

# RISE AND DEMISE OF THE ZIMBABWE TIMES

## ZAPU's and Lonrho's Covert(ish) Nationalist Daily in Rhodesia

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### Abstract

This article explores the emergence and destruction of the *Zimbabwe Times*, a weekly, later daily newspaper in Rhodesia. Covertly aligned to the Patriotic Front, an uneasy coalition of Zimbabwe's two leading liberation movements, it primarily backed Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU. Financed by Lonrho, a London-based conglomerate, this nationalist friendly title dramatically altered Rhodesia's media landscape. The paper first appeared in 1977 during the waning days of white settler rule. After 18 months of publication, it was banned amidst an abortive transition to a racially integrated interim government that incorporated more pliable black leaders. Despite its brief existence, the *Zimbabwe Times*' reception and interaction with a range of political groups illuminates both political strategies and tensions that underpinned the fragile relations between a host of political actors during a dynamic era. This account is principally informed by the newspaper's own coverage, external press accounts, and interviews with *Zimbabwe Times* staff.

**KEYWORDS:** Joshua Nkomo, Abel Muzorewa, Tiny Rowland, nationalism, censorship, race

### Introduction

In the late 1970s, the media landscape in the renegade white settler state of Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe) in southern Africa changed dramatically. On 4 April 1977, the first issue of *Zimbabwe Times* (hereafter 'ZT'), hit the streets.<sup>1</sup> This newspaper catered to a black audience and covertly supported the two externally based nationalist movements seeking to wrest control of the country from its white rulers. The groups, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), headquartered in Zambia, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU, Zimbabwe's current ruling party), centred in Mozambique, nominally existed

in a coalition, the Patriotic Front (PF), from late 1976.<sup>2</sup> In practice, their cooperation mostly existed on paper to appease African leadership and the *ZT* primarily backed ZAPU. The parties had been banned in Rhodesia since 1964 and their pursuits were not well known there. According to a senior *ZT* journalist, the paper endeavoured ‘to shine light’ on their activities.<sup>3</sup>

The white ruling party, the Rhodesian Front (RF), which severed colonial links to the United Kingdom in 1965 with a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), exerted significant influence over the press since coming to power in 1962.<sup>4</sup> It wholly controlled radio and television broadcasting. Allan Savory, a former MP (1968-74) recalls that he was only once offered time on Rhodesian television from 1972 to 1979 when he was one of the country’s most senior white opposition figures.<sup>5</sup> The white-oriented Argus Group newspapers, the most widely read in Rhodesia, generally toed the government’s line after being subjected to heavy censorship in the mid-1960s. The most diverse expression of views was found in print media although specific references to nationalist leaders were typically verboten. As pressure escalated against the white regime following the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire and the opening of new military fronts in the armed liberation struggle, a détente policy emerged. The RF reluctantly pursued a political settlement with its black antagonists. In these conditions, Roland “Tiny” Rowland, chief executive of the UK-based London and Rhodesia Mining and Land Company (commonly known as Lonrho), funded the establishment of the *ZT*.<sup>6</sup>

After just 18 months of operations, the Rhodesian government renewed its penchant for media repression. The paper was banned and the PF’s covert(ish) internal voice was silenced. However, this was not simply a decision of the white settler authorities reversing course. By this time, the RF concluded an interim power-sharing arrangement with three locally-based black political parties willing to tolerate a high level of ongoing white control. The silencing of the *ZT* largely resulted from the disfavour with which it was held by the

most powerful black figure in that internal settlement, Abel Muzorewa of the United African National Council (UANNC).

This analysis of the rise and demise of the *ZT* offers insights on several critical issues during a remarkably dynamic time. Most broadly, this recovery of an oft-forgotten periodical improves our understanding of the Rhodesian press landscape and provides context to media repression in postcolonial Zimbabwe. More specifically, and the focus of this article, Muzorewa's decision to muzzle the paper illuminates the dynamics of the internal settlement, a chaotic transitional period. The *ZT's* links to the PF expands our sense of the tools available to nationalist groups primarily operating in exile. Finally, the paper's proximity to ZAPU elucidates the uneasy relationship between Zimbabwe's two main liberation movements.

### **Methods, Literature, Roadmap**

This story of the *ZT* has primarily been recovered through a close reading of press accounts – stories in the *ZT* itself (predominantly editorials) and coverage of the banning by *The Herald*, the Rhodesian paper of record, and the *Rand Daily Mail*, a leading periodical in South Africa. Critical insights on the paper's operations and its banning also come from interviews with John Ndhlovu, the *ZT's* first full-time employee and its chief sub-editor, and Tendai Dumbutshena, the paper's deputy editor. Aside from Herbert Munangatire, the *ZT* editor-in-chief, these were the two individuals most responsible for shaping the paper's political coverage.

The scope of this source material, fixated firmly on the newspaper itself, contains some limitations. Given the covert nature of their association with the *ZT*, the perspectives of the highest-level figures involved with the paper cannot be directly retrieved. Lonrho was a notoriously secretive multi-national conglomerate and no material directly documenting the rationale for Rowland's support of the paper could be recovered. Likewise, there is no

written evidence which demonstrates how ZAPU/PF officials sought to leverage the *ZT* to their advantage; the ZAPU archive was seized by the Zimbabwean state in a crackdown shortly after independence.<sup>7</sup> ZAPU would have wished to downplay its proximity to the *ZT* and there is little indication that ZANU offered public comment on the paper.

The *ZT* rarely features in the historiography, yet the origins of the ban are contested. In what is likely the most discursive account of the newspaper, Elaine Windrich, the most meticulous scholar of RF media repression, charges that Muzorewa was ‘the main instigator’.<sup>8</sup> More briefly, Richard Saunders, who has chronicled the crippling legacy of Rhodesian colonialism on the development of Zimbabwe’s contemporary media, observes that the paper was banned by the RF.<sup>9</sup> The silencing of the *ZT* has not been picked up in two more recent accounts investigating continuities between press repression in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe.<sup>10</sup> Unlike its independent predecessors such as the newsmagazine *Central African Examiner*, or the *African Daily News*, an entity banned in 1964 and the last daily newspaper in Rhodesia with political coverage focused on a black readership, the *ZT* has received virtually no scholarly attention and is rarely utilised as a historical source that sheds light on nationalist activity.<sup>11</sup> One explanation for the lack of scholarly engagement with the *ZT* is that in addition to being short-lived, it is not well preserved. The global database WorldCat indicates only six libraries worldwide stock the title. Furthermore, none of the major *ZT* editors has received attention commensurate to that devoted to Eileen Haddon of the *Examiner*, nor have they written in-depth about the paper’s experience, as Eugene Wason did with the banning of the *African Daily News*.<sup>12</sup> This neglect also denotes the lack of scholarly production on the black groups that were party to the internal settlement. They garnered substantial coverage in the *ZT* but had marginal support after independence in 1980. If the paper’s association with the PF was better known, it would undoubtedly attract more attention in the literature.

The internal settlement, which fitfully endured for less than two years is sandwiched between the longer running administrations of Ian Smith (1964-79) and Robert Mugabe (1980-2017).<sup>13</sup> Both regimes are well-known for their hostility toward independent media and their embrace of extensive propaganda efforts to solidify their rule while facing considerable threats.<sup>14</sup> This positionality has resulted in the marginalisation of the *ZT* in the historiography, despite its unique role in the service of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Although at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, this article's recovery of a title outside the mainstream complements recent work which illuminates the experience of Wilfred Brooks, a reactionary white settler and independent publisher who operated as an antagonist of the RF from the right during the late 1960s and 70s.<sup>15</sup>

The analysis now turns its focus to empirical content. The next section outlines the backgrounds and interests of Rowland and Munangatire. This is followed by a sketch of the *ZT*, outlining its reach and growth. Attention then turns to the paper's relations with nationalist groups. The article concludes with an exploration of the paper's rocky relationship with the two leading parties to the internal settlement, the UANC and RF, and the fallout following the paper's ban.

### **Press Barons: Rowland and Munangatire**

Lonrho, founded in 1909, came under the control of Tiny Rowland in 1961. Rowland had lived in Rhodesia for over a decade when he became the company's chief executive.<sup>16</sup> Lonrho maintained a range of holdings, although mining and agricultural interests dominated. Rowland also had significant ambitions as a media titan. Lonrho obtained control of *The Observer*, a British publication in 1981. This built on earlier press holdings in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>17</sup> Critically, around the time of Zambia's independence in 1964, Lonrho obtained stakes in several newspapers in Rhodesia's neighbour.<sup>18</sup> Rowland had a close relationship with Kenneth Kaunda, the Zambian head of state, and it was through Kaunda that he first met

Joshua Nkomo, ZAPU's president.<sup>19</sup> Kaunda was one of Nkomo's most ardent backers and Rowland's ties to the Zambian leader and the *ZT* probably led ZANU to view the new paper with suspicion. Rowland and Nkomo developed their own close connection. In his autobiography, Nkomo praised Rowland's 'generous contributions' to ZAPU and stated that he regarded Rowland (his age peer) as his son-in-law.<sup>20</sup>

In 1976, Rowland tapped Herbert Munangatire, a Rhodesian journalist, to oversee the launch of the *ZT*.<sup>21</sup> At the time of this appointment, Munangatire was employed by Lonrho in London.<sup>22</sup> He returned to Rhodesia in January 1977 after a decade abroad in the US and UK and assumed a position at the University of Rhodesia in addition to his editorial duties.<sup>23</sup> Munangatire's oversight of the newspaper likely alienated the ZANU contingent of the PF. He was not a ZAPU officeholder but was widely perceived by other nationalist groups as a keen Nkomo backer.<sup>24</sup> *ZT* was published by Hermu Press, a portmanteau of his name. This was likely a futile effort to obfuscate the paper's Lonrho association.

Munangatire infrequently features in the historical record and details of his activities are scarce, but he had concrete nationalist bonafides. He attended Mzingwane Primary School where he formed a lasting bond with a classmate, Jason Moyo, who oversaw ZAPU in the first half of the 1970s when Nkomo was restricted in Rhodesia.<sup>25</sup> In the mid-1950s, Munangatire was the Chair of the Highfield Branch of the City Youth League, an early nationalist body.<sup>26</sup> However, this was the last political movement he took an overt role in.<sup>27</sup> Thereafter, Munangatire appears to have decided to cultivate the image of a more impartial journalist. He was considered for government employment in 1958 but seems to have remained on the staff of the *African Daily News*.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1960s he became Secretary-General of the Rhodesia Journalists Union.<sup>29</sup> However, he remained outspoken and willing to transgress the boundaries that white Rhodesians (and white Westerners) generally found acceptable. During a study trip to the US around this time he met Malcolm X and criticized

an American Senator, Allen Ellender of Louisiana, who made racist remarks while visiting Rhodesia.<sup>30</sup>

Rowland and Munangatire were close. A *ZT* news editor recalls that they frequently conferred via telephone.<sup>31</sup> Their relationship continued after the *ZT*'s collapse; Munangatire remained a critical fixer for Lonrho in independent Zimbabwe.<sup>32</sup> However, Lonrho's interfacing with the paper was not entirely controlled from London. Ndhlovu remembers that Nick Kruger, Lonrho's Rhodesia head, occasionally visited the *ZT* offices. The extent of Lonrho's financial support for the *ZT* is unclear, but there were limitations. Ndhlovu, who opened *ZT*'s Bulawayo office, recalls that unlike *The Herald*, which was printed in Salisbury (the capital) and flown to the second city, copies of the *ZT* were usually transported by truck.<sup>33</sup>

### ***ZT*'s Rise**

The void in nationalist coverage since the 1964 banning of the *African Daily News*, and *Moto*, an independent minded church-based weekly a decade later, ensured that the *ZT* had a ready market. While the bulk of its coverage centred on the black groups participating in the internal settlement, it was described by the Rand Daily Mail as a 'black nationalist newspaper' shortly before it was banned.<sup>34</sup> According to Dumbutshena, its focus on the political activities of those representing the country's demographic majority, ensured that 'black readers were drawn to the paper'.<sup>35</sup> However, the *ZT* was not the only periodical that sought to capitalise on the modest détente atmosphere that emerged in Rhodesia over the second half of the 1970s.

Its major competitor for black readers was a weekly, *The National Observer*.<sup>36</sup> However, there was considerable ideological distance between the two papers. The *ZT*'s recurring editorial critiques of Apartheid South Africa and support for Palestinian statehood were non-starters in its rival, which embraced the Rhodesian nomenclature of referring to the

armed guerrillas of the liberation armies as ‘terrorists.’<sup>37</sup> *The National Observer* had white editors, Graham Rees and later Fred Cleary, both of whom previously worked for *The Herald*.<sup>38</sup> It was primarily controlled by the Theo family which produced *The Citizen*, a tabloid-style right-wing newspaper linked to the RF. *The National Observer* also pursued an ulterior political mission – the promotion of Muzorewa and the UANC.<sup>39</sup> Both titles featured regular sports coverage and photos of the occasional ‘pin-up babe.’

In December 1977 the weekly *ZT* became a daily. In February 1977, issue size increased from eight to 12 pages. This growth suggests that the title enjoyed some commercial success, although the paper seems to have been far from its ceiling given its unique position on the market. When the paper was banned in October 1978, it had approximately 66 staff.<sup>40</sup> By May 1978, *ZT* claimed circulation had reached 40,000, although *The Herald* cited a figure half that size several months later.<sup>41</sup> Even this smaller figure was noteworthy. Some two decades later the most widely read independent weekly in Zimbabwe boasted a print circulation of 40,000.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Ndhlovu adds that *ZT* issues were widely shared ‘betwixt friends and neighbours’, increasing the paper’s reach beyond traditional circulation metrics.<sup>43</sup> The primary *ZT* readership and target audience were urban and semi-urban black middle-class and elites – the same constituency the UANC targeted as its prospective power base. The paper had a national reach to all the traditional sites of Rhodesian newspaper distribution – the larger cities as well as smaller towns surrounding farming communities.<sup>44</sup> Hermu Press printed two editions catering to the country’s two main cities, Salisbury and Bulawayo. A satellite office was first established in Bulawayo and facilities in Gwelo and Fort Victoria soon followed.<sup>45</sup> Reports were dispatched from across the country. Most of the paper’s editorials were penned by Munangatire or Dumbutshena, who had recently completed graduate studies in England.<sup>46</sup>



Munangatire wrote that the *ZT*'s Salisbury office was possibly the most integrated workplace in the country.<sup>47</sup> The *ZT* editor-in-chief enjoyed the rare distinction in 1970s Rhodesia of presiding over a significant contingent of white staff. Lonrho seconded two white accountants and a white secretary to the *ZT*. Ndhlovu supervised two young white foreign journalists.<sup>48</sup> Demographically, the paper's operations embodied the characteristics of the society the internal settlement claimed to be striving to inculcate. The paper's managing director and advertising head, JAH Roberts, was white. Roberts' team ensured that the paper diversified its funding base beyond Lonrho's support. According to Dumbutshena, *ZT* generated 'decent advertising revenue', with mostly Salisbury-based businesses promoting their services and products.

### **Editorial Independence: Balancing Competing Nationalisms**

The *ZT*'s service to the PF was only known to senior editorial staff.<sup>49</sup> Publicly, from its motto ('we publish all the news that's fit to print without fear or favour') to its editorials, the paper repeatedly underscored its editorial independence within an overarching framework of support for the nationalist cause. A *ZT* anniversary retrospective declared, 'from the start the newspaper declared in favour of majority rule but was even-handed in its support for the four dominant nationalist parties – ANC(S), ANC(Z) [ZAPU], UANC and Mr. Robert Mugabe's group'.<sup>50</sup> An earlier rare front-page editorial proclaimed, 'the *Zimbabwe Times* will not be influenced by politicians of whatever hue'.<sup>51</sup>

These assertions were generally consistent with the tone of the paper. No ZAPU bias would be readily inferred by a casual reader from the scope and tone of the content. The black parties to the internal settlement, a rump faction of ZANU led by its deposed first leader, Ndabaningi Sithole (also known as ANC-S), Muzorewa's UANC, and the Zimbabwe United People's Organisation (ZUPO) combined probably received more coverage than the PF. *ZT* staff regularly consulted with the deputy leaders of these parties, especially ANC-S.

Exclusive interviews with party leaders were uncommon, although an exchange with Sithole formed a massive front-page story.<sup>52</sup> Officials from these parties eagerly took advantage of the paper's vibrant letters to the editor section. These included Joshua Cohen, who became a UANC deputy minister following the 1979 election.<sup>53</sup> Mid-ranking officials were more common contributors however, such as Frank Govinder, the Organising Secretary of the ANC-S branch in Arcadia, a Salisbury suburb, or TL Tsapi, the Publicity Secretary of the UANC's Midlands North provincial branch, both of whom used *ZT* space to laud their party's leaders.<sup>54</sup> *ZT* generally avoided condemnations of the UANC in the manner of the propaganda produced by the PF. When George Nyandoro, the UANC's Secretary for External Affairs arrived in Rhodesia after a nearly a decade of exile, the *ZT* celebrated his return:

Mr. Nyandoro deserves all the honour and praise his party and the African people of this country in general have heaped on him. He is not only a pioneer in the African struggle but a fighter par excellence...Mr. Nyandoro's devotion to the African struggle is evidenced by the fact that throughout the 14 years he spent in exile he remained faithful to the cause. He never faltered.<sup>55</sup>

*[Insert Figures 1.1 {Caption: Zimbabwe Times Masthead} & 1.2 {Caption: Editorial Backing Unity, 12 June 1978} here]*

Ndhlovu contends that the *ZT* genuinely represented a united PF that encompassed those loyal to both Mugabe and Nkomo.<sup>56</sup> The editorial tone supports this assertion. As one editorial proclaimed, 'to ignore the Patriotic Front would be to condemn our country and people to a protracted guerrilla war. Let's bring them in.'<sup>57</sup> When word leaked that the parties to the internal settlement were secretly seeking to bring Nkomo into the fold, a *ZT* editorial denounced the move under the headline 'No Nkomo without Mugabe'.<sup>58</sup> Prior to independence, Munangatire reportedly believed that Mugabe would assume power in a free and fair election.<sup>59</sup> The two maintained a working relationship, Mugabe granted Munangatire

an exclusive interview during the 1978 summit of the Organization of African Unity.<sup>60</sup> Press conferences by ZANU's internal wing, the People's Movement, received recurring coverage in the *ZT*.<sup>61</sup> Despite these efforts, Ndhlovu recalls that the paper's staff had difficulty liaising with ZANU's Information and Publicity Department, based in Maputo, Mozambique. He states that Webster Shamu, a prominent ZANU official in the Department was particularly hostile to the *ZT*.<sup>62</sup> The paper's political correspondents had better luck dealing with Oliver Munyaradzi, a Salisbury-based physician who held several ministerial portfolios in independent Zimbabwe and was one of ZANU's more prominent members inside Rhodesia in the late 1970s.<sup>63</sup>

#### Editorial Independence: The ZAPU Factor

The division between ZANU and ZAPU had deep roots. After ZANU broke away from ZAPU in 1963, the townships of Salisbury were rocked by representatives of the rival factions seeking to assert their dominance.<sup>64</sup> An abortive attempt to reunite in 1970/71 backfired when it resulted in the establishment of another political party, FROLIZI.<sup>65</sup> In Lusaka, Zambia, in December 1974, ZANU and ZAPU reluctantly entered a unity coalition under Muzorewa's auspices.<sup>66</sup> This effort also had a divisive impact as it strengthened the role of the UANC as a distinct political force. Muzorewa expelled Nkomo from the coalition the following September, effectively signalling its demise.<sup>67</sup> The PF, which excluded Muzorewa, was the next iteration of regionally brokered Zimbabwean nationalist unity.

Despite the attempts of the *ZT*'s editorial staff to ostensibly promote the PF, ZANU had legitimate reasons to view the paper with suspicion. The *ZT*'s ZAPU connections were deep. Ndhlovu notes that he was initially recruited by Munangatire to join the paper in the presence of George Kahari, ZAPU's deputy publicity secretary.<sup>68</sup> The party's publicity secretary, Willie Musarurwa, contributed op-eds under a pen name, Tsanga Shanga.<sup>69</sup> Musarurwa was extraordinarily prolific – he produced a column on an almost daily basis that

pontificated upon political developments in Rhodesia. After the paper expanded to a daily format, Cephas Msipa, ZAPU's education secretary joined the growing stable and contributed a column, 'I Write as I Like'.<sup>70</sup> John Ndhlovu was a ZAPU partisan who subsequently married Nkomo's daughter, Thandiwe.<sup>71</sup> He fled Zimbabwe in 1983 with assistance from Rowland as Mugabe's government cracked down on ZAPU.<sup>72</sup>

There are some instances in which it appears that the *ZT's* affinity for Nkomo's group impacted the paper's coverage. A series of profiles of nationalist leaders disproportionately showcased ZAPU members.<sup>73</sup> However, Munangatire was cognizant of the need to maintain legitimacy. Musarurwa's column spanned a diverse range of political developments in detail from his personal perspective, including pieces confined to white party politics.<sup>74</sup> It was hardly a space for sycophantic pieces praising ZAPU and Nkomo. Editorials occasionally contained elements that critiqued ZAPU. One even noted en passant that the party granted Nkomo, a life president, excessive power.<sup>75</sup>

### **UANC/State Target**

The *ZT's* commitment to journalism 'without fear or favour' made it a recurring target of the authorities. The use of the nationalist name for the country, 'Zimbabwe' would have been perceived by many whites as a provocation. Rhodesia's media space remained significantly circumscribed throughout UDI, particularly regarding reportage on the guerrilla war. In 1976, a National Security Committee was formed to control coverage of the armed conflict.<sup>76</sup> Peta Thornycroft, a reporter who operated throughout southern Africa during this era believes that media restrictions were stronger in Rhodesia than Apartheid South Africa.<sup>77</sup>

Shortly after the paper was launched, members of the Rhodesian Special Branch visited both the *ZT* office and Munangatire's home to inquire about his reasons for initiating the paper.<sup>78</sup> The paper's publication was also delayed on several occasions after censors requested the excision of letters to the editor.<sup>79</sup> In October 1977, Munangatire was told that

he would face charges over his coverage of the detention and deportation of Janice McLaughlin, an American nun helping document atrocities committed by the Rhodesian security forces.<sup>80</sup> Formal charges were never laid, but a month before the paper was banned, Munangatire appeared in court after the paper was accused of failing to properly clear a report on the liberation war.<sup>81</sup> Dumbutshena believes that the paper did occasionally publish reports on the war that either had not been cleared by the censors, or had been rejected.<sup>82</sup> The government also muzzled the *ZT*'s reporting on the dismissal of Byron Hove, an outspoken minister appointed by the UANC following the internal settlement.<sup>83</sup>

However, the *ZT*'s low-key enmity with the UANC was more consequential to its end than its relations with the settler state. The paper was not strident in its criticism of the party, but it constantly simmered. There may have been an effort to stoke disunity in the party. Editorials highlighted internal discord in the UANC or advised the party to undertake actions that may have encouraged cleavages.<sup>84</sup> Amidst mixed praise, a September 1977 editorial accused the party's internal practices of being 'undemocratic'.<sup>85</sup> On the eve of the talks that resulted in the transitional government, an editorial decried attempts to resolve the Rhodesian crisis that precluded the PF: 'we do not share the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for a so-called internal settlement'.<sup>86</sup> Another editorial dubbed the PF's exclusion from the talks the 'major weakness' of the final agreement.<sup>87</sup> This position set the paper on a collision course with the UANC, the most prominent nationalist group party to the settlement. Days after the settlement talks got underway, the UANC publicity secretary, David Mukome, publicly accused the *ZT* of inaccurately reporting a Muzorewa address.<sup>88</sup>

In early March, the internal talks successfully concluded. The UANC transformed from a liberation movement to a partner in a new ruling coalition, led by an Executive Council whose leadership rotated among the four signatories to the settlement (Muzorewa, Smith, Sithole, and ZUPO's Jeremiah Chirau). The *ZT*'s criticism of the government

continued. In May, it accused the Council of ‘dragging its feet and making some stupendous political blunders’.<sup>89</sup>

The UANC turned up the heat in return. Ndhlovu recalls being assaulted and kicked out of a UANC rally in Salisbury.<sup>90</sup> *ZT* staff began to struggle to gain access to UANC meetings and the party displayed a preference for reporters from *The Herald*.<sup>91</sup> A June editorial set forth the situation:

Some of the people around the UANC leader [Muzorewa] want to turn the party into a totalitarian organisation where no member is free to question their actions... We, ourselves, by adopting a positively neutral line and criticising some of their actions, have been accused of being anti-UANC and therefore *persona non grata*. This intolerance, this puerile attempt to intimidate party members and the Press can only lead to a dictatorship.<sup>92</sup>

On 2 October 1978, that intolerance culminated in the form of a ban on *ZT* and *Hermu* Press.

### **The Demise**

Senior *ZT* journalists assert that despite Munangatire’s difficulties with the military censors, the UANC governing element was primarily responsible for the ban on the paper.<sup>93</sup>

Munangatire advanced this claim at the time:

It was Bishop Abel Muzorewa who was against us, and it was he who put his signature to the banning order.<sup>94</sup> Muzorewa is obsessed with the idea that the Zimbabwe Times supported a particular leader and so he conducted, with his party political machinery, a vendetta against our criticism of him, and we were not prepared to run away from him.<sup>95</sup>

Hilary Squires, the white co-minister of justice concurred, declaring, ‘you can take it from me it was the black members of the Government who were mainly concerned’.<sup>96</sup>

Representatives from ZUPO and the Sithole ZANU faction declined to comment on the prohibition, which was interpreted as an expression of their disapproval.<sup>97</sup> Only Mukome, the UANC publicity secretary, gleefully announced, ‘I don’t shed any tears to hear of this. They were obviously abusing having a paper in a free nation and taking advantage to publish scandalous things about us’.<sup>98</sup>

Ndhlovu notes that the ban itself was not a surprise, but that the timing was unexpected and *ZT* staff had no foreknowledge of the action.<sup>99</sup> However, the chronology of the paper's dismantling potentially becomes clearer when viewed against the broader political calculus in Rhodesia. At the beginning of September, ZAPU's military wing shot down an Air Rhodesia civilian flight near the Zambian border. When Nkomo was questioned about the incident, he claimed responsibility and chuckled. This comportment enraged white Rhodesians and extinguished attempts to bring Nkomo into the fold of the internal settlement.<sup>100</sup> There is no direct evidence, but the *ZT* prohibition may have been a form of retaliation enabled by this new reality.

The *ZT* was banned as the principals in the internal settlement were in the midst of a major charm offensive to sell their agreement. In his autobiography, written just after the adoption of the settlement, Muzorewa trumpeted, 'another pillar of democracy is freedom of the press'.<sup>101</sup> Muzorewa and Chirau travelled to the US just over a week after the ban where they joined Smith and Sithole.<sup>102</sup> However this assault on a fundamental tenet of liberal democracy did not generate significant backlash, at home or abroad. A mild editorial in *The Herald* 'deplore[d]' the interdiction, but in a nod to its white readership simultaneously averred that the paper 'may not have been everyone's cup of tea'.<sup>103</sup> *The Herald* published just one letter to the editor on the proscription, a defence of the *ZT*.<sup>104</sup> It thus seems that moderate and liberal whites had limited exposure to the paper. Internationally, the ban generated scarce attention beyond an announcement from the UK's National Union of Journalists that it would deliver protest notes to the British and Rhodesian governments.<sup>105</sup> The reasons behind the muted international reaction are difficult to assess. Dumbutshena believes the ban was overlooked due to the highly dynamic nature of the Rhodesian crisis at the time and was not any form of negative commentary on the paper's quality or reach.<sup>106</sup> Conversely, Michael Holman, a Rhodesian-raised, Lusaka-based correspondent for the

*Financial Times* (UK) at the time of the ban recalls hearing little about the paper and considers that its overall impact was ‘negligible’.<sup>107</sup> However, it seems unlikely the authorities would have proscribed the paper unless they felt it had some influence.

Squires situated the *ZT*’s ban as ‘part of the clampdown on organisations supporting terrorists’.<sup>108</sup> The *ZT*’s ZAPU connection was an open secret among government officials. Chris Mbanga, who became UANC publicity secretary shortly after the ban confirms that the party knew of Munangatire’s and the *ZT*’s association with ZAPU.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Dumbutshena, whose father Enoch was a prominent UANC official, recalls an awkward encounter with Muzorewa while on assignment for *ZT* in Victoria Falls; the UANC leader referred to Rowland as Munangatire’s boss and, in turn, observed that Nkomo was Rowland’s overlord.<sup>110</sup>

Munangatire publicly denied accusations of bias, responding, ‘I’m a journalist who has never aligned himself with any political leader. At the Zimbabwe Times we set out to portray national affairs as we saw them, and we were banned because the Government would not tolerate our criticism’.<sup>111</sup> There were some initial attempts to push back against the ban. The editor-in-chief immediately announced that he would appeal to the government for a reversal of the decision.<sup>112</sup> Munangatire visited London and conferred with Tiny Rowland on steps forward as *ZT* staff remained on paid leave.<sup>113</sup> Days later, it was announced that a substitute publication, *The World*, would be launched with Dumbutshena as editor. However, this publication was in turn prohibited before its first issue was published.<sup>114</sup> Ndhlovu believes that Hermu Press and Lonrho did not vigorously contest the ban because Smith and Muzorewa threatened action against Lonrho’s business assets.<sup>115</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Muzorewa became the first prime minister of Zimbabwe Rhodesia in June 1979 but failed to obtain international backing. He held the position for just months before the



renegade country accepted an internationally brokered settlement at the Lancaster House Conference. Zimbabwe Rhodesia briefly returned to British control at the end of the year in preparation for the internationally recognised elections that led to Zimbabwe's independence in April 1980. In one of his first acts, the new colonial governor, Christopher Soames, revoked the ban on the *ZT*.<sup>116</sup>

Although the *ZT* was published for only 18 months and has largely faded out of the contemporary historical record, its ephemeral existence nevertheless shapes our understanding of several key issues during the final stages of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Perhaps most significantly, the recovery of the paper's connections to the PF, particularly ZAPU, helps situate Nkomo's awkward relationship with both ZANU and the Rhodesian authorities. The *ZT* demonstrates how, with the denouement to white resistance unfolding, ZAPU sought to indirectly project a presence within Rhodesia and frame the terms of the national political debate. The secret(ish) organ did not, in a departure from official ZAPU publications like *Zimbabwe Review*, censure Mugabe and ZANU.

The *ZT's* editorial checks on the UANC, the Rhodesian government, and the harsh responses from the two are also informative. Muzorewa, white discrimination, and international issues, rather than Mugabe and ZANU, were the main targets of the paper's editorial ire. Virtually as soon as the UANC began to discuss the internal settlement with the RF (a move condemned by the *ZT*), it launched attacks on the veracity of the *ZT's* reporting. Meanwhile, the RF only grudgingly tolerated the presence of a 'black nationalist' daily in the country. The *ZT* was subjected to unique restrictions that more established newspapers did not face and its editor-in-chief endured state harassment.<sup>117</sup>

The ban on the *ZT* reinforced a heritage of limited media freedom that was bequeathed to Zimbabwe upon independence. The muted international reaction to the edict, coupled with the fact that the primary protagonist behind it was a black, rather than white

political group, may potentially have emboldened Mugabe and ZANU to take similar steps against the press once in office. Had the *ZT* remained in existence at the time of Zimbabwe's independence with its ZAPU links, ZANU as a ruling party would have been confronted with a significantly more vibrant independent media. Furthermore, if the *ZT* had continued in production, it may have given ZAPU a boost outside of its Matabeleland stronghold during the 1980 independence election. In January 1981, with a grant from Nigeria, Mugabe's new government announced that it was buying out the Argus Company, the South African press group that held the largest stake in five major Zimbabwean newspapers.<sup>118</sup> With radio and tv still state controlled, this left few sources of independent local news beyond a resuscitated *Moto*.<sup>119</sup> In the early 1990s Munangatire attempted to start a weekly, the *Sunday Times*, but the paper struggled to gain traction and folded.<sup>120</sup>

Evaluated against its motto, throughout 18 months of existence the *ZT* published news with little fear, and restrained favour. In the high-stakes atmosphere of Rhodesia's disintegration, that was no easy feat.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s)

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<sup>1</sup> "From Rags to Riches." *Zimbabwe Times* (hereafter '*ZT*') Anniversary Supplement, 13 May 1978.

<sup>2</sup> White, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, 79.

<sup>3</sup> John Ndhlovu, telephone interview by author, 6 October 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Msindo, "Hearts and Minds," 671-72.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Savory, telephone interview by author, 7 February 2022.

<sup>6</sup> "Bullring." *Rand Daily Mail* (hereafter '*RDM*'), 26 September 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Nkomo, *Story of My Life*, 228.

<sup>8</sup> Windrich, *Mass Media*, 86.

<sup>9</sup> Saunders, *Dancing Out of Tune*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Dombo, *Private Print Media*; Mugari, *Press Silence*.

<sup>11</sup> King, "Central African Examiner"; Dombo, "African Newspapers Limited."

<sup>12</sup> Law, *Gendering the Settler State*, ch. 3, passim; Wason, *Banned*.

<sup>13</sup> On Smith: Windrich, "Rhodesian Censorship"; on Mugabe: Tendi, *Making History*.

<sup>14</sup> Msindo, "Hearts and Minds,"; Ranger, "Patriotic History."

<sup>15</sup> Cohen and Pilossof, "Big Business"; Pilossof and Rivett, "Imagining Change."

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- <sup>16</sup> EIR, *Tiny Rowland*, 64-65.
- <sup>17</sup> Cronjé et al., *Lonrho*, 36.
- <sup>18</sup> Chirambo, "Impact of Democratisation," 83.
- <sup>19</sup> Nkomo, *My Life*, 183.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> *Lonrho*, 259.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> "From Rags to Riches."
- <sup>24</sup> Chris Mbanga, telephone interview by author, 28 July 2021.
- <sup>25</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>26</sup> Scarnecchia, *Urban Roots*, 76.
- <sup>27</sup> "Ban Slapped on Zimbabwe Times." *The Herald* (hereafter 'TH'), 3 October 1978.
- <sup>28</sup> Secretary, Home Affairs to Secretary Federal Public Services Commission, 19 December 1958, F121/H3, National Archives of Zimbabwe.
- <sup>29</sup> "SR Newsman in Ghana." *African Daily News*, 8 November 1963.
- <sup>30</sup> "This is the US – As Seen by an African." *African Daily News*, 19 February 1963; "African in US Says Senator Must Go." *RDM*, 7 December 1962.
- <sup>31</sup> Barbara Cole, email to author, 18 October 2021.
- <sup>32</sup> Bower, *Tiny Rowland*, 390-91.
- <sup>33</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>34</sup> "Mugabe: 'Love of One Another is One Principle I Uphold.'" *RDM*, 28 July 1978.
- <sup>35</sup> Tendai Dumbutshena, email to author, 17 February 2022.
- <sup>36</sup> "Three Papers Woo Rhodesian Blacks." *RDM*, 11 November 1977.
- <sup>37</sup> Examples include: "Bophuthatswana and Independence." *ZT*, 7 December 1977; "Create Non-Racial Society." *ZT*, 31 May 1978; "Lessons from the Rhodesian Experience." *ZT*, 16 January 1978; "High-Rank Ters Get British Passports." *National Observer*, 30 August 1979.
- <sup>38</sup> "Press Protests at Times Ban." *RDM*, 3 October 1978; Geoffrey Nyarota, email to author, 3 November 2021.
- <sup>39</sup> John Theo, telephone interview by author, 7 February 2021.
- <sup>40</sup> "Editor of Banned Paper in London." *TH*, 10 October 1978.
- <sup>41</sup> "From Rags to Riches."; "Ban Slapped on Zimbabwe Times."
- <sup>42</sup> Tendi, "Patriotic History," 385.
- <sup>43</sup> John Ndhlovu, email to author, 22 February 2022.
- <sup>44</sup> Dumbutshena email.
- <sup>45</sup> "From Rags to Riches."
- <sup>46</sup> Tendai Dumbutshena, interview by author, Johannesburg, South Africa, 30 September 2021.
- <sup>47</sup> "From Rags to Riches."
- <sup>48</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>49</sup> Confirmed in interviews with both Dumbutshena and Ndhlovu.
- <sup>50</sup> "From Rag to Riches."
- <sup>51</sup> "About Ourselves." *ZT*, 14 October 1977.
- <sup>52</sup> "Why I Gave In – Sithole." *ZT*, 28 January 1978.
- <sup>53</sup> "Who did Coloureds Represent?" JB Cohen, letter to editor, *ZT*, 29 April 1977.
- <sup>54</sup> "Hoping and Trusting In a Better Tomorrow." Frank Govinder, letter to editor, *ZT*, 25 May 1978; "Muzorewa Leads to Freedom." TL Tsapi, letter to editor, *ZT*, 29 April 1977.
- <sup>55</sup> "Nyandoro Returns from Exile." *ZT*, 12 December 1977.
- <sup>56</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>57</sup> "Mr. Mugabe's Dar-es-Salaam Speech." *ZT*, 16 December 1977.
- <sup>58</sup> "No Nkomo without Mugabe." *ZT*, 3 June 1978.
- <sup>59</sup> EIR, *Tiny Rowland*, 117; Saul Ndlovu, "Did Nkomo Ordain Mugabe?," *The Patriot*, [https://www.thepatriot.co.zw/old\\_posts/did-nkomo-ordain-mugabe/](https://www.thepatriot.co.zw/old_posts/did-nkomo-ordain-mugabe/), accessed 14 October 2021.
- <sup>60</sup> "Love of One Another."
- <sup>61</sup> "Convene All-Party Talks – ZANU." *ZT*, 15 June 1978; "People's Movement Urges for All-Party Conference." *ZT*, 30 May 1978.
- <sup>62</sup> I was unable to reach Shamu for his response.
- <sup>63</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>64</sup> Scarnecchia, *Urban Roots*, ch. 7 passim.
- <sup>65</sup> "Unity: Dare Resolution." *Zimbabwe News*, December 1970.
- <sup>66</sup> FROLIZI was also party to the agreement.

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- <sup>67</sup> Muzorewa, *Rise Up*, 169.
- <sup>68</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>69</sup> Confirmed in interviews with Ndhlovu and Dumbutshena.
- <sup>70</sup> Msipa, *Freedom and Justice*, 70. Msipa claim to have ‘run the paper’ which seems to be an exaggeration.
- <sup>71</sup> Nyarota, *Against the Grain*, 52.
- <sup>72</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>73</sup> ZAPU leaders profiled included: Nkomo (28 October 1977), Josiah Chinamano (25 November 1977), Daniel Madzimbamuto (30 December 1977), George Silundika (14 January 1978), Msipa (28 January 1978).
- <sup>74</sup> Tsanga Tshanga, “When will the RAP be RIP?” *ZT*, 16 January 1978.
- <sup>75</sup> “Bishop Muzorewa’s New Team.” *ZT*, 16 September 1977.
- <sup>76</sup> “Rhodesia Imposes Censorship in Move to Combat Guerrillas.” *New York Times*, 27 April 1976.
- <sup>77</sup> Peta Thornycroft, telephone interview by author, 12 October 2021.
- <sup>78</sup> “From Rags to Riches.”
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> “Editor Charged.” *RDM*, 1 September 1978.
- <sup>82</sup> Dumbutshena interview.
- <sup>83</sup> “We Demand a Fair Deal.” *ZT*, 2 May 1978.
- <sup>84</sup> “Separate Rolls Not Acceptable.” *ZT*, 13 February 1978; “UANC Congress Necessary.” *ZT*, 8 June 1978.
- <sup>85</sup> “Bishop Muzorewa’s New Team” Sept 16, 1977.
- <sup>86</sup> “Can an Internal Settlement Work?” *ZT*, 25 November 1977.
- <sup>87</sup> “The Salisbury Agreement.” *ZT*, 6 March 1978.
- <sup>88</sup> “Strike Report ‘Mischievous.’” *RDM*, 13 December 1977.
- <sup>89</sup> “Exco Dragging its Feet.” *ZT*, 13 May 1978.
- <sup>90</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>92</sup> “Uphold Freedom of Expression.” *ZT*, 15 June 1978.
- <sup>93</sup> Ndhlovu and Dumbutshena interviews.
- <sup>94</sup> Muzorewa was Chair of the Executive Council at the time.
- <sup>95</sup> “Editor Replies to Minister’s Accusations.” *TH*, 17 October 1978.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>97</sup> “Press Protests at Times Ban.”
- <sup>98</sup> “Rhodesia’s Only Black Daily Banned.” *RDM*, 3 October 1978.
- <sup>99</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>100</sup> “The Night a favoured Nkomo fell from Grace.” *RDM*, 14 September 1978.
- <sup>101</sup> Muzorewa, *Rise Up*, 258.
- <sup>102</sup> “Bishop and Chirau Fly Today to America.” *TH*, 12 October 1978.
- <sup>103</sup> “Another Nail.” *TH*, 3 October 1978/
- <sup>104</sup> “Why was Newspaper Banned?” HJ Knowles, letter to editor, *TH*, 10 October 1978.
- <sup>105</sup> “Press Protests at Times Ban.”
- <sup>106</sup> Dumbutshena interview.
- <sup>107</sup> Michael Holman, email to author, 17 February 2022.
- <sup>108</sup> “Ban Slapped on Zimbabwe Times.” White officials commonly referred to ZANU and ZAPU as terrorist organisations.
- <sup>109</sup> Mbanga interview.
- <sup>110</sup> Dumbutshena interview.
- <sup>111</sup> “Editor Replies to Minister’s Accusations.”
- <sup>112</sup> “Ban Slapped on Zimbabwe Times.”
- <sup>113</sup> “Editor of Banned Paper in London.”
- <sup>114</sup> “Ban Comes Before First Issue.” *RDM*, 20 October 1978.
- <sup>115</sup> Ndhlovu interview.
- <sup>116</sup> “Soames Lifts Ban on ZANU, ZAPU.” *RDM*, 22 December 1979.
- <sup>117</sup> Windrich, *Mass Media*, 86.
- <sup>118</sup> Ruth Weiss, “Zimbabwe: Black Editors in,” 28.
- <sup>119</sup> AJ Chennells, “The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe,” 206-07.
- <sup>102</sup> Kumbula, “Press Freedom in Zimbabwe,” 177.

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