Southern Rhodesia and Britain's Discriminatory Sterling Area: The Dollar Crisis and Post-War Colonial Tobacco Trade, 1947–1960

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Abstract

Drawing on archival material from the National Archives of Zimbabwe, Adam Matthews Digital Archives and newspaper reports, this study locates Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry within post-war currency developments and the politics of international trade. Following the Second World War, the shift in the financial balance of economic power triggered by the shift from the gold standard to the reformed gold standard had a lasting impact on global trade. This resulted in the British retreat from the position of hosting the global key currency denominated in sterling towards the US dollar from 1944 onwards. This study utilises the effects of this shift in the case of Southern Rhodesia, a British colony, and its impact on one specific commodity: tobacco. Because of the dollar crisis of 1947 in Britain, however, and Cold War geopolitical considerations explored in this paper, Britain was extended some leeway by the United States to recover from the losses of two world wars and a depression, as well as the loss of key currency status in ways that resulted in the establishment of a discriminatory sterling area that informed colonial trade dynamics in interesting ways. This paper thus brings the experience of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry into sharp focus by centring it in the context of international exchange arrangements and trade considerations in the post-Second World War period. In doing so, it illuminates imperial-colonial relations in a settler colonial setting against the background of post-war Anglo-American economic relations.

Keywords: Southern Rhodesia; empire; tobacco; post-war; dollar crisis

Introduction

The colonial project was stimulated by a search for territories and commodities that could be secured relatively cheaply and for the benefit of European empires. While in the 1940s, this dynamic focused significantly on tobacco, the colonisation of Zimbabwe had been triggered by the prospect of securing gold just as with the rand in the South African republic.[1] However, the interconnectedness of the growing tobacco industry of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the tobacco manufacturing industries of the UK goes back to the early 1900s.[2]

Other critical connections between imperial interests and colonial commodity production, whether gold or later tobacco, found full expression in who produced them, to whom they were sold and, crucially, in what currency. The colonisation of Southern Rhodesia by Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1890 occurred at the height of British imperial power and at a point when it was at the apex of the classical international gold standard. To sustain international trade, gold was the main commodity upon which currencies were based, and its acquisition was critical to sustaining the system. This stimulated the activities of chartered companies that ultimately secured charters for the colonisation of territories such as Southern Rhodesia to ensure the exploitation of such resources for the benefit of the British Empire. However, currency denominations were at the centre of the global balance of economic power in a context in which the country that held the most gold controlled international exchange and reaped the most benefits.[3] The production and marketing of agricultural commodities such as tobacco was also informed by similar dynamics, although its importance to currency arrangements would become much more important in the 1940s.

It is against this background that this paper brings the story of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry in conversation with Britain's imperial system in the context of the post-war international tobacco trade. It starts in 1947, a year in which a deal (to be known as the London Agreement) was sealed between UK tobacco manufacturers and Southern Rhodesian tobacco growers, and ends in 1960 with the UK's abandonment of dollar import restrictions, thereby exposing Southern Rhodesia to the vagaries of world tobacco markets. In doing so, the paper charts the complex and dynamic interplay of global, regional and domestic factors that influenced the trajectory of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry in the aftermath of the Second World War. In what follows, the discussion turns to the historical development of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry from the 1900s to the end of the Second World War in 1945, to cast light on its historical connection with that of the mother country.

Tobacco Production in Southern Rhodesia: Origins and Development

The history of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry is intricately linked to that of the UK in many ways. The nature of currency developments also significantly shaped colonial commodity markets over time. The territory that became Southern Rhodesia was colonised by Cecil John Rhodes' BSAC in 1890 on the strength of a royal charter issued by the British Crown. Although the colony was first occupied on the promise of rich gold deposits similar to those discovered in South Africa, this basis proved unsustainable. The gold in the territory was not in the anticipated quantities, forcing the company administration in charge of the territory to diversify.[4] It was against this background that the company administration introduced the 'white agricultural policy' in 1908, the first firm step by the colonial administration to systematically encourage and support the development of the territory's agricultural resources.[5]

Among the many crops that the administration experimented with was tobacco.[6] Coincidentally, this happened at a time when the British tobacco industry was consolidating on the strength of an expanding cigarette market. A few years before the occupation of Southern Rhodesia, developments that were to have significant implications for the territory's tobacco industry took place in Britain in ways that would shape colonial markets.

The nature of colonisation in Africa was shaped by imperial strategic and economic interests. In Southern Rhodesia, not only was the interest initially in securing gold but ultimately the BSAC and subsequent settler governments sought to develop a diversified economy and exploit the colony's resources. Imperial economic gains, however, could only be facilitated in a currency they controlled and prices they determined.[7] Also, securing colonies would eliminate competition from other competing imperial contenders, leaving the African continent to be economically divided along the trading or currency areas defined by imperial currencies such as the escudo, the franc or sterling. As the case of Southern Rhodesia demonstrates, the imposition and gradual entrenchment of sterling was informed by imperial interests determined to enforce the kinds of commodities grown, and how or at what price they were traded.[8] By the time currency arrangements were established in the colony, the formation of the Imperial

Tobacco Company of Great Britain and Ireland (ITC) set the tone for the future trajectory of the global tobacco industry, with implications for Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland (now Malawi), South Africa and, to an extent, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).[9]

The establishment of the ITC culminated in the Anglo-American agreement in terms of which the American Tobacco Company (ATC) conceded to cease activities in Great Britain and Ireland. Instead, the ITC would have the trading rights in the UK for the ATC's brands. In return, the ATC would have the trading rights in the USA for the ITC's brands. It was in the sphere of the export trade where the foundation for the development of Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry was laid. The ITC and ATC formed a new company, the British-American Tobacco Company (BAT), as their international arm, 'to which were assigned the rights and trademarks of both the older organisations for ships' stores and other business outside the United States and its territories and outside Great Britain and Ireland.'[10] The BAT went on to set up cigarette manufacturing operations in different countries – including South Africa from 1904 – and actively encouraged the local growing of flue-cured leaf to serve these factories. Hence, as Clements and Harben point out, the cultivation of flue-cured tobacco leaf in Southern Rhodesia began to take off from around 1910 due to the demand from BAT's South African operations.[11]

This process of extending the cultivation of flue-cured leaf to other parts of the globe by BAT (for example to British India) had become a severe bone of contention among US agricultural interests by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. The main objection was that US-style tobacco leaf cultivated for use in locally made cigarettes was now providing competition for US tobacco leaf exports in Britain and elsewhere. BAT had originally been majority owned by ATC, but this holding was sold off after 1911 due to a ruling by the US Anti-Trust authorities; once in British hands, its support for leaf tobacco growing in other parts of the globe became a threat to US leaf markets abroad.[12]

Meanwhile, the ITC was spreading its tentacles globally. In a development that saw its influence expanding beyond the UK, it established its own leaf-buying and rehandling organisation in the USA in 1902, the source of the bulk of British leaf supplies. Expanding the cultivation of US leaf in the colonies, however, had the advantage of reducing dependency on US sources, and would allow it to save on dollars and purchases would be made in sterling. To this end, it also established similar facilities in India and Canada in 1910 and 1926, respectively. What is more relevant to this discussion was the establishment of handling and packing factories at Msasa in Southern Rhodesia in 1928 and, before that, at Limbe in Nyasaland in 1906.[13]

Under the direction of the mother company's Leaf Department, these organisations were responsible for the purchasing, packing and shipping of the company's leaf requirements from the various territories. With respect to southern Africa, the establishment of the leaf-buying and rehandling organisation at Limbe marked the first significant contact between the British Empire and the region in so far as the tobacco industry was concerned. From 1907 onward, the UK started to secure leaf from its Empire, first from Nyasaland, and later from India and Rhodesia, marking the beginning of a long relationship that shaped the agricultural landscape of the region, particularly that of post-Second World War Southern Rhodesia.

However, despite the activities of the ITC and the BAT, the use of Empire leaf had no appreciable effect on the pattern of leaf supplies until after the First World War.[14] This changed slightly after the war on the strength of two stimuli: the imperial preference on tobacco first introduced in 1919 before its increase in 1925; and the British Empire Wembley Exhibition of 1923, at which Southern Rhodesian tobacco was showcased. The year 1915 is especially important, given that Britain was forced to suspend the gold standard in the context of the war and pursue dollar-saving policies.[15] By 1925, although the gold standard was re-established briefly (until 1931), it had become clear that Empire tobacco was critical for British economic recovery. Whereas in 1920, Empire leaf accounted for only 3 per cent of total UK tobacco leaf consumption, the figure rose to 10 per cent, 23 per cent and 24 per cent in 1925, 1933 and 1939, respectively.

In many ways, beyond currency considerations, the boom in Empire tobacco trade was partly due to new cigarette lines wholly made of Empire leaf, such as Walter Tobacco Co.'s Walters Medium Navy Cut, introduced in 1935, and the ITC's Tenner Medium, introduced a year later to compete with Walters.'[16] Although these cigarettes made using exclusively Southern Rhodesian leaf did not prove to be a commercial success in inter-war Britain, the integration of tobacco leaf from the colonies as part of blended brands became significant and enabled Southern Rhodesian growers to secure around 10 per cent of Britain's leaf imports throughout the 1930s. However, even then, it is important to note that the pre-Second World War UK cigarette was composed of 85 per cent USA leaf and that, in 1939, about 75 per cent of tobacco leaf used in the UK was imported from the USA. Other suppliers, such as Rhodesia and Nyasaland, India and Canada, contributed 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively.[17]

The impact of the war on the global tobacco trade and its implications for Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry has received scholarly attention.[18] As earlier highlighted, in emphasising the positive impact of the war, Clements and Harben titled their chapter covering this period 'The Fortune of War.'[19] Similarly, writing about the development of the local tobacco industry to 1945, Rubert describes tobacco as 'a most promising weed.' How the 'promising weed' noted by Rubert transformed into a 'golden leaf' is part of what this discussion focuses on. It does so in the context of the post-war realignment of the tobacco trade between Southern Rhodesia and Britain. In doing so, it illuminates further dimensions of the complexity of imperial relations in the post-war period, as will more fully appear in what follows.

British Sterling Crisis and Rhodesian Tobacco: International Context and Global Dynamics

As highlighted in the preceding section, early efforts to grow tobacco in Southern Rhodesia coincided with a period of sustained expansion of the UK's tobacco manufacturing industry on the back of the popularity of the Bonsack machine-made cigarette.[20] However, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the consumption of the colony's tobacco leaf by UK manufacturers remained minimal. The outbreak of hostilities in 1939 drastically changed this pattern. War-time circumstances saw the UK increasingly resorting to sourcing tobacco from the Sterling Area, to which Southern Rhodesia belonged.[21] It became necessary to source tobacco from within the Empire to avoid the loss of gold and preserve foreign currency to sustain financing the war. Purchasing tobacco 'internally' allowed Britain to purchase more important artillery and other war-related material outside the Empire, but could use its own currency to secure tobacco and other products for its domestic needs.

Contrary to Southern Rhodesian tobacco growers' fears, the war-time advantages did not end with the cessation of hostilities in 1945. After the war, Britain's economy had been battered by the sustained impact of two world wars and a depression. London had since suspended the gold standard in 1931 and owed much in war-time loans. Its position at the helm of the international exchange system became unsustainable, necessitating the Bretton Woods conference (1944), which passed the baton of setting an international key currency to the US as a compromise between the flexible exchange rates in the 1930s and the fixed rates of the reformed gold standard at US$35 an ounce.[22] This initially led to a run on the Bank of England by, especially, the dominions who were keen to shift their assets to the US dollar instead of sterling until Britain suspended convertibility into gold in 1947.[23] However, for geopolitical reasons, the USA needed an economically stable UK in order to fend off the growing communist threat of the Soviets. In exchange for a US loan of US$3.75 billion (that is US$57 billion in 2014 values) and a Canadian loan of US$1.19 billion (US$16 billion in 2014 values), the Anglo-American Loan agreement (1946) resulted in the convertibility of sterling in all other currencies on 15 July 1947.[24] Following this agreement however, the UK was allowed to establish the discriminatory sterling area, which would allow them to retain colonies in a 'second colonial occupation,' trade within the Empire and pool dollars at the Bank of England, allowing their economy to recover.[25] Britain not only owed over GB£3 billion in war-time debt, but also 'faced a cumulative balance of payment deficit of £1.250 million between 1945 and 1950.'[26]

As highlighted above, Britain's post-war balance of payment disequilibrium dictated the continued importation of tobacco from the Sterling Area, as opposed to the traditional dollar zone dominated by the USA, but also including Canada. Through the London Agreement, a marketing deal sealed between British tobacco manufacturers and Southern Rhodesian farmers in 1947 with the tacit support of the two parties' respective governments, Anglo-Rhodesian tobacco trade relations solidified. It is within this context that 'the promising weed' (tobacco) that Steven Rubert refers to during the period up to 1945 quickly matured into Clements and Harben's 'leaf of gold' in the post-war era.[27] For the first time in the history of the colony, tobacco dislodged gold as Southern Rhodesia's largest foreign currency earner in 1946.[28] This was taking place, however, against the backdrop of a 'reconstructed international trade architecture' revolving around the USA's free trade gospel.

The discriminatory sterling area, created in response to a convertibility crisis triggered by the immediate effects of Bretton Woods and the Loan Agreement are viewed, on one hand, as a short-lived and temporarily successful mechanism to bolster the international influence of the currency and, ultimately, its managed retreat.[29] This was done through the joint efforts of the Bank of England, the Treasury and the Dominions and Colonial Office. Setting up the new sterling arrangements required 'that colonial territories understood and appreciated the principles and practice of exchange control in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to the Exchange Control Act, 1947,' especially against the backdrop of 'the economic crisis and the plans for meeting it, and to emphasise the need for dollar (and sterling) economy.'[30] Thus, '[i]t was important in this connection that the orthodox British monetary and marketing arrangements were preserved, since this meant that exchange surplus would automatically accumulate as sterling balances.'[31] As Krozewski highlights, 'British policy was mainly concerned with import control, the boosting of exports and the control of financial and currency arrangements.'[32]

Prior to the new exchange control regulations, Southern Rhodesia, as other British colonies, operated on the basis of the Defense (Finance) Regulations (DFR) of 1939, 'on the lines of and not less stringent than' those in Britain.[33] On this pretext, the authorities and institutions presiding over the new exchange control legislation had then to adapt it to specific territorial contexts. This was crucially aided by a tour undertaken by W.J Jackson, an official of the foreign branch of the Bank of England, and H.E. Brooks, from the Treasury, to the colonies and also specifically to Southern Rhodesia. While all east and west African colonies were advised at conferences held in Nairobi and Accra, respectively, Southern Rhodesia was consulted on its own, demonstrating its importance in the British post-war recovery programme.[34] The consultations were necessary as 'it was felt in London that the colonies had been too long at the end of a limb, trying to work a control the nature of which they could not fully understand.'[35] In the ensuing sterling crisis of 1947 and 1952, 'the empire occupied a prominent position in Britain's external economic relations and fulfilled a pivotal role in the discriminatory management of the sterling area.'[36]

Southern Rhodesia was briefed that the setting up of the area aimed at achieving the restoration of 'the economic position of the UK.' The sterling empire's 'Facts of Life' were depicted as the problem of reconversion in the wake of the 1947 convertibility crisis.[37] The loss of other major imperial and colonial territory and investments aggravated the decrease in 'invisible earnings' which had hitherto offset the balance of payment deficits, hence the need to consolidate colonial territories. Although the 'general plan' of recovery had 'details of the assistance available to us from the American Loan and Bretton Woods (and the strings attached),' the consultations emphasised the area's need for 'saving dollars' through 'import licensing in relation to exchange control.'[38] Export of currency notes and economic and trading activity would be closely supervised and the banks monitored. This was meant to control the rate of inflation which had the potential to harm sterling.[39]

In Southern Rhodesia, which desired increased political autonomy, and, with it, a greater degree of discretionary monetary authority, exchange controls only enhanced further entrenchment to sterling. Unlike most other British African colonies, Southern Rhodesia had been under Responsible Government from 1923 and was therefore treated comparatively differently. This explains why Jackson and Brooks made a separate visit to the country during their Bank of England sponsored colonial tours on exchange control, instead of grouping Southern Rhodesia with the colonies at conferences held in Nairobi or Accra.[40] This unique treatment of Southern Rhodesia in British colonial relations impressed upon the Secretary to that colony's Treasury, A.H. Strachan, who reiterated to parliament the need to be exemplary in following imperial exchange control instructions.[41] Indeed, Brooks believed that Southern Rhodesia would be quite exemplary in complying with imperial instructions. He represented the thinking that 'colonial development and British recovery were the same.'[42] This rationale became increasingly complicated by diverging imperial economic and settler interests in Southern Rhodesia in the late 1950s. In the mid-1940s, however, it was unsurprising that Southern Rhodesia's tobacco fortunes were tied to Britain's economic recovery plans that culminated in the 1947 London deal. Britain's post-war imperial ambitions were based on the centrality of the Empire in its post-war reconstruction efforts.

Anglo-Rhodesian Tobacco Trade Relations and the Politics of Post-Second World War Economics

Scholars of diplomatic history and international relations have traced the reconstruction of the post-war international trade architecture to the last few years leading to the end of the Second World War in 1945. Of relevance to this discussion are Anglo-American negotiations for free trade as a pre-condition for enduring global peace. The USA and the UK already envisioned a post-war world trading system based on reducing all trade barriers and limiting discriminatory tariff preferences as well as currency blocks. Preparations for the new world trading order began during the war and date from the Atlantic Charter and the Lend-Lease Act, the main condition of which was the promise of general support for the construction of a liberal and multilateral trade order, support that Britain could demonstrate concretely by abolishing imperial preferences. Just two years after Germany's surrender, twenty-three countries established the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that set rules to restrict national trade policies and even started to decrease tariffs in binding agreements.[43] The main objective of GATT was to eliminate 'discriminatory commercial practices, of which preferences ranked as a pernicious form.'[44] This section offers an overview of how all these developments influenced the general post-war international trade climate in the context of Britain's post-war imperial system with implications for the trajectory taken by Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry.

According to L.J. Butler, 'the Second World War had a profound effect on the British imperial system.'[45] The post-war period was characterised by 'a revival and strengthening of Britain's imperial commitment.'[46] Britain's war-induced balance of payment disequilibrium and the accompanying dollar crisis shaped her attitude towards her imperial possessions. For instance, British officials valued the Commonwealth commercial network and imperial preferences because they could give British exports a temporary edge over foreign commodities while they regained their international competitiveness.[47] In the face of a crippling shortage of dollars, it became pertinent for Britain to emphasise the importance of extracting products from countries that fell within the Sterling Area. Tobacco from Southern Rhodesia was one such product and the producing colony valued imperial preference, one of the most contentious trade practices that the USA wanted removed. Yet, as McKenzie demonstrates, this was something that Britain could not do without, causing friction among its dominions and colonies and thereby undermining the Commonwealth.

Britain's ability to lead the Commonwealth would sustain its role as a world power and retaining imperial preference would be a measure of British strength and self-reliance, with its abolition viewed as 'a kowtow to American leadership.'[48] At the same time, 'the Commonwealth would not alone decide Britain's place in the world.' There was also need to maintain harmonious and cooperative relations with the USA as a way of 'reinforcing Britain's postwar role in world affairs.'[49] This presented Britain with a difficult situation which 'exerted contradictory pressure on trade policy': on the one hand, relying on the Commonwealth called for the retention, even expansion, of the imperial preference as a symbol of Commonwealth solidarity; on the other hand, 'riding on American coat-tails would be made easier by giving up imperial preference.'[50] This is the context within which this discussion seeks to unpack post-war Anglo-Rhodesian tobacco trade relations.

The contradiction between Britain's commitment to free trade in terms of the Atlantic Charter, the Lend-Lease Act and later the GATT, and her post-war 'second colonial occupation,' anchored on leveraging her imperial possessions for post-war reconstruction, was to manifest itself in her tobacco trade relations with Southern Rhodesia and the rest of the Empire. The continued scarcity of dollars in the post-war era saw the UK government encouraging the production within the Empire of essential raw materials for her industrial requirements. The establishment of the Colonial Primary Products Committee (CPPC) in 1947 should be understood against this background. The committee was tasked to 'review, commodity by commodity, the possibility of increasing colonial production.'[51] Tobacco was one such product, the production of which within the Sterling Area, particularly in Southern Rhodesia, was encouraged. The importance of tobacco in the British economy is evident from the place it occupied on the CPPC priority list of commodities. Together with essentials such as rice, maize, millets, fertilisers, meat, pig products, dairy products, hides and skins, hardwood, plywood and cotton, tobacco was accorded first priority status. In fact, it was prioritised ahead of sugar, cocoa, citrus, fruit juices and tanning materials, which came second on the priority list, and tea, coffee, spices and fruit (other than citrus), which were placed third.[52]

The British government went a step further to encourage the Board of Trade's Tobacco Advisory Committee (TAC) to conclude a tobacco leaf supply deal with growers from the Empire. In line with this and on behalf of the major UK tobacco manufacturers, the TAC consummated with the Southern Rhodesian Tobacco Marketing Board (RTMB) what became known as the London Agreement. Under this Agreement, which, with slight modification, was renewed each year until 1954, the RTMB undertook that the UK manufacturers would seek to purchase about two-thirds of the Southern Rhodesian flue-cured crop in each of the ensuing five years. The last of the five-year commitments under this form of Agreement did not come to an end until 1958, but, meanwhile, in 1954, the TAC had negotiated a new form of agreement. Under the new agreement, the TAC undertook to provide each year a firm estimate of UK manufacturers' requirements for the following year, with provisional estimates for the two next subsequent years.[53]

Contrary to Britain's post-war commitment towards creating a less restrictive and discriminatory trade regime, the provisions of the London Agreement, which underpinned post-war Anglo-Rhodesian tobacco trade relations, dictated otherwise. Its operative provisions flew in the face of the Anglo-American post-war trade ethos, based on making international trade freer and less restrictive. Firstly, the Anglo-Rhodesian delegations that negotiated the agreement conceded that, under existing conditions of dollar shortage, it would be necessary for import permits to be enforced. This concession was made in view of the TAC's submission that the level of leaf stock among manufacturers was highly uneven. Import control was meant to ensure their equitable adjustment without heightening competition at the Salisbury auction floors.

Related to that, the Southern Rhodesian delegation conceded the need for some system of export control to guarantee British tobacco manufacturers their agreed percentage of the crop at reasonable prices.[54] This would be done by restricting other markets to the remainder of the crop after Britain had obtained her requirements. Without export control, competition would in all probability be so intense that prices would become grossly inflated, and this would eventually kill the market. Although export control would certainly result in the loss of some markets, Southern Rhodesian growers were prepared to sacrifice them on the altar of stability. They were prepared to forego immediate gain in the interest of creating a stable market at fair prices. Two years later, the 1949 Australian Agreement, largely similar to that signed in London, was concluded with Australian manufacturers. The only major difference was that, unlike Britain, Australia had no association of manufacturers similar to the British TAC. Consequently, they were to sign the agreement individually.[55]

The London and Australian agreements of 1947 and 1949, respectively, did not only entail a controlled tobacco market but also reinforced its segmentation into priority and non-priority markets. The former comprised 'the agreement markets' of the UK and Australia, the Union of South Africa quota, as agreed from year to year between the two territories' ministers of agriculture, and the local market, whose requirements were ascertained from all manufacturers by the Department of Agriculture. On the other hand, was what was classified as non-priority markets was covered by a blanket quota for export which was proportioned out to buyers in accordance with their pro-rata exports over the last three years. This was operationalised through requiring buyers to render weekly returns, giving weights and, where necessary, average prices paid for both priority and non-priority markets. If, upon comparing the average price paid by each buyer on non-priority markets and that paid over the whole of the purchase for the UK in any one week, the former exceeded the latter, warning would be given to the buyer to reduce it in the following week. In the event of the price on non-priority markets continuing to be excessive, a buyer would be judged to be detrimental, and his quotas would be reduced or taken away.[56]

The export and import controls introduced in Southern Rhodesia triggered resentment among different players in the tobacco value chain. These included individual tobacco growers in the colony, UK small manufacturers and merchants, and US tobacco growers whose search for more markets for their tobacco crop was relentless. A section of the tobacco-growing community understood the rationale behind the London Agreement, that is, 'to nurse the British market … to secure a stable market for Rhodesian tobacco.'[57] This group called upon fellow growers to 'be prepared to sacrifice much in order to secure stability' in the prices of tobacco, in the long-term interests of the industry.[58] However, another section of the same local tobacco-growing community was critical of the Rhodesia Tobacco Association (RTA) for signing up to an arrangement that stifled their long-cherished free and unfettered auction sale system in place since 1936 when the RTMB was established, and which, up to that date, had served the industry well. Winston Field, a former RTA President in the 1930s, and the first Rhodesia Front president of the colony in 1962, cautioned against tying up the 'whole future of the Rhodesia Tobacco Industry … to England.'[59] The same sentiments were shared by Ian Morten, Southern Rhodesia's tobacco representative at Rhodesia House in London, who reinforced that it was 'unwise to tie too much of our tobacco to the British market' because 'competitors in this market, whether from States or the Empire [would] go on with their efforts to recover lost ground.'[60]

Criticism of the London Agreement also came from the rank-and-file membership of the RTA. For instance, Nicholle Strong from Bindura, a tobacco-growing district in Southern Rhodesia's Mashonaland Province, during a farmers' meeting, moved a motion for the scrapping of 'all control on export permits … to throw open the market on low grade tobacco to all buyers.'[61] Another grower from Headlands, another tobacco-growing district, expressed doubt over non-priority market players' attendance local tobacco sales 'if the only attraction be that tobacco … unwanted by buyers under the Agreement.'[62] He did not understand why the local tobacco industry could not take advantage of the supply and demand dynamic, which, in the immediate post-war era, was tilted in favour of the supplier. For him, there was no point 'why prices [should] be sacrificial when the supply [was] short.'[63] He called upon the RTA 'to take steps to have export regulations lifted and thus throw the market open' in order to enhance competition at the auction floors and take advantage of improved pricing of their crop.[64]

Another group that felt short-changed by the London Agreement comprised small manufacturers and merchants who were excluded from the agreement's ambit. The London deal was sealed with the TAC, which largely represented the interests of the big British tobacco manufacturers to the exclusion of those of the small manufacturers who got considered only when this did not interfere with the TMB-TAC deal. In any case, in clear disdain of the small player, the RTA secretary cautioned against putting 'too much faith in the smaller manufacturer, or the merchant in respect of the UK market.'[65] They could 'help the merchant get a bigger non-priority market and foster continental markets' only if they could 'avoid upsetting the TAC.'[66] This attitude did not go down well with the small manufacturers, who felt betrayed because, prior to the dollar tobacco restrictions, they were sourcing most of their supplies from the Empire. They had had no vested interests in US tobacco. Their 'usings' of Empire leaf were far larger, in proportion, than that of the bigger manufacturers. Yet, when the heavy cuts in US supplies were imposed, big companies which had previously used US leaf were allocated larger proportions of Empire leaf ahead of the loyal small players who had always supported leaf from the Empire.[67] These were some of the challenges that the RTMB had to contend with. However, this was just part of a bigger problem, as will be clearer in what follows.

Previous sections have shown how, prior to the cessation of hostilities, the USA championed a free and less restrictive post-war international trade regime. The momentum was sustained into the post-war period, as evidenced by, among other interventions, the USA's active role in the different rounds of the GATT negotiations, beginning with the Geneva round in 1947. Top on the list of US concerns during subsequent GATT rounds of negotiations were two things: a cut in the Commonwealth preference for Rhodesian and other tobacco; and the ending of the London Agreement. This, they argued, was because tobacco production in Commonwealth countries was no longer an infant industry in need of protection. Britain's improved foreign exchange situation since the mid-1950s rendered the reduction of hard currency imports unnecessary. In view of this, the USA pushed hard for the scrapping of all forms of import restrictions and tariff preferences, which they argued impeded free trade as provided in GATT protocols.

The US position had been informed by British imperial shifts in the mid-1950s. Following the end of the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill had been determined to revitalise the Commonwealth and Britain's Africa Empire. But, following the Suez Crisis under the premiership of Anthony Eden, it became clear that the Empire could not be sustained. In fact, the Suez debacle signalled two important issues. The first was that the USA was no longer willing to support, as they had initially done with the 'second colonial occupation,' any more of the UK's imperial adventures. The second was that, in a context of post-war liberalism, sustaining Empire was increasingly expensive and difficult. The Suez crisis resulted in Eden's resignation. His successor, Harold Macmillan, took stock of 'something like a profit and loss account of our colonial possessions,' which 'revealed a cold calculation that the benefits and costs of continuation of colonial rule had to be set against the economic and political advantages of good relations with ex-colonial states.'[68]

Macmillan recognised the 'wind of change'[69] that was blowing across Africa and thus began a process of imperial retreat. This triggered a shift away from reconstituting Empire towards economic consolidation in the emerging European Economic Community. The discriminatory sterling area started weakening and, with it, the trade arrangements made in the 1940s. Moreover, within the colonies, the Central African Federation that had been established in 1953 was facing internal African opposition, resulting in its collapse in 1963. Cohen observes that, '[w]hile the Federation's birth and adolescence were relatively benign, its adulthood and death provided the British government with one of its most intractable problems during the period of decolonization.'[70]

The approach to international trade adopted by the USA was sure to set it against Southern Rhodesian tobacco interests. For Southern Rhodesia, the imperial (later Commonwealth) preference was the only remaining advantage, especially after Britain adopted liberalisation and began imperial retreat after 1957. In the immediate post-war era, Britain had used the dollar crisis to justify dollar import restrictions. However, this argument lost traction in the late 1950s when the dollar situation improved significantly, and the sterling became convertible again. As revealed by its High Commissioner, Britain was increasingly under pressure from the US government 'to remove those of our remaining import controls which still affect them.'[71] The currency shortage plea, he added, was no longer plausible in the circumstances of the 1950s. Hence, he advised that Britain and Southern Rhodesia had ‘to face the situation that indefinite maintenance of this control cannot be justified.’[72]

While Britain’s attitude towards dollar import restrictions was partly due to pressure from the USA, there were other equally important considerations worth discussing. For instance, ‘in the late 1950s, Britain’s imperial economic relations underwent an important transformation,’ which warranted ‘a re-ordering of relationships developed during the war and its aftermath.’[73] Indeed, ‘by the mid-1950s, the empire had played its assigned, and heroic, part in rebuilding Britain after the war.’ The UK’s new thrust was to ‘attempt to adjust established imperial relations to the requirements of liberal multilateralism,’ with implications for Southern Rhodesia’s tobacco industry.[74] The 26 March 1959 Salisbury Airport meeting between representatives of the Southern Rhodesian tobacco industry and Sir David Eccles, the President of the British Board of Trade, is relevant in this regard. At that meeting, John Graylin, the colony’s agriculture minister, highlighted his country’s ‘fears that UK moves in the convertibility of sterling and the further liberalisation of trade might have serious repercussions upon [local] tobacco interests.’[75] The fears were not without basis as, barely a year later, and contrary to Eccles’ assurances, the British High Commissioner confirmed the inevitability of liberalisation. ‘Our policy of liberalisation continues and further steps will be taken shortly,’ he wrote, adding that, ‘to exclude leaf tobacco, which stands as the only raw material still under control, would be to invite the United States to apply the strongest pressure for liberalisation … we have no ground to resist this.’ For Britain, it was no longer a question of whether tobacco should be liberalised, but, rather, whether that should happen ‘in the next few weeks or during the auctions.’[76]

Given the inevitability of liberalisation, Southern Rhodesian tobacco interests sought to cushion themselves from the global competition it entailed. One way of mitigating this was through a binding Commonwealth tariff preference. Yet, even this could not be guaranteed. According to the Board of Trade, the expiry of the preference’s ten-year guarantee in 1942 meant that it ceased to be contractual, and therefore ‘any increase in preference would involve a head-on collision [with the United States] in the GATT.’[77] This would set a precedent for the USA to review its relations with them, to the detriment of British economic interests.

In addition to its continuous and consistent policy to secure an erosion of Commonwealth preferences, the USA posed yet another threat to Southern Rhodesia’s tobacco industry. Following mounting surplus agricultural stocks due to the government’s price support system, the USA promulgated the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, also known as Public Law 480, (PL 480), the aim of which was ‘to reduce agricultural surplus by increasing world consumption of American agricultural products.’[78] In terms of PL 480, the USA could make domestic and foreign donations or enter into barter contracts in respect of surplus produce, of which tobacco was one. The tobacco surplus as at 1960 stood at one billion lbs. against a total annual world trade of about 800 million lbs.[79] By an amendment of 1959, the US President was empowered ‘to make long-term supply contracts to friendly countries,’ in terms of which the USA could supply surplus commodities to other countries annually over a period of up to ten years, and accept payment over a period of up to twenty years.[80]

Shipments of surplus agricultural commodities exported under Title I of PL 480 from July 1957, the commencement of the shipping period under this law, up to the end of January 1958, amounted to 3,150,111 metric tons. Of this total, tobacco accounted for 5,474 metric tons or 12,068,000 1bs. The shipments covered several countries, some of which were on the radar of

Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry as potential markets.[81] Burmese manufacturers, for instance, could not buy Southern Rhodesian tobacco because their government prohibited the importation of any tobacco except in terms of PL 480, which involved no foreign exchange. The Japanese and Egyptian markets were other cases which illustrated the negative impact of PL 480 deals on Southern Rhodesia. With PL 480 deals in place, Southern Rhodesian tobacco failed to penetrate the Japanese market. Tellingly, when the PL 480 deal stopped, Japan very quickly became an important buyer in Salisbury.[82] Similarly, before the Suez crisis disruptions, Egypt's market share for Southern Rhodesian tobacco was a weight of 3 million lbs. Attempts to get back into that market after the crisis were hindered by a three-year PL 480 deal, in terms of which the greater part of Egypt's fire-cured and flue-cured tobacco was supplied by the USA.[83] In some cases, exports under Title 1 of the PL 480 in effect opened new markets for US tobacco to the detriment of the Southern Rhodesian industry, while, in others, US exports under Title 3, which provided for the bartering of surplus tobacco in exchange for strategic raw materials, were disposed at sub-economic prices, thus handicapping the local tobacco industry in search for genuine commercial markets.[84]

Southern Rhodesian opposition to US activities under PL 480 rested on the grounds that they constituted an artificial interference with the world trade in tobacco. As such, they were regarded as an unfair trading practice, rendering it inconsistent with both the letter and spirit of GATT and, more broadly, the US commitment to creating a free and unrestrictive post-war trade environment, highlighted earlier in the discussion. What particularly irked Southern Rhodesian tobacco growers was what they considered to be the USA's double standards. Whereas, on the one hand, the USA relentlessly attacked the Commonwealth tariff preferences on the basis that they were inconsistent with the notion of free trade, on the other hand, they rolled out PL 480 deals which were similarly distortive of world trade. The USA, Southern Rhodesian tobacco interests argued, could not have it both ways: use GATT protocols to attack the Commonwealth preferential tariff, but at the same time abandoning the same protocols when it came to their PL 480 deals. Such actions flew in the face of the US commitment, in terms of the GATT, to a policy of positively assisting the economies of less-developed countries in general and its professed desire to promote the well-being of Central Africa.[85]

Southern Rhodesian tobacco growers organised themselves within the Tobacco Exports Promotion Council of Rhodesia (TEPCOR), which was formed in 1958, to demand 'that a strong line should be taken with the US in any context which might arise.'[86] One such context was the 1960/61 Dillon GATT round of negotiations whereat Southern Rhodesian representatives launched a scathing attack on the USA over her alleged double standards. The undersecretary for agriculture, V.M. Wadsworth, delivered Southern Rhodesian protests during the ongoing negotiations 'in strong terms, very rarely heard at GATT.'[87] Wadsworth himself admitted that his delegation was 'at a loss to find words within the language of normal diplomatic use to express its feelings about these transactions.'[88] What enraged the Southern Rhodesian delegation was that not even the 1955 GATT resolution, calling for orderly disposal of surplus agricultural products on world markets, in terms of which a nation carrying out surplus disposals was required to consult those countries whose trade might be affected by such transactions, could stop the USA from acting unilaterally.[89] Worse still, unlike during the immediate post-war period, when they could count on the UK's support in terms of the 'second colonial occupation' approach, in the late 1950s to 1960s, the situation changed with the Empire unravelling and the UK shifting more and more towards multilateralism.

Conclusion

This discussion first presented a historical overview of the role of currency in the establishment of Southern Rhodesia's colonial economy and how it informed the production and marketing of commodities such as tobacco from the 1900s to the end of the Second World War to illuminate the interconnectedness of the local tobacco industry with that of the Empire. This laid the foundation to understand how the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 and, in more detail, the post-war global exchange and trade climate, provided the impetus for the consolidation of Anglo-Rhodesian tobacco trade relations.

Focusing more deeply on the post-Second World War international exchange regime changes and how they stimulated such bilateral trade arrangements between the British metropole its Southern Rhodesian colony in the form of the 1947 London Agreement, the paper charted Anglo-American- Rhodesian tobacco trade politics. In doing so, it brought the history and dynamics Southern Rhodesia's tobacco industry into sharp focus within the context of Britain's post-war imperial system and broader global tobacco trade politics. Doing so allowed the paper to cast light, to varying extents, onto post-war global trade dynamics, imperial-colonial relations and, to the extent limited by available sources, contestations among the triad of Britain, the USA and Southern Rhodesia in the post-war global tobacco trade. It particularly unpacked Rhodesian-American rivalry in international tobacco from a predominantly Rhodesian perspective, as dictated by access to sources.

By offering valuable insights into Southern Rhodesia's tobacco-trading relationship with both the UK and the USA from the late 1940s to 1960, the paper provided further explanatory weight to our understanding of the processes of how global currency and exchange considerations and imperial economic recovery policies stimulated the 'second colonial occupation' through the establishment of a temporary discriminatory sterling area in southern Africa. It detailed the ambitions of Rhodesian growers to dominate the metropolitan market in the face of US pressure, capitalising on acute post-war British financial constraints. The paper made a case for Southern Rhodesian 'agency' in this triangular relationship between Washington, London and Salisbury to illuminate the extent to which the development of the local tobacco industry was influenced by the different contexts within which it operated, transcending the parochial emphasis on internal dynamics prevalent in existing literature.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes

1 See Phimister, "Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Rand," 74–90.

2 The importance of colonial commodity production for European imperial economies cannot be overstated, as numerous scholars have shown. See, for example, the classic Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

3 See Balachandran, "Power and Finance in Global Finance," 313–35.

4 Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890–1948*; Machingaidze, "The Development of Settler Capitalist Agriculture"; Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia*.

5 Machingaidze, “The Development of Settler Capitalist Agriculture,” 1.

6 Mbanga, *Tobacco*; Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed*; Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold.*

7 Phimister, “Rhodes, Rhodesia and the Rand,” 74–90.

8 Nyamunda, “Gold, Currency and Stamps,” 107–37.

9 Formed on 10 December 1901, the ITC was an amalgamation of 13 tobacco interests in the UK, designed to counter the expanding influence of the American Tobacco Company (ATC) in Britain.

10 Davies, *Fifty Years of Progress*, 10.

11 Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 70. See also Cox, *The Global Cigarette*; Corina, *Trust in Tobacco*.

12 Cox, *The Global Cigarette.*

13 Davies, *Fifty Years of Progress.*

14 Monopolies Report, 18.

15 Bordo and Kydland, “The Gold Standard as a Rule,” 423–64.

16 Monopolies Report, 21–22.

17 Ibid.

18 Monopolies Report, 23; Mbanga, *Century of Gold*; Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*; Rubert, *Most Promising Weed*.

19 See Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, 127–34.

20 See Alford, *W.D. & H.O.*; Corina, *Trust in Tobacco*; Forey et al., *International Smoking Statistics*; Monopolies Commission Report; Tate, *Cigarette Wars*.

21 See Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*, chapter 12.

22 Bordo, *The Operation and Demise of the Bretton Woods System*, 217.

23 Newton, “The Sterling Crisis of 1947,” 391–408; E.C., “Sterling in 1947,” 63.

24 The loans were only settled on 29 December 2006, six years in default of the agreement. See Schenk, *The Decline of Sterling*, 60.

25 The phrase, ‘the second colonial occupation’ was coined by Low and Lonsdale, “Introduction,” 45–46. For a broader and more detailed study on the discriminatory sterling area, see Krozewski, *Money and the End of Empire*.

26 Newtown, “The Sterling Crisis,” 392.

27 See Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed*; Clements and Harben, *Leaf of Gold*.

28 See Rubert, *A Most Promising Weed*.

29 Krozewski shows in Ibid., 21, that ‘Economic and currency matters remained the prerogative of British government departments until the formal move of individual territories to independence.’ On p. 22, he argues that, although the requirements of the discriminatory sterling area increased colonial governments’ roles, this ‘supported Britain’s management of the sterling area because it minimized competing interests in trade,’ as a way of ‘re-establishing the pound as a world currency,’ Ibid., 24. Shenck, on the other hand, contends that the primacy of sterling waned after 1952, when it ceased to be a reserve asset in the Commonwealth. Although poorer members retained the link with sterling until the 1960s, as colonies approached independence from the mid-1950s, ‘the sterling held in their reserves became an element of Britain’s management of the process of decolonization, but never a primary driver’ (Schenk, *The Decline of Sterling*, 420).

30 Bank of England, “Tour of African Territories, November 1947.”

31 Krozewski, *Money and the End of Empire*, 95.

32 Ibid., 90.

33 Bank of England, Letter from H.E. Brooks to M.E. Allen.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Krozewski, *Money and the End of Empire*, 81.

37 Bank of England, Letter from H.E. Brooks to M.E. Allen.

38 Bank of England, “Tour of African Territories, November 1947”.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Krozewski, *Money and the End of Empire*, 94.

43 See, for instance, McKenzie, *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth*; McKenzie, *GATT and Global Order*; Youngson, *The British Economy*.

44 Zeiller, “GATT Fifty Years Ago,” 709–17, 709.

45 See Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 28; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688–2000*; Thompson, *Britain’s Experience of Empire*; Low and Lonsdale, *The Oxford History of East Africa*; Riley, “Monstrous Predatory Vampires”; Strange, *Sterling and British Policy*; Ukelina, *The Second Colonial Occupation*; Stutton, *The Political Economy of Imperial Relations*.

46 McKenzie, *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth.*

47 Ibid., 39.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 40.

50 Ibid., 39.

51 Colonial Tobacco, 1944–1949. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Global Commodities, https://www.globalcommodities.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/BT_64_4302, accessed 11 July 2017.

52 Ibid.

53 Monopolies Report, 23.

54 NAZ, 2570/TBC1, Vol. 1, TMB Meeting Minutes, 11 March 1948. The export control system was later abandoned in 1953.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., April 1, 1948.

57 See *Rhodesia Herald*, August 15, 1951, as quoted in Ncube, "Colonial Zimbabwe's Tobacco Industry," 42.

58 Ibid.

59 *Rhodesia Herald*, November 22, 1947.

60 NAZ 2570/TBC1, Vol. 2, Tobacco General, 1949 January 1947–1949 December 16, London Tobacco Representative Annual Report, 1949.

61 *Rhodesia Herald*, July 11, 1951.

62 *Tobacco, August* 1951, 57.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 NAZ, RH 27/2/1, 1935–1951, Parker's letter to Morten, 20 June 1951.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*.

69 The wind of change speech was made in the South African parliament on 3 February 1960. See Ovendale, "MacMillan and the Wind of Change," 455–77.

70 Cohen, "Settler Power," 282.

71 NAZ, File F226/1214/1, Tobacco Industry Federal Archives, Letter from Acting UK High Commissioner to C.H. Thomson of the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, 21 December 1959.

72 Ibid.

73 Krozeweski, *Money and the End of Empire*, 149.

74 Hopkins, *American Empire*, 484.

75 NAZ, File F226/1214/1, Tobacco Industry Federal Archives, Letter from Acting UK High Commissioner to C.H. Thomson of the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs, 21 December 1959.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Fish, "Public Law 480," 114.

79 Ibid., 11.

80 Ibid.

81 NAZ, RH 27/3/7, File 130/16/20, Public Law 480 in US, 4 April 1958.

82 Campbell, "The Trouble with P. L 480," 9.

83 Ibid.

84 Hooper, "The Political Economy of the Rhodesian Tobacco Industry," 110.

85 Campbell, "The Trouble with P. L 480," 10.

86 Agricultural Correspondent, "Federation Protests at Surprise US Tobacco Deal," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 12, 1960.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 NAZ RH 27/3/3, Tobacco adviser, 1954 Annual Report.

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