



Conclusion

To step back and assess the entire period covered in this book it is possible to reflect on unintended consequences of this diplomatic history. First, the preoccupation with creating mechanisms to keep whites in Zimbabwe that began with the plans for the Geneva talks was of a much higher priority for Western powers than finding ways to avert a potential civil war between ZAPU and ZANU after independence. From a Cold War and domestic political perspective in Britain and the United States, avoiding a potential “race war” was a greater priority than avoiding a potential “civil war” between ZAPU and ZANU. For many Western diplomats who understood the core political nature of the *Gukurahundi* campaign in 1983, which in its extreme form was an attempt to “wipe out” the opposition once and for all, it became convenient to express this fundamentally political violence as a “tribal” conflict. The use by diplomats and experts of “tribal” or ethnic violence as the central rationalization of state violence allowed them to speak in a shorthand language with other bureaucrats, as well as to their own leadership, that increasingly categorized Zimbabwe and Mugabe as working within a presumably familiar mode of operation that was assumed to be similar to the rest of Africa. In this way, falling back on “tribal” or ethnic difference as the assumed and unquestioned African source of political violence allowed Europeans and Americans to detach themselves from their own nation’s responsibilities in creating the context for such postcolonial violence.

This book has looked at the archival records left by those involved in the creation of Zimbabwe as a postcolonial state. The main theme of the book has been to demonstrate a fundamental aspect of twentieth century global diplomacy, the racializing of states during the Cold War. Rather than ascribing racist ideas solely to diplomats from the West as they interacted with African diplomats, it is fundamentally more significant to consider how entire state bureaucracies collectively fell back on ideas of race and ethnicity (tribalism) to rationalize actions and

inactions in specific chapters of Zimbabwe's decolonization. An additional contribution of this study has been to demonstrate the ways in which Zimbabwean and other African diplomats took advantage of how not only American and British diplomats, but also South African and Commonwealth diplomats, saw their demands through racial lenses.

The diplomatic efforts of Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe in particular, as well as many of their comrades and African diplomats from the Frontline States and Nigeria, help to demonstrate both the limits and opportunities the Cold War offered African leaders and diplomats. The situation created in the mid-1970s by the Portuguese dismantling of the colonies of Angola and Mozambique and the Cuban and Soviet support for the victorious MPLA in Angola dramatically changed the opportunities available to Zimbabwean nationalists. The previous chapters have demonstrated how Nkomo's ZAPU and Mugabe's ZANU took full advantage of this opportunity to negotiate on a much larger stage than previously thought possible. These two leaders, along with other diplomats, demonstrated many important characteristics of African diplomacy when confronted with ultimatums from more powerful Cold War powers. Their ability to use techniques of intransigence at times and cooperation at other times to try to build their own personal political and military power is to be expected. What is likely less expected, and less appreciated, is how well Nkomo and Mugabe worked together in the years from Geneva in 1976 through the Lancaster House talks in 1979.

Even though British diplomats were well aware of the long history of rivalry between Nkomo and Mugabe, they held a positive assessment of the way Nkomo and Mugabe negotiated together as the PF. Lord Carrington's private secretary, Roderic Lyne, would sum up the effectiveness of Nkomo and Mugabe's teamwork at the Lancaster talks. In a 1999 interview, Lyne recalled the "stormy" bilateral meetings held with the PF in Carrington's office. He recalls how Nkomo would pound angrily on the coffee table, so much so that those present expected it to eventually break. Lyne also recalled the successful chemistry between Nkomo and Mugabe during these heated talks. "Nkomo would do a lot of talking and shouting and ranting. He was a big powerful man and he'd bring his fists crashing down on the coffee table." Meanwhile, as Nkomo "ranted" on, Lyne remembers, "Mugabe would sit there saying very little, but he was an extremely

clever, very astute man. Then he would come in at a certain point with a rapier thrust. He would make some killer point, a point that was really difficult to answer.” Lyne summed up the nature of the PF relations at Lancaster: “Nkomo and Mugabe didn’t like each other; they were rivals for power. They were very suspicious of each other, but they were also a pretty clever double act and tough to negotiate with; a very wearing process.”¹

There are a number of reasons why this close cooperation between Nkomo and Mugabe as diplomats has not been fully acknowledged in the Zimbabwean historiography. This book has demonstrated that while Nkomo was definitely trying to find a way to become Zimbabwe’s first leader, he never betrayed the promise made to Nyerere and the Frontline State presidents to remain in the PF. The preceding chapters show that this was not necessarily a loyalty emanating from Nkomo’s personal “character,” but rather the pressures he faced to maintain Soviet, Eastern bloc, and OAU military and financial support. The details of the multilateral diplomacy carried out over years in order to get the PF to the negotiating table also reveal an alternative explanation of Robert Mugabe’s characterization as an intransigent politician. For many, this pattern is seen as a sign of his strength. In reality, his inflexibility was often linked to his relatively weak position as the outright leader of ZANU. The historical record, at least as can be reconstructed from the sources available from archives to date, demonstrates that Nkomo was often in a better position to be intransigent and more radical than Mugabe. At other times, particularly during August and September 1978, it was Mugabe’s confidence that he and ZANU would ultimately come to power that helps to explain his unwillingness to work with Nkomo toward a ceasefire and transfer of power negotiated by the Nigerians, the Zambians, and the British. The continuation of the war, and the escalation of the war after September 1978, led to extensive loss of life among combatants and civilians. This was an unfortunate escalation of the war at a point when the South Africans and the Rhodesians recognized that the liberation war was “unwinnable” from the Rhodesian and SADF perspective, as the South Africans had made clear to the Rhodesians since 1977.

¹ BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index, Lyne, Sir Roderic Michael John (Born 31 March 1948), 26.

The ways Nkomo was portrayed at the time and subsequently has unfairly presented him as a leader who would “sell-out” the nationalist interest to cut a deal to make himself the leader. He may have had the chance to do so a few times, but in each case, he insisted on remaining with Mugabe in the PF. It is important to reiterate, however, that his consistent commitment to stay in the PF was done because he understood that to split the PF would amount to political suicide for him and his party. He knew that the military aid received from the Soviets, the Eastern bloc, the OAU, and many European sources would transfer to Mugabe and ZANU if he was seen as initiating the break in the PF to join the internal settlement.² In addition, Nkomo’s personal rivalry with Bishop Muzorewa meant that he was not going to try and form an alliance with Muzorewa and the United African National Council, even as Western diplomats tried to make this alliance happen.

There are many historical lessons to be learned from the diplomacy conducted to create Zimbabwe. The significant intervention of the Americans in 1975 and 1976 had a large impact on the outcomes of Zimbabwe’s decolonization process. Historian Jeremi Suri, in the introduction to his political biography of Henry Kissinger, notes that Kissinger’s career saw him “work feverishly to make the world a better place. His actions, however, did not always contribute to a world of greater freedom and justice.” Suri diplomatically remarks that Kissinger “contends with his own complicity in unintended consequences.”³ Based on the evidence presented in Chapters 3 and 4, Kissinger in southern Africa seemed to gain personal satisfaction from his complicity with the South Africans and Rhodesians. It seems that Kissinger in particular, was determined to try for the outcome he wanted (i.e., Smith’s announcement that he accepted majority rule in two years), and he really “didn’t give a damn about Rhodesia” beyond that goal.⁴ Kissinger’s attempt to “solve” the Rhodesian problem certainly forced the British to get more involved in Rhodesia, something they were generally doing their best to avoid. But Kissinger’s insistence on

² See Gorden Moyo, “Mugabe’s Neo-sultanist Rule: Beyond the Veil of Pan-Africanism,” in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ed., *Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 61–74.

³ Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

⁴ This point is made in Stephen Stedman, *Peacemaking in Civil War: International Mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974–1980* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), 119–23.

pressuring the Frontline State presidents and South Africa to bring the PF and Smith's government to Geneva certainly changed the dynamics of the negotiations in the Cold War race state context.

As shown in Chapters 5 and 6, the British were in no hurry in 1977 and 1978 to reach a settlement, nor, it would seem, were the Frontline State presidents. It seemed that the liberation war had turned in favor of the liberation war armies, so there was no need to move too quickly. However, into this void entered Ian Smith and his "EXCO" who were bent upon reaching an internal settlement that would result in a black prime minister, but most importantly the lifting of sanctions and the return to international recognition. The pressures from the Frontline State presidents and pressure groups in Africa, the United States, and the Commonwealth nations did not allow the internal settlement and "Zimbabwe-Rhodesia" to work as planned, resulting in the dramatic results of the Lancaster House negotiations in 1979. The Americans wanted to avoid another "Horn of Africa" Cold War conflict by 1978–79, so they put greater pressure on the parties to negotiate. In the end, it was South African and Rhodesian raids into Zambia and Mozambique that forced the Frontline State presidents – Presidents Kaunda and Machel in particular – to put the ultimate pressure on Nkomo and Mugabe to negotiate in earnest.

As emphasized from the outset of this book, the use of diplomatic files as sources of history presents potential problems regarding how power relations are presented, and how voices are mediated. However mediated and biased these sources are, I believe that these files offer a valuable window into the world of power negotiations and reveal, in historical time, the ways in which leaders such as Nkomo and Mugabe confronted the offers of the Cold War powers and Frontline State presidents to try to achieve the goal of African sovereignty, as well as compete with each other in order to become the first leader of the new state. These files have also shown that the more powerful states involved, particularly the United States, Britain, and South Africa, were not as capable of managing the decolonization process as they sometimes believed. In the end, South African support for the internal settlement did help to force the PF to accept the Lancaster House agreements, but the weaknesses of Muzorewa's Zimbabwe-Rhodesia state coalesced with Cold War pressures from the United States and Britain to insist that the PF be the main power brokers at Lancaster House.

A major tragedy of Cold War conflicts in Africa is that the continued funding of ZANLA and ZIPRA by so many outside forces meant that Mugabe and Nkomo were never forced by material circumstances to combine their militaries. As much as they succeeded in combining their diplomatic talents to navigate and negotiate a decolonization process, the recognized problems of two separate liberation armies would lead to a major tragedy after independence. As discussed earlier in Chapter 9, Richard Werbner's important argument that the "quasi-nationalisms" and ethnic political violence that tore apart the vision of a united Zimbabwe was fundamentally a product of the two liberation armies that were, with some important exceptions, recruited on ethnic lines. Attempts to force real unity on the PF, and the Frontline State presidents' attempt to use the OAU Liberation Committee to do so, all failed given that there remained other options for Nkomo and Mugabe to fund the war.

As this book has attempted to demonstrate, the development of ethnicity as an operating factor within the factionalism of Zimbabwean nationalists also contributed to the Anglo-Americans' consistent interpretation of almost every new development, or most often setback, in the liberation struggle through the lens of ethnicity. What these chapters have hopefully demonstrated, is that the personal rivalries and political struggles between ZAPU and ZANU were more significant than the ethnic differences. In the end, however, the election campaigning and the post-independence violence that culminated in the *Gukurahundi*, while politically driven, was to be rationalized by many different international actors and diplomats as primarily an ethnic conflict – one that the foreign powers could conveniently wash their hands of, using tropes of supposed typical African state behavior, even while they remained intimately involved in the restructuring and day-to-day practices of the ZNA.

Once Mugabe and ZANU had taken power, the ability of the United States and Britain to influence behaviors were limited, particularly in terms of the ability to curb the abuse of state power in Mugabe's goal of destroying Nkomo and ZAPU and creating a one-party state. The diplomatic record demonstrates that British and American diplomats did more to try to stop the excesses of 5 Brigade violence than is often believed, but it also shows that no matter the amount of leverage they had, the decision was made by their superiors in the FCO and US Department of State to avoid antagonizing the goodwill and anti-Soviet stance of Mugabe's government over the *Gukurahundi*. South Africa, after failing to keep

Mugabe from coming to power, and who had responded with immediate acts of sabotage and assassination attempts on Mugabe's life, eventually worked out a relationship involving the two countries' mutual security interest in weakening ZAPU and also weakened the ability of the South African ANC to operate freely from Zimbabwe. This cooperation was far from being "successful," as both sides worked to undermine it, but the existence of this cooperation suggests that the longstanding relationship between Rhodesian military and intelligence and South African counterparts did not end in 1980. That is, despite Mugabe and ZANU's strong anti-apartheid rhetoric and international reputation, when it came to compromising with South Africa on economic and security issues, they understood well that they could not push too hard against South Africa. In a perverse way, South Africa's destabilization efforts with "Super-ZAPU" allowed the Zimbabwean state to continue renewing the state-of-emergency measures that, in turn, permitted state agents and the military to act with impunity against ZAPU. International knowledge of South African involvement also offered Mugabe and others in ZANU the ability to justify the use of state violence against its own citizens.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the obvious, that the institutional racialization of "white states" and "black states" in Africa did not end with the decolonization of Zimbabwe. It remains part of the culture of diplomacy, media coverage, and public opinion some forty years later. These sorts of underlying rhetorical devices are infused in much of the debates and multilateral and bilateral negotiations of today. Hopefully, the evidence presented here can allow students of history to reflect on the power of such belief systems and help to understand how they remain extremely detrimental to ending the cycles of violence and brutality still evident today. It is important to emphasize that the historical narrative presented in this book has tried to make the case that this violence was never only an "African problem," but rather the continuation of many historical strains of violence. It is also impossible and dangerous, therefore, to place all the responsibility for the political violence of the 1980s only on the shoulders of Robert Mugabe. The tendency to do so only perpetuates the personification of history, missing out on how such large-scale state crimes are not just done because of one individual. It is also worth remembering that it was not just one or two Anglo-American leaders who were responsible for the hypocrisies and hubris of Western leaders and bureaucracies in this history. It would take entire foreign relations bureaucracies in the

United States and Britain to achieve this. They had congratulated themselves in 1980 for their role in creating a client state in a Cold War sense, but they were also relieved that the new Zimbabwe was no longer viewed as their responsibility. By 1983 and 1984, the Zimbabwean government and its state crimes could be defined and classified as outside the responsibility of those powers who only a few years earlier celebrated their role in creating a new type of Cold War race state.