national life in Botswana, and she recognizes the elitism of any 'harmony' among other groups. Yet, she shies away from the implications of all this: that both groups are carving up a territorial endowment depopulated through force, indeed, through explicitly racist policies on the part of the government in Gaborone.

I found Gressier to be most persuasive and informative when, in the early part of the book, she explicates the tourist trade. She drills down through feelings and rhetorics of belonging to capture subtle forms of instrumentality. Whites know and love the Okavango. They might camp and hunt there as strong, silent men and women, but they also love to share stories. Before naïve tourists, they deploy bush lore ranging from elephants to insects. They perform their experiential autonomy, indeed converting it into a valuable commodity. They romanticize everything about the safari hunt: the risk; the material deprivation (while actually on safari); and the Bushmen trackers, who for tiny wages actually find the animals to shoot. Like many southern Africans, they embrace conservation and seek to achieve or restore a balance between humans and other creatures. These whites seem to practice nature-loving without the exclusivity and arrogance so characteristic of other safari-minded people. Their self-appointed stewardship of the land still affords space for respecting the African people who inhabit it. I would gladly assign these chapters to my undergraduates (notwithstanding Gressier's fondness for the passive voice). Still, she overlooks an underside even here: the elite safari market depends entirely upon intercontinental flying – an unsustainable, climate-destroying, atmosphere-colonizing practice if ever there was one. This oversight on Gressier's part delimits the strengths and weaknesses of *At Home in the Okavango*. Read it as a happy village study of a place remote but caught in global processes barely detectable.

DAVID MCDERMOTT HUGHES
Rutgers University–New Brunswick

THE SEMIOTICS OF RHODESIANNESS

Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization.
By Luise White.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pp. xvi + 343. $30.00, paperback (ISBN 978-0-226-23519-6).
doi:10.1017/S0021853716000876

Key Words: Zimbabwe, citizenship, decolonization, identity, ideology, international relations, nationalism, race, white settlement.

As in Luise White's previous works, she has once again taken on a fairly well known narrative and turned it on its head. Here the subject matter is white politics in Rhodesia during the period of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from 1965–80. Usually characterized by the struggle of African nationalists for majority rule against an oppressive white minority rule, this period has been well covered by scholars for the past fifty years. White offers a revision by avoiding the perpetrator/victim binary so common to this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853716000876 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historiography, focusing instead on the strategies whites used to convince themselves and the rest of the world of their own peculiar and internationally unpopular definitions of sovereignty and citizenship.

White's ability to bring to the fore what others might view as particularly banal forms of violence successfully disrupts a conventional reading of white settler culture. The maintenance of 'normalcy' in a situation of such abject inequality and injustice is, of course, a form of violence all too common in the modern world, especially within states where racial privilege, segregation, and exclusive rights protected by 'sovereignty' continue to divide groups and defend the privileged. By focusing on the seemingly sterile world of ideas and imaginaries, White maintains a consistent impatience with historicism and moralism that would rather make white Rhodesians one-dimensional and defined almost exclusively by their commitment to oppressive policies. However, by confining the story almost exclusively to Rhodesian debates over who qualifies to join as a legitimate citizen or voter, the book does downplay the centrality of oppressive policies and state violence toward those who opposed it.

Fundamental to White's revisionary push is to deconstruct the notion of citizenship in Rhodesia. White states that 'this book charts a path that may be best understood as standing outside national identity, showing that Rhodesians were men and women who could ... become British or South African at a moment's notice. By the 1970s being Rhodesian came to be promoted as a set of personal qualities that made the nation, not the other way around' (29). As White puts it in Chapter Four, 'the idea of kith and kin backfired. It allowed for the already indistinct ways of belonging to Rhodesia to be belonging to somewhere else. It also seemed to have encouraged a characterization of independent Rhodesia as a kind of lesser Britain, out of step with the times and more like a midsized British city than anything else' (105–6). White refers more than once to this idea, that Rhodesia was more like a British suburb than a nation. A major thread holding the chapters together then is the extent to which white politicians crafted sovereignty and citizenship in ways that suited their own worldview. By demonstrating the 'thinness' of their claims, White stresses the contingent nature of state sovereignty and citizenship more generally, particularly in cases where claims to ethno- or demo-cratic forms of belonging largely fail, or run counter to minority rule. White thus challenges older notions of decolonization as a process of conferring claim-making rights from settlers to African majority rule. It was much messier and contingent in Rhodesia.

For White, conventions or conventionally voiced wisdoms tend to tell us more about the hidden truths they often try to cover over. That is the case, then, with defining citizenship through many different mediums. White asks 'How do I discuss the practices of political independence and when the independent state was so often represented in the vocabulary of responsibility and efficiency when reliable telephone service was equated with a civilization that was a stand-in for talking about race?' (36). This book asks such questions of Rhodesia's many different and complicated forms of franchise qualifications because White wants readers to see that these language games, when read over time, tell us a great deal about the shifting meaning of citizenship and sovereignty in a place where the building materials of these foundational concepts of the nation state were in short supply by the mid-1960s, and even scarcer by the mid-1970s. White's examination of how whites and some Africans conceptualized franchise and citizenship as if they were defined by

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853716000876 Published online by Cambridge University Press

accepted notions of 'civilization', draws readers into the irony of UDI politicians constantly having to adapt existing laws and franchise rules to pay lip service to African advancement, while all the while buttressing the legal maintenance of white privilege – and avoiding African nationalists' main demand for majority rule.

White's interests in the contingent nature of sovereignty and citizenship leads at times to a disregard for the events and chronology most commonly associated with political history, choosing instead to emphasize the ways politics and history are found in more subtle forms of narrativization. Such an analysis comes with a cost, however, as analyses of racial relations as actually practiced, along with the narrativization of African nationalist demands and imaginaries, and the significance of British-led international pressures on UDI are all decentered from the narrative and made secondary to the semiotics of 'Rhodesianness'. African nationalists usually appear as impediments to what whites saw as their own 'reasonable' proposals for constitutions and voting requirements. For a political elite that took pride in not enshrining race into its laws, as in apartheid South Africa, the discussions of how to limit the African franchise are revealing for their inventiveness. Of course, white politicians from the late 1950s and in the period prior to and during UDI created and relied on legislation that built upon centuries of British colonial practices to 'legally' destroy opposition from the colonized.

As much as this is a narrowly defined treatment of UDI, White does bring the British into the story in chapters on sanctions and the 1972 Pearce Commission, and she also shifts to diplomatic sources in the chapters on the transition to Zimbabwe. Here White shows again how the question of 'belonging' for Rhodesians was expanded to incorporate many more blacks who were seen in need of protection from the external threats of communist-led liberation armies and the further 'betrayal' of Rhodesians by the Western powers and South Africa. White is successful in showing how white politicians and their black political counterparts used draft constitutions and franchise reform to negotiate a more expansive notion of belonging, one where victimhood was a more likely bond across races than the older concerns for signs of 'civilized behaviors'. White then provides a very useful discussion of the 1979 elections that led to Bishop Muzorewa's electoral victory as prime minister of the short-lived 'Zimbabwe Rhodesia', and then the international negotiations that established the parameters for the first internationally recognized universal suffrage election in 1980, in which Robert Mugabe's ZANU party attained power.

It is quite possible that this book will cause some consternation among Africanists working on Zimbabwean history. If it does, White will likely feel the book has been a success. Similar to *Comforts of Home* (1990) and *Speaking With Vampire*s (2000), White's latest work will likely find a wider academic audience than most other historical works on Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. However, because of White's decision to dispense of much historical context (with the exception of a very brief 'short history' at the start), this book will present some pedagogical challenges for students not versed in Zimbabwean history. If it is assigned in class, as it should be, I recommend pairing it with a more comprehensive history designed for graduate and undergraduate students, such as Alois Mlambo's *A History of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge 2014).

TIMOTHY SCARNECCHIA
Kent State University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853716000876 Published online by Cambridge University Press