

Is Post-Conflict an Oxymoron?

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I have been working on a book-length history of Rhodesian independence and in 2011 was able to do the research on the last chapter, the 1980 elections. Rhodesia (Southern Rhodesia before 1964, Zimbabwe after 1980) had been a semi-colonial hybrid since the early 1920s, and was part of the Central African Federation before its demise in 1964. Whereas the other member states became the African-ruled nations of Malawi and Zambia, Rhodesia's white minority declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1965. Rhodesia became the first pariah nation of the decolonizing world: mandatory sanctions were imposed on Rhodesia long before they were required for South Africa (sanctions against Rhodesia were to become the model for the United Nations sanctions of the 1990s against Iraq and former Yugoslav states).

Rhodesian independence soon plunged the country into a prolonged guerrilla war, fought from exile with two guerrilla armies that far outnumbered Rhodesian forces. The armies represented two political parties that had been founded in the early 1960s, Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) and Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). No army had a decisive military victory, but the attrition on Rhodesia and the neighboring states that housed the guerrillas was enormous. The British organized several conferences to end the war and create a settlement that would bring about majority rule to the country. These were conducted with great flair – in 1975, to give but one example, the warring parties met on a train stopped on the bridge over Victoria Falls, between

the national borders of Rhodesia and Zambia – and no results. A combination of factors in 1979 -- a new



government in Britain and wear and tear on Mozambique and Zambia, which housed ZANU and ZAPU respectively, and the long term effects of sanctions – made some kind of settlement necessary, and a new majority-rule constitution was worked out in the annual Commonwealth heads of state meeting in August. A month later there was a constitutional conference in London - the real task of which was to arrange for, and detail the enforcement of, an end to the war and a ceasefire, which created the conditions for the first one-man, one-vote elections that made Rhodesia Zimbabwe in 1980.

With a small grant from UF's Faculty Enhancement Opportunity program, I spent two weeks in London in 2011 reading newly opened archives and conducting interviews with former election observers about the 1980 election. The conventional account of the

election is contradictory, that there were free and fair elections and that despite widespread intimidation by Mugabe's party, ZANU won by a large margin. My research in London revealed something different, however, that there was a cessation of hostilities but nothing resembling a ceasefire, and that no one observing the ceasefire or the election could discern which political party was intimidating the most people. This suggested to me that two ideas dear to Africanists – the notion of post-conflict societies and that of electoral violence -- might be somewhat flawed. At the end of a civil war, when ex-combatants are known to the civilian population, intimidation is a constant: everyone does it to counter the intimidation of other political parties. What we think of 'post-conflict' is not post at all, but an extension of the earlier conflict. In the same way, the very term 'electoral violence' locates and limits violence to electoral practices, rather than the situation the election was imagined to resolve.

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