other detainees (OAU 1965). By the same resolution, member states agreed to use all possible means, including the use of force, against any unilateral declaration of independence and to extend strong support to the people of Zimbabwe to establish rule by the majority in their country. Kwame Nkrumah condemned Britain's failure to act against Rhodesia's racial oppression, accusing it of shielding White minority rule under colonial legality. (Eze 1975).

Grassroots Mobilization and Civil Disobedience

Organizing the Black Population

Grassroots mobilization and civil disobedience played a crucial role in organizing the Black population in Rhodesia following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965. Following UDI, Black political organizations, notably the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), intensified their efforts to resist White minority rule. These organizations employed a range of strategies, including grassroots mobilization, which involved engaging rural and urban communities in the struggle for liberation through rallies, political education, clandestine meetings, strikes, and boycotts (Munochiveyi 2014).

The Smith regime employed a variety of tactics, including censorship, mass arrests, and the implementation of emergency powers to maintain control.

Significant Conferences and Agreements

The Rhodesian crisis witnessed several pivotal diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the conflict between the White minority regime and African nationalist movements. The Victoria Falls Conference (August 1975) marked an early attempt at negotiation, convened aboard a train straddling the border between Rhodesia and Zambia. Despite symbolic significance, talks between Ian Smith's government and nationalist leaders—including Joshua Nkomo and Ndabaningi Sithole collapsed due to mutual distrust and procedural disagreements (Windrich, 1977).
Subsequently, the Geneva Conference (October–December 1976), sponsored by the United Kingdom and the United States, sought to broker a transition to majority rule. It brought together Smith, Robert

Mugabe (ZANU), and Nkomo (ZAPU). However, the conference failed as Smith resisted immediate majority rule, and nationalists demanded an end to White dominance. The breakdown intensified the guerrilla war and international condemnation.

On 3 March 1978, Smith signed the Internal Settlement with moderate African leaders: Sithole, Bishop Abel Muzorewa (UANC), and Chief Jeremiah Chirau (ZUPO). This agreement excluded the Patriotic Front (a ZANU-ZAPU alliance), which continued to engage in armed resistance. Though it established a Transitional Government, the settlement lacked legitimacy and failed to halt the conflict.

In 1979, Muzorewa briefly led the Zimbabwe Rhodesia government, but it was dismissed by Robert Mugabe as a "neocolonial puppet." The war persisted until the Lancaster House Agreement later that year, which ultimately paved the way for Zimbabwean independence.

The Deaths of Jason Moyo, Herbert Chitepo, and Josiah Tongogara: Assassinations or Accidents?

The deaths of Jason Moyo, Herbert Chitepo in 1975, Jason Moyo in 1977, and Josiah Tongogara in 1979 have long been shrouded in controversy, raising questions about the motivations behind these tragedies (Warner 1981; Brittain 2006). These figures were pivotal in Zimbabwe's liberation, and their untimely deaths have often been interpreted through the lens of internal power struggles, factionalism, and tribalism within the nationalist movements (Fontein 2018).

The assassinations of Jason Moyo and Herbert Chitepo were widely attributed to Rhodesian counterintelligence efforts, aiming to weaken the nationalist movements by eliminating their key leaders. However, the persistence of unexplained "road accidents" that claimed the lives of other prominent figures within the liberation movements, both during and after the war, raises questions about internal dynamics within these movements themselves (Msindo 2016).

In the case of Chitepo, a self-confessed Rhodesia assassin, Peter Stiff claimed responsibility (Stiff 2002). He claims it was an attempt to provoke the two rival parties, ZANU and ZAPU, into accusing each other and widening the rift, thereby deterring the two organizations from their war effort. The Zambian government responded to the killing of Chitepo by arresting senior ZANU members based in Zambia (Msindo, 2016). However, Chikozho-Mazarire (2011) shows that internal killings were common in ZANU and suggests that as many as 70

guerrillas were killed in one such disagreement. Nhari, a commander, ordered the killings, and he also ultimately met the same fate.

Long-term Impact on Zimbabwean Politics

The nationalists have a long-term impact on Zimbabwe. The tribal division persisted, and in the early to mid-eighties, violent clashes in the form of Gukurahundi were largely considered tribal-led, resulting in substantial loss of life. The nationalist movements' reliance on violence during the liberation struggle left a legacy where violence and intimidation became normalized in Zimbabwean politics (Kriger, 2003). This culture of violence has manifested in numerous election cycles, where political violence, intimidation, and state-sponsored repression have been used to suppress dissent and opposition (Dodo et al 2016). This enduring legacy has hindered the development of a truly democratic political culture, perpetuating cycles of fear and repression.

This emphasis on a liberation identity has also been used by the ruling party to legitimize its authority and frame opposition as unpatriotic (Lewanika, 2014). The legacy of this nation-building process has contributed to a sense of pride and resilience among Zimbabweans but has also been manipulated for political purposes, often at the expense of genuine democratic development.

Theoretical Analysis of the Literature

The nationalist response to Rhodesia's UDI has been widely examined through historical and political lenses, yet its deeper ideological and structural underpinnings demand a more nuanced theoretical engagement. Postcolonial Theory, particularly Frantz Fanon's work on colonial violence and resistance, offers a compelling framework for understanding the shift from political negotiation to armed struggle. Fanon (1963) argues that colonial repression inevitably provokes counter-violence as a means of reclaiming agency. In the Rhodesian context, the banning of nationalist parties and imprisonment of leaders such as Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe exemplified the systemic denial of African political participation, which accelerated the turn toward militarized resistance (Meredith, 2002).

This repression was not incidental but rooted in the logic of Settler Colonialism, which Patrick Wolfe (2006) describes as a structure premised on the elimination of the native to secure settler dominance.

Rhodesia's White minority rule, sustained through UDI, functioned as a settler strategy to preserve racial and economic control in defiance of decolonization pressures. The ideological justification for this system—framed as a bulwark against communism and chaos—mirrored the racial paternalism seen in other settler regimes, notably apartheid South Africa (Good, 2015; Smith, 1997). The ideological divergence between ZANU and ZAPU, often shaped by tribal affiliations and leadership rivalries, reflected colonial legacies of divide-and-rule and foreshadowed the factionalism that would persist into post-independence Zimbabwe (Sithole, 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008).

In response to both internal repression and external diplomatic inertia, nationalist movements adapted their strategies in line with Political Opportunity Theory. Tarrow (1998) and McAdam (1998) argue that social movements evolve in response to shifts in political structures and international support. The backing of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Frontline States, and global condemnation of UDI created new avenues for diplomatic advocacy and military coordination. These external pressures, combined with the failure of British intervention, shaped the nationalists' decision to intensify armed struggle and seek legitimacy through international platforms (Eze, 1975; Martin & Johnson, 1981).

Crucially, the use of media, particularly radio broadcasts from exile, emerged as a vital tool for mobilization and counterpropaganda. Drawing on Media and Communication Theory, Stuart Hall's (2019) encoding/decoding model helps explain how nationalist leaders crafted messages of unity and resistance that resonated with African audiences, despite Rhodesian efforts to distort or suppress them. Benedict Anderson's (2020) concept of "imagined communities" further illuminates how these broadcasts helped forge a collective identity among dispersed populations, uniting them in the struggle for majority rule. The strategic deployment of media thus complemented military and diplomatic efforts, reinforcing the nationalist narrative and sustaining morale across borders (Kriger, 1992; Chung, 2006).

Conclusion

The UDI by Rhodesia was a complex and multifaceted decision driven by the desire to maintain White minority rule, reject British pressure for decolonization, fear of communist influence, economic interests, and deep-seated ideological beliefs. The UDI was met with widespread

international condemnation and resulted in significant economic sanctions. The UDI lacked recognition internationally and several UN resolutions were passed against it. The OAU along with neighbouring Frontline states put a strong diplomatic offensive in support of the nationalists. The Smith government responded by strategically using media to reshape public opinion and suppress dissent. Most nationalists were imprisoned and their political parties banned.

This resulted in a prolonged liberation struggle, ultimately resulting in the establishment of Zimbabwe as an independent nation in 1980. The response of Zimbabwean nationalists to the UDI was multifaceted, combining armed struggle, international advocacy, and grassroots mobilization to resist the Rhodesian regime. The nationalists mobilized the Africans to remove the Ian Smith regime using cultural appeal, civil disobedience and military initiatives. The military campaign utilized rear bases especially in Zambia, and Mozambique.

The UDI not only intensified the liberation struggle but also galvanized nationalist movements to work together in their quest for independence. The ideological differences between the main nationalist movements, ZANU PF and ZAPU, often played out along tribal lines and persisted into post-independent Zimbabwe. The resilience and determination of these nationalists eventually led to the attainment of independence in 1980, after years of protracted conflict and negotiation.

International diplomatic efforts to end the Rhodesian government included the Victoria Falls Conference, the Geneva Conference, the Internal Settlement, and finally the Lancaster House Conference, which led to independence.

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