

**Independence and Pan-African Diplomatic Contestation: Anti-colonial
Nationalism and the Eclipse of White Legitimacy in ‘British Central Africa’, 1957-
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The rapid collapse of European empires in Africa transformed the politics of the white settler dominated states at the south of the continent. In what briefly remained ‘British Central Africa’, the rise of sovereign states created a new sphere of political competition between white officials and their anti-colonial nationalist opponents. White authorities, while perturbed by imperial retreat and committed to racial discrimination at home, nonetheless attempted to cultivate the emerging African nations. After some initial diplomatic success in west Africa, increasingly assertive African leaders became more overtly aligned with the cause of African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia, the pre-eminent British settler colony in the region. The presence of white settler officials at African independence celebrations generally became unacceptable. Conversely, the colony’s anti-colonial nationalists, initially excluded from independence ceremonies, quickly became the preferred diplomatic interlocutor at these events. This transformation forestalled settler attempts to establish diplomatic footholds in majority-ruled African states, but also spurred intra-nationalist factionalism. This analysis adds new insights on the rise

of white unilateralism, the process by which the ‘wind of change’ reached southern Africa, and underscores the swift radicalisation of pan-African diplomacy.

Keywords: decolonisation, race, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Milton Obote, Central African Federation, Rhodesia

Introduction

The independence of Ghana on 6 March 1957 is often portrayed as an unadulterated pan-African convocation that ignited the quest for self-determination in Africa.¹ As British control over the colony ended, Kwame Nkrumah, the new country’s leader, famously declared, ‘our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent’.² Scholars have been cognizant of the uphill struggle that remained to fulfil this edict, carefully admonishing their contemporaries to not regard the rapid decolonization of the continent that subsequently ensued as inevitable.³

A nuanced reconsideration may also be required for descriptions of Ghana’s inauguration into the comity of nations. While Kwame Nkrumah invited a bevy of pan-African leaders to the celebration as his personal guests, the British government retained overall responsibility for the event’s guest list.⁴ Thus, alongside pan-African icons like George Padmore and CLR James, a ministerial representative of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953-63), a bastion of white settler power in what was then frequently called ‘British Central Africa’, was present. That official was joined by the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe), the pre-eminent white state in that Federation and its only constituent with a quasi-independent status. In this initial wave of African decolonisation, Britain’s attempts to superintend pan-African

nationalism, coupled with the Federation's sporadic efforts to diplomatically negotiate the 'wind of change', briefly evoked the possibility of an alternative path before the Federation and Southern Rhodesia assumed pariah status on most of the continent.

The independence of sub-Saharan African nations in the late 1950s and early 1960s became a critical sphere of contestation among the opposing political forces in Southern Rhodesia and the Federation, which also included Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (today's Zambia and Malawi). This article straddles the blurred nexus of Federal and Southern Rhodesian politics. Southern Rhodesia and the Federation shared a capital, Salisbury, from where dual legislatures and prime ministers operated on behalf of each entity.⁵ Until late 1962, both territorial spheres were governed by the United Federal Party (UFP, or its predecessors). The Federal parliament was initially seen as more prestigious – it presided over major services for whites and oversaw more expansive portfolios like foreign affairs. A disproportionate number of Federal parliamentarians and Federal diplomats hailed from Southern Rhodesia.

Federal and Rhodesian officials and their anti-colonial nationalist foes jockeyed to manipulate the historic occasions to their advantage and secure political representation in the new territories. As African political authority became more entrenched, the Federation's diplomatic footprint across Africa receded. Within a handful of years Ghana's reception of Federal officials became obsolete. As Matteo Grilli noted, following independence, 'Nkrumah had the power and resources to put Ghana's Pan-African policy into practice'.⁶

Independence celebrations emerged as a forum for new leaders to display their pan-African credentials and criticise the policies of the Federation and Rhodesia's settler rulers. Southern Rhodesia's black nationalists began to establish foreign offices in countries that had recently been under imperial control. Whites in Rhodesia turned

inward, becoming disenchanted with the Commonwealth and repudiating the Federation's principal slogan, the vaguely defined, but progressive sounding call for 'multi-racial partnership'. This process culminated with the dissolution of the Federation in December 1963 and Salisbury's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from British rule almost two years later.⁷

Conversely, the presence of, and support for, anti-colonial Zimbabwean nationalists gathered pace as independence currents accelerated. Organised black political activity in Southern Rhodesia lagged behind that of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. A reconstituted Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC) was only formed in 1957, making it considerably younger than its fraternal Federal counterparts, the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC, 1944) and Northern Rhodesia African National Congress (NRANC, 1948). SRANC and NAC were both banned in 1959 and replaced by the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), respectively. The NDP was itself proscribed at the end of 1961 after it had begun to successfully cultivate networks on the pan-African stage.

However, the emergence of newly empowered continental allies was a double-edged sword for Zimbabwean nationalism. Weeks before the Federation was dissolved at the end of 1963, competing delegations of Zimbabwean nationalists attended independence celebrations in Kenya. The rise of independent African nations made white rule in southern Africa more precarious, but simultaneously fostered divisions among nationalists as competition emerged for the spoils of pan-African backing. An analysis of the struggle for representation at African independence events and the consequential competition for diplomatic recognition illuminates the making of two of the most significant dynamics of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle: the white minority's

willingness to ‘go it alone’ and the internecine conflict within the nationalist movement that prolonged white resistance to majority rule.

Following a literature review the remainder of this article ventures from west to east and explores the impact of several African independence celebrations on Federal and Southern Rhodesian politics, primarily during the life of the Federation. This scope includes both tangible representation at the actual independence celebrations, but also attempts to secure diplomatic representation, and the domestic positioning and rhetoric from the region’s various political factions amidst the historic ceremonies. The independence of Ghana, the Republic of Congo (today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo), Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi feature (in that order) most prominently. This approach reflects the chronological unfolding of independence; it is simultaneously a geographic nod to Michael West’s articulation of a ‘Global Africa’, a pan-African framework which saw the ideology’s focal point shift from the west bank of the Atlantic Ocean to its east, where it contracted and became more exclusionary under state sponsored patronage.⁸

Zambia, a seemingly obvious inclusion in this framework is omitted. Many senior Zimbabwean nationalists were detained shortly before its independence in October 1964. Two leading nationalists who escaped the clampdown, James Chikerema and George Nyandoro, were guests of honour of Kenneth Kaunda, the incoming Zambian President at the celebration. However, there is little evidence that Zambia’s independence ceremony played a notable role in Rhodesian political competition.⁹ Unfortunately, the documentary basis for that conclusion is challenged by enhanced restrictions on the Rhodesian press from that August. The account has significantly richer source material with which to inspect the settler side of this contestation, principally the archives of the Federation’s Ministry of External Affairs. While

negligible extant archival material hampers the recovery of the behind the scenes experience of the nationalists at independence events, this article explores their diplomatic canvassing through newspaper accounts and party organs which celebrated the then novel international outreach.

Reviving the Decolonisation Moment

As Miles Larmer has noted, questions arising at the moment of decolonisation, received significant attention at the time, but ‘have been surprisingly neglected ever since’.¹⁰ However, there are signs of burgeoning interest in the impact of Africa’s decolonisation on the white settler states of southern Africa. This modest corpus of literature often centres around the dominant player in the subregion, South Africa.¹¹ In the Zimbabwean context, Timothy Scarnecchia, Matthew Hughes, and this author have explored the impact of developments following the independence of the Congo on Southern Rhodesia and the Federation.¹² Others, like Zoe Groves, have looked to the transnational inspiration bequeathed by fraternal nationalist movements, like the MCP.¹³ While these works prominently foreground events leading up to, and following the moment of national independence, they are not tightly focused on the occasion conferring national sovereignty or broader questions concerning diplomatic recognition. Other works that trace wider aspects of the diplomatic dimension of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle tend to emphasise international conferences.¹⁴

The wider literature on African independence celebrations similarly eschews a focus on the original independence moment. There is a modest body of work that explores independence commemorations across the continent, including post-colonial Zimbabwe.¹⁵ Africa’s Golden Jubilee’s, the commemoration of 50 years of

independence, provided significant impetus for this scholarship.¹⁶ However, these works are not diplomatic histories, they are generally concerned with the implications of subsequent commemorations on post-colonial nation-building and citizenship. They infrequently encompass the original transfer of sovereignty from the departing imperial ruler, the principal focus of this study, although Sue Onslow has documented Zimbabwe's 1980 independence ceremony.¹⁷ One of the most significant exceptions providing a targeted study capturing political culture associated with the immediate coming of independence is an edited work, drawn from a special issue of *The Round Table*, that explores the independence celebrations of a range of newly sovereign Asian and African nations, primarily of The Commonwealth.¹⁸

The 'Africanisation of Partnership'

This study highlights the moment of imperial transfer and the advent of national sovereignty. The impact of wider African decolonisation on southern Africa's white settler states is elucidated through the framework of African independence celebrations and the ensuing contest for diplomatic recognition. The insights resulting from this approach are particularly pronounced among the white settler group, as the literature tends to focus on insular ties among the white regimes of the region.¹⁹ The scholarship on South Africa again outpaces the considerations of the attempts of other white-dominated territories in the region to grapple with African liberation. Roger Pfister and Jamie Miller have seriously assessed South Africa's foreign policy in Africa, rather than simply dismissing the country as an ostracised state with no international contacts.²⁰ Miller, in particular, has sought to demonstrate how the Apartheid State, particularly during the administration of John Vorster, attempted to 'Africanise Apartheid'.²¹

Southern Rhodesia's foreign policy was under the purview of the Federation. Although not independent, the latter enjoyed wide latitude to directly engage with external governments, especially those of the Commonwealth, after 1957. However, there have been few attempts to systematically investigate how Rhodesians and the Federation attempted to sell 'partnership' to what local whites dubbed the 'Black North'. Similarly, while there are detailed studies of South African liberation movements in exile, the Zimbabwean nationalist movement abroad beckons for more thorough treatment.²²

Although distant from southern Africa, west Africa was one of the most significant spheres in which attempts were made to implement 'partnership'. A High Commission of the Federation was opened in Lagos in April 1960.²³ It was staffed by black diplomats and the Federation dispatched several delegations to independence celebrations in the region.²⁴ However, the Federation's schizophrenic approach to west African independence highlights the inherent speciousness of the 'partnership' policy.

Freedom Now! Ghana and West African Independence

The granting of various foreign policy 'entrustments' from the UK to the Federation in April 1957 may have been an effort to mollify white Rhodesia's unease with Ghana's independence the previous month.²⁵ The formation of the Federation, often seen through an economic imperative, or as a means to deflect South Africa's influence, was also presented as a tool to blunt the rise of 'Gold Coastism' in southern Africa.²⁶ Roy Welensky, the Prime Minister of the Federation at the time of Ghana's independence, wrote shortly before Southern Rhodesia held a referendum on the creation of the grouping: 'there are the African Nationalists who want to see Northern Rhodesia and

Nyasaland handed over completely to African rule, as the Gold Coast has been. One of the most powerful arguments for federation is that it will prevent this from happening'.²⁷

Since 1952 Kwame Nkrumah had been Prime Minister of the Gold Coast, enjoying a measure of self-government, but not full independence from British rule. This development did not, at first, widely resonate among the white Rhodesian populace, but it unnerved the colony's leaders. In 1956, Godfrey Huggins, Welensky's predecessor, appealed to the UK's Secretary of State for the Commonwealth, Lord Home, for the independence of either the Federation, or Southern Rhodesia. Huggins wrote, 'the only reason why I feel it to be essential is to avert what would otherwise be a grave state of affairs by about 1958, caused by the strength of feeling of the largely European electorate, if places like the Gold Coast are given self-government and we are not'.²⁸ Huggins accurately diagnosed the significant anti-Nkrumah sentiment that quickly emerged among white Rhodesians. As the Federation's Chief Justice, Robert Tredgold reminisced, Ghana became a country 'constantly held up in Rhodesia as an example of oppressive government'.²⁹ However, at the time of the west African country's independence, the emphasis, at least in government circles, was on efforts to externalise the promotion of the Federation's commitment to 'partnership'. Huggins himself tried to have it both ways. In 1954, he publicly praised Nkrumah as 'an exceptional African'.³⁰ These were the two contrasting impulses that guided Southern Rhodesia and the Federation as Ghana attained sovereignty: recognition that the white Southern Rhodesian electorate was fundamentally opposed to majority rule, but a desire to diplomatically navigate The Commonwealth's post-war transformation.

Federal and Rhodesian Officialdom at Ghanaian Independence

On 27 February 1957, Malcolm Barrow, the Federation's Minister of Home Affairs, and Garfield Todd, Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister, departed Salisbury for the Gold Coast. Both travelled with their wives and private secretaries. In a sign of the linkages then in place between the 'White South' and 'Black North', their connecting flight originated in Johannesburg, South Africa. Another indication of the comparatively transparent political competition between the races at the time was the presence of another delegate to the ceremony, TDT Banda, the NAC's president, on the same flight.³¹ The two private secretaries even exchanged pleasantries with the Nyasa nationalist leader.³² Just two years later, the NAC would be banned and Banda's successor, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, imprisoned in Southern Rhodesia for over a year.

Barrow and Todd arrived in Accra on the morning of February 28. They were received at the airport by AL Adu, the Secretary of External Affairs, and champagne was served. Barrow found Adu 'exquisitely well-mannered and charming'.³³ Later that afternoon, Barrow spoke on Ghanaian radio. He wished Ghana 'a happy and prosperous future', took the opportunity to tout the Federation's development, and defended its commitment to 'partnership'. Barrow broadcast:

Our Federation is a multi-racial State. The preamble to our Constitution clearly indicates the intention that there should be equal opportunity for all races and it is the determination of the Federal Government to put this policy into effect while retaining the reins of government in responsible hands.³⁴

Barrow scored an impressive diplomatic achievement the following day, securing a 40-minute private audience with Kwame Nkrumah. The Federal minister recorded that 'the Prime Minister obviously had little knowledge of the Federation'.³⁵

Barrow apparently made no effort at this time to inquire about the possibility of opening a diplomatic mission in Accra. However, from 1960 on, expanding the Federation's diplomatic footprint in Africa became a significant concern. Much of their discussions centred around Ghanaian development schemes, but Barrow was also interested in Nkrumah's admission that due to personnel shortages, a considerable number of European civil servants would be kept on in the near term.³⁶ The latter point became a substantial talking point in the Federation, a reflection of white unease about their durability in the region. Garfield Todd publicly highlighted Nkrumah's commitment to retaining white officials following his return to Salisbury.³⁷ Coverage in the white-controlled, but black oriented media of the Federation pushed the same line into the early 1960s.³⁸

On 2 March, official festivities connected with the impending independence commenced. Barrow and Todd attended a succession of ceremonies, cocktail parties, receptions, and film screenings. Barrow approvingly noted that as he traversed Accra, the Federation's flag was 'in evidence at several points in the flag bedecked streets of the capital...and at other points along the ceremonial routes'.³⁹ Denoting his lack of genuine enthusiasm for the historic occasion, Barrow did not venture to the polo ground downtown for the actual independence moment at midnight on 6 March. Instead, he and his wife listened to the 'firecrackers, shouts, applause and other indications of pleasure' from his lodging.⁴⁰

However, Garfield Todd, mingled in the crowd and absorbed the electric environment. His wife, Grace, quoted his reactions to the arrival of the first British colony in sub-Saharan Africa to shed the imperial yoke:

I must say I felt that the Prime Minister did not measure up to the occasion. The Band played the Ghana National Anthem a couple of times, the Prime Minister

strung a hundred clichés together, but nevertheless received a tremendous hearing. When he worked himself up to a crescendo of enthusiasm and declared that Ghana was free at last of all foreign and imperial rule, a great roar swept the crowd. I had no feeling that I was about to be torn limb from limb. On the contrary, the people round about me turned and laughed in such a way as to say: ‘well, it isn’t really as bad as it sounds, but this is our night, you know, and I am sure you will understand’.⁴¹

Barrow and Todd departed the new country on the afternoon of 8 March, spending just over a week in Ghana. While their mere presence was a victory for the Federation’s promotion of ‘partnership’, Barrow’s meeting with Nkrumah belied a relative lack of contact with the emerging forces of pan-African nationalism. As Barrow’s trip report recorded, ‘we did not make any real contact with the foreign representatives or the numerous private guests of the Prime Minister’.⁴² He noted that he never saw Harry Nkumbula, NRANC’s leader, during his entire time in Ghana, but was confident that he and TDT Banda were both busy ‘seeking “solidarity”’ with Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party.⁴³

Rhodesian Nationalists and Ghana’s Independence

The white officials did not have to worry about the activities of Southern Rhodesian anti-colonial nationalists in Ghana. None were present. The colony only saw the inauguration of a territory-wide political movement that September. At the time of Ghana’s independence, the largest black political group in the colony was the City Youth League (CYL). Established in 1955, by the time of Ghanaian independence it claimed approximately 4,000 members and boasted 5 branches, all in the vicinity of Salisbury.⁴⁴ However, the formation of the CYL is generally considered as the beginning of ‘mass African nationalism’ in the colony.⁴⁵

As Joshua Nkomo, the leader of CYL's successor, SRANC, wrote in his memoir, 'it was manifest that others would be following' Ghana's independence.⁴⁶ The CYL greeted developments in Ghana with great enthusiasm. Although not physically present in Ghana, the group issued a statement gushing over the 'historic development...unique and highly commendable'.⁴⁷ The statement lavished praise on Nkrumah's leadership:

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of Ghana, armed with unity of purpose of his African people to gain independence, battled hard for this occasion, with foresight and judgement. He will go down in the annals of African history as one of the greatest sons of Africa. The state he has helped to found has immense responsibilities to face. We are confident that he will absolve these tasks ingenuously as he has done in the past. Ghana will be a symbol of true democracy whose men and women of all races and colour can live happily and peacefully, with opportunities of advancement for all, and malice towards none. We all join in the celebrations taking place there today, praying and trusting in God that Ghana will grow into a great African state within Africa and throughout the world.⁴⁸

Notably, the CYL commended the UK for its 'sympathetic ears' toward the people of Ghana and called on the British government to refrain from placing any obstacles on the path towards self-determination of its African territories.⁴⁹ While Zimbabwean nationalists would continue to appeal to Britain for intervention throughout the struggle, their tone became significantly more strident as African decolonisation garnered momentum. By mid-1961, the newsletter of the NDP, the principle nationalist political party in Southern Rhodesia, openly accused Britain of seeking to help the white settlers of the Federation extend their 'political and economic control.'⁵⁰

An editorial in the *Central African Daily News*, the paper of record for the Federation's black population, highlighted independence as a 'milestone' for the continent.⁵¹ In black political circles in Southern Rhodesia, commemorations of Ghanaian independence were predominantly confined to paper. One nationalist

supporter writing to a newspaper lamented the lack of public commemoration of the historic occasion in the colony.⁵² The lack of activity in Southern Rhodesia was particularly pronounced in comparison to Northern Rhodesia. In Lusaka, the Northern Rhodesian capital, an all-night dance at the NRANC office was held to mark Ghana's independence. One of Nkumbula's then top deputies, Kenneth Kaunda, announced to some 1,000 attendees that the party looked forward to the colony's own Independence Day. His rhetoric toward Britain was significantly more direct than that of his Southern Rhodesian counterparts. A newspaper account of the dance recorded that Kaunda declared 'the Union Jack will be buried and forgotten in Northern Rhodesia someday'.⁵³

The Tide Turns

As Britain's retreat from its west African empire progressed, Rhodesian whites became increasingly disconnected from the region's developments. At the first anniversary of Ghana's independence, SRANC was represented by its Secretary-General, George Nyandoro. Neither the Federation nor the Southern Rhodesian government were present. Nyandoro's visit received prominent press coverage and he boasted of meeting 'nearly all the cabinet ministers'.⁵⁴ He stayed in the country for about a week and a half and also visited Kumasi, the second city.⁵⁵ Weary of losing diplomatic ground, the authorities in Salisbury sought to thwart the visit. Nyandoro experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining a passport, and was ultimately issued a document that was only valid for two weeks.⁵⁶

The participation of both a Federal minister and the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister at Ghana's independence arguably represented the highwater mark of white Federal/Rhodesian pan-African diplomacy. The Federation sent a racially mixed delegation to Ghana's Republic Day celebration in July 1960.⁵⁷ In a sign of their

increased strength, Southern Rhodesian nationalists were represented at this event by Joshua Nkomo, soon to become the NDP's leader. In late 1961, Nkrumah invited the NDP to open an office in Accra.⁵⁸

A more rapid pattern of settler political decline was evident following Nigerian independence in 1960. Barrow and Mike Hove, a black Federal MP from Southern Rhodesia, represented the Federation at the independence of one of the most populous countries on the continent.⁵⁹ However at the installation of Nigeria's first black Governor-General weeks later, Hove, a white federal minister, and Nkomo were all present.⁶⁰ The NDP newsletter rejoiced over the absence of Edgar Whitehead, the Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister, and celebrated the party's rising diplomatic presence.⁶¹ The incoming Governor, Nnamdi Azikiwe, implicitly criticised the Federation and explicitly noted the recent resignation of its Chief Justice, Robert Tredgold, who had resigned in protest against the adoption of draconian security legislation in Southern Rhodesia.⁶² Within three short years, events associated with independence in west Africa became a source of embarrassment for the Federation and Southern Rhodesia, its principal member.

The Federal delegation at Sierra Leone's independence celebration in April 1961, led by Jasper Savanhu, a black Federal MP from Southern Rhodesia, escaped significant criticism, but the Federation failed to secure the accreditation of its High Commissioner in Nigeria to the country.⁶³ The white dominated government was clearly on the defensive by this time. While west Africa was at the vanguard of the continent's decolonisation and in accelerating settler/nationalist diplomatic power struggles in 'British Central Africa', white Rhodesian and Federal interests became significantly more exposed with the independence of countries closer to home.

Central Africa: Shifting Terrain with the Republic of Congo's Independence

In mid-1958, the Federation attached an official to the British Consulate in Elisabethville, a mining city in the south of the then Belgian Congo (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo, hereafter the 'Congo').⁶⁴ The Federation, via Northern Rhodesia, shared an extensive border with the Congo. At independence on 30 June 1960, the Congo was the Federation's second largest trading partner in Africa.⁶⁵ Days later, the new country's armed forces mutinied. Tens of thousands of whites fled, with several thousand arriving in the Rhodesias.⁶⁶ As Ian Smith, who became Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister months after the dissolution of the Federation, wrote in his memoir, 'this event had a profound effect on our people'.⁶⁷ The influx occurred concurrently with the secession of the Katanga Province, which contained Elisabethville, from the main Congolese state. The Katanga Republic endured for nearly three years before collapsing. The Federation 'consider[ed] the establishment of a strong independent Katanga State to be in [its] best interests' and attempted to support, usually covertly, its renegade leaders who were also backed by Western commercial interests.⁶⁸ This solidarity has obscured the Federation's simultaneous wish to establish congenial relations with the central Congolese state and expand its representation in Elisabethville.

Whites on the Retreat

The Belgian government extended an invitation to the Federation to attend the Congo's independence festivities.⁶⁹ Barrow and Savanhu were slated to attend when, ten days before independence, the Congolese Chamber of Deputies passed a motion condemning Belgium's invitation to representatives from the Federation, South Africa, and

Portugal.⁷⁰ The Federation was unclear if the invitation had been formally withdrawn and wished, if it was not, to sustain its representation. It only received clarification from the Belgian Consul on the night of 28 June that while the invitation stood, the Federation should not attend for ‘technical reasons’.⁷¹ The Congo’s distance from the British Commonwealth made it easier for the country’s nationalists to condemn the Federation’s racial policies.

The decision to ‘finally and regretfully’ withdraw the delegation was made at the last minute.⁷² The Federation announced that the cancellation was a decision of its own volition, ‘to avoid embarrassing [the] Congolese Government’.⁷³ A goodwill message was sent to the incoming government and for the next three years, while simultaneously backing the Katanga secession, the Federation also attempted to open a consulate in Leopoldville, the Congolese capital. In mid-1961, following a visit to Leopoldville by Ken Towsey of the Federation’s Ministry of External Affairs, it was hoped that the new mission would be opened within ‘the next two or three months’.⁷⁴ Towsey met with the Congo’s Foreign Minister, Justin Bomboko, and found him favourably disposed toward the presence of a Federal mission in Leopoldville.⁷⁵ However, a major United Nations action against Katanga disrupted this momentum. Nonetheless, federal officials continued to endeavour to establish a mission in the Congolese capital until April 1963, by which time the Federation was on its deathbed.⁷⁶

Nationalist Offensive

From mid-1960, the Federation’s futile efforts to maintain relevance amidst Africa’s transition began to contrast markedly with the gains of their nationalist opponents in Southern Rhodesia. The impact of the Congo’s independence, a country

bordering the Federation, was considerably greater than Ghana's example three years earlier. As Joshua Nkomo, in exile since SRANC's banning in February 1959, announced after the date for the Congo's independence had been fixed:

We feel that with the Congo about to achieve independence, the Africans' struggle for freedom and independence has taken an important step forward. The time will soon come to carry on the campaign from within a few miles of the frontiers of our own countries, instead of from London 6,000 miles away.⁷⁷

Hundreds of NDP partisans gathered in Salisbury on the evening of June 30 to celebrate the Congo's independence that day. A leading party official, George Silundika, announced, 'if we...talk about Freedom Now, we shall be talking about something that has been demonstrated.'⁷⁸ The NDP does not appear to have been represented at the independence celebrations in Leopoldville, but the party had better success than the UFP in developing ties with the Federation's northern neighbour. From late 1962, Ndabaningi Sithole, the Chair of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), formed following the NDP's ban in December 1961, spent significant time in Leopoldville. Sithole attended a conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement for Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa in Leopoldville in late 1962.⁷⁹ Sithole was also in Leopoldville on the eve of the May 1963 summit in Addis Ababa that led to the formation of the Organisation of African Unity and returned there upon the conclusion of the conference.⁸⁰

The Federation ultimately avoided significant embarrassment with its absence from the independence ceremonies in Leopoldville. Although the anticipated Federal delegation to the independence ceremonies had been publicly announced, its cancellation did not generate significant attention.⁸¹ The Congo was not joining the Commonwealth, there was a language divide, and the dramatic events that took place almost immediately after independence overshadowed the Chamber of Deputies

resolution. This would not be the case for the British colonies in east Africa. Although their economic ties with the Federation were weaker, a shared imperial heritage meant that decolonisation in east Africa resonated in Southern Rhodesia in unprecedented ways.

Uhuru: Independence in East Africa

The failure of the Federation's efforts to externalise 'partnership' in the Congo did not mark the end of attempts to woo newly independent African nations. With a spate of Commonwealth colonies approaching independence in east Africa, such efforts became more urgent. A few weeks after the Congo's independence, James Watson Swan, a Federal MP from Southern Rhodesia declared, 'I do feel we live in Africa and the more we know of African Affairs the more likely are we to be in a position to conduct our affairs better'.⁸² Independent Tanganyika (later Tanzania) became a key base for early Zimbabwean nationalist activity. In 1961 it became the first Commonwealth country bordering the Federation to become independent under majority rule, a development that re-aligned the region's politics.

Tanganyika

Tanganyika attained internal self-government on May 1, 1961 with Julius Nyerere as Prime Minister. Almost immediately, the Federation began to push to open a diplomatic mission. A memo by Welensky (who doubled as Minister of External Affairs) outlined the Federal government's thinking:

The Federation cannot afford to isolate itself in Africa and it is particularly important for it to get on to friendly terms with regimes which eschew the wilder forms of Pan-Africanism. To a large degree this was the thinking behind

Federal representation in Lagos and the same consideration applies in even greater measure to Tanganyika. Representation there will afford us opportunities to discuss mutual problems with the Tanganyika authorities, to influence Tanganyika Ministers in favour of Federal policies and objectives, to correct misunderstandings about the Federation and to counter the machinations of influences from within and outside the Federation designed to align the Tanganyika Government with the more extreme manifestations of African nationalists.⁸³

Had the Federal authorities been successful in this endeavour, subsequent Zimbabwean nationalist activity would have been greatly constrained. The Federation hosted a Tanganyika trade representative attached to the UK High Commission and believed this gave it leverage.⁸⁴ As FHN Parry, Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs wrote, 'we are continuing to press and I find it difficult to believe that they will be able to refuse our request'.⁸⁵

However, the pan-African world became significantly more resolute following Ghana's independence. Nyerere's anti-Federal/Rhodesian policy was more assertive than Nkrumah's initial programme. Iain Macleod, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, spoke to Nyerere on the matter of Federal representation in Dar-es-Salaam, the Tanganyikan capital. Nyerere made it clear that the matter would not be countenanced.⁸⁶ Weeks later, in a major diplomatic victory, the NDP announced that it had been invited to open a foreign office in Dar-es-Salaam, its first in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁷ It was originally solely staffed by John Chirimani, a relatively junior NDP member.⁸⁸ However, its importance swiftly grew and until the independence of Mozambique in 1975, Tanzania and Zambia served as the leading regional bases for Zimbabwean nationalists.

An overt snub to Federal prestige and Rhodesian settler power came with the independence of Tanganyika in December 1961. Until that time, Federal representatives had attended the independence celebrations of most African Commonwealth countries. However, the day before independence, Nyerere announced

at a press conference that he did not recognise the Federation and its government had not been invited to the festivities marking Tanganyikan statehood.⁸⁹ The Federation was further embarrassed when its flag, originally one of 60 on display at the Dar-es-Salaam airport, was removed after a journalist mentioned its presence to Nyerere.⁹⁰

Tanganyika's independence greatly inspired Zimbabwean nationalists. In *Radar*, the London-based publication of the NDP, an editorial rejoiced:

The independence of Tanganyika has more than given us hope for our own independence soon, it has also given us a stick with which to strike the Imperialists, whether they be the British themselves or settlers in Central Africa. Our argument for self-rule is more than fortified.⁹¹

Joshua Nkomo, the President of the NDP, was invited and attended the festivities.

Whitehead banned the NDP on Tanganyika's Independence Day. This timing provided Nkomo with the opportunity to personally lobby a bevy of foreign dignitaries, such as the British Commonwealth Secretary, Duncan Sandys, about Southern Rhodesia's unjust policies.⁹² It also exposed the hypocrisy of attempts by the Federal authorities to reach a *modus vivendi* with new African states and illustrated the hollow nature of 'partnership.' An editorial in the *Central African Daily News* noted the injury to the Federation. The column observed:

It is unthinkable that eight years after its inception, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, whose avowed policy is that of racial partnership, should still be lumped together with S. Africa and Portugal whose treatment of Africans has aroused the world into international indignation.⁹³

However, establishment whites still envisaged the challenges that would result from isolation on the continent. An editorial in *The Rhodesia Herald* (the colony's paper of record, which catered to a white readership) noted, 'this country has a strong interest in wishing the 29th independent African State well'.⁹⁴ The following year,

Welensky, as part of his inconsistent charm offensive in Africa, pronounced Nyerere 'one of the great Africans', adding, 'I am only too willing to come to terms with pan-Africanism'.⁹⁵ While disingenuous, this claim was, briefly, more accurate in the sphere of international diplomacy than anywhere else. Welensky's UFP would soon lose power and pan-African outreach became relatively obsolete with the rise of the Rhodesian Front (RF) following a Southern Rhodesian election in December 1962. The independence of Uganda in October 1962 constituted one of the last opportunities for the UFP to attempt to externalise 'partnership'.

Uganda

In July 1962, the Federation's Commissioner in Nairobi, CC Milton, undertook an extended tour of east Africa. The Federal government was contemplating a transfer of its existing mission in Nairobi, Kenya to Kampala, Uganda. It believed independent Uganda would be more friendly, and that Kenyan independence remained distant.⁹⁶ Milton was able to secure audiences with GBK Magezi, the Minister of State, and Amos Sempa, the Minister of Finance. Milton reported to Salisbury that 'Uganda is the most reasonable and mature of the East African territories. If we do not succeed there I would put our chances here [east Africa] very low'.⁹⁷ Milton found race relations in Uganda more congenial than in Kenya and reported that Milton Obote, the Prime Minister, had not been particularly active in the Pan African Freedom Movement for Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa (PAFMECSA), an anti-colonial grouping in which Nyerere exercised a leading role.⁹⁸ Milton was also encouraged by the fact that although neither the Federation nor South Africa were invited to Uganda's independence celebrations, Portugal was.⁹⁹

In late August, Welensky wrote to Obote, expressing his ‘best wishes for your country’s future happiness and prosperity and to express the hope that our two countries will continue to enjoy cordial relations...’ He proposed the establishment of a Federal diplomatic mission in Kampala and stated that he hoped ‘to appoint an African as our first High Commissioner’.¹⁰⁰ The letter was to be hand delivered by Milton to Obote personally. Federal officials believed their proposal had a 50% chance of success.¹⁰¹ These chances declined drastically a few weeks later when Whitehead, seeking to boost his standing ahead of the general election, banned ZAPU.

Weeks before Uganda’s independence, Milton secured a personal audience with Obote. He presented Welensky’s letter and found him courteous and pleasant throughout their 20-minute meeting. This disposition changed markedly by Independence Day. Amidst festivities marking Ugandan nationhood, Obote denounced the Federation’s white rulers. He suggested that the anti-colonial nationalists of Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi should ‘remove Welensky and his government and then have a better Federation supported by the people of the three countries’.¹⁰² Obote added that he was ‘very disturbed’ by the policies of the Federation and South Africa.¹⁰³ Reeling from its recent ban, ZAPU does not appear to have been represented at the festivities. The Southern Rhodesian government had recently restricted Joshua Nkomo, depriving the ZAPU leader of the opportunity to lobby abroad.¹⁰⁴ Weeks after Uganda’s independence, Welensky was informed of the termination of Milton’s existing accreditation to Uganda.¹⁰⁵

By the end of 1962, the balance of power in the struggle for representation and recognition across Africa between the Rhodesian/Federal governing class and its nationalist opposition had fundamentally altered. Whites were firmly on the defensive. The UFP, despite recurring attempts to externalise ‘partnership’, found the reception in

Africa increasingly cold as independence permeated the region. Contrary to the Federation's increasing isolation, Zimbabwean nationalists experienced a diplomatic boon. New African leaders not only excluded Federal representatives, but overtly criticized Federal and Rhodesian policies.

However, this momentum became side-tracked. As Claud Ake wrote:

As the prospects for political independence improved, the solidarity of the [liberation] movement grew weaker and competition between its component units became more intense...so while agitating to overthrow the colonial regime, the constituent elements of the coalition were also trying to block one another from appropriating it.¹⁰⁶

This dynamic began to afflict Zimbabwe's nationalist movement. Nkomo's stature in the struggle diminished following a 1961 breakaway attempt that had a significant pan-African component.¹⁰⁷ A more significant split emerged in 1963, between Nkomo's ZAPU, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), under the leadership of Ndabaningi Sithole. A key reason for this division was that ZANU's leadership rejected an attempt by Nkomo to establish a government in exile in Tanganyika, an act only possible in a post-colonial world.¹⁰⁸ While the Federation's African outreach was in tatters following Uganda's independence, Zimbabwe's nationalists failed to fully seize the initiative.

Kenya and Malawi

Kenya shared demographic similarities with Southern Rhodesia as a bastion of white settlement.¹⁰⁹ However, just weeks before the Federation's dissolution, the dimension of the Rhodesian crisis on display at the independence festivities in Nairobi was not white discrimination, but the ZAPU-ZANU divide. In early October, ZAPU

supporters rejoiced when Nkomo received an invitation from Jomo Kenyatta to Kenya's independence celebrations scheduled for 11-13 December. The gesture was seen as a major coup; Tom Mboya, a trade unionist and the second most prominent Kenyan political leader, had previously indicated support for ZANU.¹¹⁰ For nearly a month, ZANU officials despaired over the forum that Kenya's independence celebrations would provide for Nkomo to advance his party unchecked. On 6 November however, it was reported that a misaddressed invitation had finally reached ZANU, six weeks after it was posted, causing 'jubilation in party circles'.¹¹¹ At ZANU rallies across the country, the invitation was hailed.¹¹² The Women's League of ZANU's Highfield Branch further seized the initiative by deriding Nkomo's invitation as 'purely social'.¹¹³

The independence of Ghana in 1957 provided unmitigated inspiration for anti-colonial activists in Southern Rhodesia. The violence and neo-colonial intervention following the independence of the Congo in 1960, the first majority-ruled country on the borders of the Federation marred the still significant enthusiasm for the region's changing political status. Just three years later however, the independence of Kenya, a colony with similar demographics to Southern Rhodesia, was not hailed as a seminal blow against settler colonialism. Rather, it provided a forum for the two major Zimbabwean nationalist factions to court sponsors. Although John Day mistakenly claims that it was 'significant' that Nkomo did not travel abroad between July 1963 and April 1964, the ZAPU leader, who was facing legal charges, received permission from Bulawayo's Chief Magistrate to attend Kenya's independence celebrations.¹¹⁴ Sithole was similarly embroiled in legal woes and was also granted permission to attend.¹¹⁵ Given the competition underway between the two parties, the RF government likely welcomed the prospect of Sithole and Nkomo clashing in Nairobi. This division overshadowed the reality that although the

Federation's mission in Nairobi had not yet officially closed, there appears to have been no question of a role for its government at the independence celebration.¹¹⁶

In Nairobi, Nkomo lobbied governments in east and west African countries to visit Rhodesia and assess ZANU's strength, which he believed was overestimated.¹¹⁷ Thus, as a result of the split, ZAPU contravened wider African efforts to isolate Southern Rhodesia. Speaking to US embassy officials in Tanganyika following his departure from Kenya, Sithole noted that Nkomo publicly clashed with Nyerere's foreign minister, Oscar Kambona, accusing him of fostering the rupture.¹¹⁸ Sithole claimed that African leaders now viewed Nkomo as Southern Rhodesia's Harry Nkumbula, a once leading Zambian nationalist subsequently eclipsed by Kenneth Kaunda.¹¹⁹ He added that the only African country which ZANU saw as firmly backing ZAPU was Egypt. Some African leaders hoped to use the independence celebrations to facilitate a reconciliation of the rival parties. Tom Mboya hosted Nkomo and Sithole for dinner at his residence in hopes of a rapprochement, but neither leader made the necessary concessions.¹²⁰

The RF received a more tangible boon with Malawi's independence. In July 1964, Malawi became the first of the Federation's constituents to attain sovereignty. While Banda used the ceremony to rail against Welensky, the occasion signalled a temporary reversion of Rhodesian exclusion from Africa's independence commemorations.¹²¹ The Southern Rhodesian Minister of Agriculture, Angus Graham was present. Winston Field, a RF MP and former Prime Minister, also attended.¹²² Upon his return to Salisbury, Graham triumphantly informed the press that President Hastings Kamuzu Banda had told him that he 'would be delighted to meet [Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian] Smith at any time'.¹²³ The Southern Rhodesian government also provided technical assistance for the celebration. The guns used to salute the Duke of

Edinburgh and open the independent Parliament were seconded by Southern Rhodesian artillery forces.¹²⁴ While the colony was, for the most part on an isolationist course and looking to South Africa as its foremost ally on the continent, Malawi's independence provided the RF with a clear propaganda victory. However, Salisbury airport was a major transit point for international delegates to the festivities, which exposed the RF to some pan-African opprobrium. Liberian Vice-President William Tolbert used his layover in the city to warn that his government would oppose a UDI.¹²⁵

The RF was also boosted by Banda's handling of nationalist representation at the ceremony. Unlike Kenya, where both nationalist movements participated, only ZANU attended Malawi's independence celebration. The party dispatched a 20-strong delegation, led by its Secretary-General, Robert Mugabe.¹²⁶ ZAPU was not invited and its spokesperson, William Mukarati, disparaged ZANU for attending alongside Graham, stating, 'we are not prepared to sell our country and people in this way'.¹²⁷ Three days after independence, the publicity secretary for ZAPU's Malawi office was deported.¹²⁸ Several scholars have argued that ZANU's international contacts were critical to its very survival.¹²⁹ Banda's early support at Malawi's independence celebration provided a notable boost in that regard.

Conclusion

In the late 1950s and early 1960s most countries in Africa shed colonial rule. This process had a profound impact on the politics of 'British Central Africa', a settler dominated region where the doctrine of white supremacy prevailed, despite ostensible 'partnership' rhetoric to the contrary. The rapid independence of Africa countries inaugurated a competition for diplomatic representation and recognition between the colonial government and its nationalist opposition. The settler establishment briefly

experienced some success in its effort to navigate the ‘wind of change’ across the continent. However, as African liberation accelerated, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland increasingly found itself isolated on the pan-African scene. This dynamic emboldened Southern Rhodesia’s anti-colonial nationalists. However, by 1963, their unity fractured and African independence ceremonies became a site of intra-nationalist competition.

This dynamic set the context for the remainder of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle. The RF, which dominated Rhodesian politics until 1979, abandoned overt efforts to court African states. Shortly after UDI, the Southern Rhodesian Ministry of Information released a booklet attacking the governance record of many African countries that just a few years earlier the UFP assiduously tried to cultivate.¹³⁰ The work disparaged African self-rule, noting that ‘increasing poverty, economic tribulation, maladministration, corruption, nepotism, tribal dissension, anarchy and authoritarianism threaten to revert Africa to a new dark age...’¹³¹ However, it was the RF’s rule which was notably anachronistic. The party’s ability to maintain power was significantly eased by the post-1963 split in Zimbabwe’s nationalist movement. Despite attempts by the Organization of African Unity to facilitate reconciliation, the ZANU-ZAPU divide remained a fixture throughout the liberation struggle and beyond.¹³²

The abrupt arrival of African sovereignty transformed the world. This article demonstrates how decolonisation impacted ‘British Central Africa’ in general, and Southern Rhodesia in particular. It reveals how anti-colonial nationalists, and perhaps more surprisingly, settler authorities, swiftly moved to position themselves amidst this structural change. More broadly, this study of independence celebrations and the ensuing Federal bids for diplomatic recognition, neglected in the historiography, provides crucial context on the repercussions of the changed membership dynamics at

the United Nations and the Commonwealth. Both organisations exerted major pressure on Rhodesia during the course of UDI. However, this dynamic only coalesced around late 1961 when Federal officials became *persona non grata* at independence celebrations. This exploration has also indirectly shown how new Commonwealth leaders embraced foreign policy stances that were increasingly critical of white minority rule as the pace of decolonisation accelerated (Banda aside).

African independence ceremonies simultaneously provided Zimbabwe's nationalists with some of their earliest opportunities to practice international diplomacy while furnishing white officialdom with a last gasp effort to sell 'partnership' abroad. These positions catalysed two critical, albeit very different trajectories. Largely rejected by Africa's emerging leadership, white politics in Southern Rhodesia turned inward. Conversely, the anti-colonial nationalist opposition, was emboldened by the rise of prospective allies across the continent. However, this boost was a double-edged sword as nationalist unity ruptured amidst a competition to secure pan-African patronage. Both courses made the maintenance or pursuit of power more difficult and fundamentally shaped the unfolding political struggle.

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- ¹⁰⁰ Welensky to Obote, 29 August 1962, F236/CX70/3, NAZ.
- ¹⁰¹ Toswey to Lamb, 17 September 1962, F236/CX70/3, NAZ.
- ¹⁰² “Uganda’s First Premier Attacks Federal Regime.” *TRH*, 10 October 1962.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁴ “Nkomo Can Still Lead in Politics if...” *ADN*, 9 October 1962.
- ¹⁰⁵ Magezi to Welensky, 31 October 1962, F236/CX70/3, NAZ.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ake, *Democracy and Development*, 4.
- ¹⁰⁷ Marmon, “Division to Save,” 374-382.
- ¹⁰⁸ Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, 176.
- ¹⁰⁹ Marmon, “‘Kith and Kin.’”
- ¹¹⁰ “Nkomo Invited to Kenya.” *ADN*, 8 October 1963.
- ¹¹¹ “Sithole Invited to Kenya.” *ADN*, 6 November 1963.
- ¹¹² “Stand Firm Call.” *ADN*, 13 November 1963.
- ¹¹³ “The ZANU Women Reply.” Letter to the editor, *ADN*, 14 November 1963.
- ¹¹⁴ Day, *International Nationalism*, 118; “Nkomo Wins A ‘Yes’ on Kenya.” *ADN*, 26 November 1963.
- ¹¹⁵ “Sithole Uses Court.” *Zimbabwe Review*, Vol. 1, No. 7.
- ¹¹⁶ McIntosh to the Librarian, Makerere University College, 14 December 1963, NAZ, F165/1/2, NAZ.
- ¹¹⁷ AmConsul Salisbury to Department of State, 23 December 1963, Record Group (hereafter ‘RG’) 59, Box 4025, Pol 13-9, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter ‘NARA’), College Park, Maryland.

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- ¹¹⁸ Dar-es-Salaam to Department of State, 20 December 1963, RG 59, Box 4023, Pol Rhod and Nyas, NARA.
- ¹¹⁹ On Nkumbula see: Macola, *Liberal Nationalism*.
- ¹²⁰ "Reconciliation Talks between Nkomo and Sithole flop in Nairobi." *African Parade*, February 1964.
- ¹²¹ "New Banda Tirade on Sir Roy." *TRH*, 6 July 1964.
- ¹²² "Field at Ceremonies." *TRH*, 6 July 1964.
- ¹²³ "Banda Now Willing to See Smith." *TRH*, 8 July 1964.
- ¹²⁴ "Notes by the Way." *East Africa & Rhodesia*, 9 July 1964.
- ¹²⁵ "Liberian Comment on Declaration." *TRH*, 4 July 1964.
- ¹²⁶ "20 ZANU Team for Malawi." *ADN*, 4 July 1964.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁸ "Malawi Deportee Warns Against Banda." *ADN*, 15 July 1964.
- ¹²⁹ Reed, "International Politics," 33; Mazarire, "ZANU's External Networks," 84.
- ¹³⁰ Ministry of Information, *Rhodesia in the Context of Africa*.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹³² For a comprehensive account of these tensions, see: Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory*.