

# POLITICS ON LIBERATION'S FRONTIERS: STUDENT ACTIVIST REFUGEES, INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ZIMBABWE, 1965–79\*

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## Abstract

During Zimbabwe's struggle for national liberation, thousands of black African students fled Rhodesia to universities across the world on refugee scholarship schemes. To these young people, university student activism had historically provided a stable route into political relevance and nationalist leadership. But at foreign universities, many of which were vibrant centres for student mobilisations in the 1960s and 1970s and located far from Zimbabwean liberation movements' organising structures, student refugees were confronted with the dilemma of what their role and future in the liberation struggle was. Through the concept of the 'frontier', this article compares the experiences of student activists at universities in Uganda, West Africa, and the UK as they figured out who they were as political agents. For these refugees, I show how political geography mattered. Campus frontiers could lead young people both to the military fronts of Mozambique and Zambia as well as to the highest circles of government in independent Zimbabwe. As such, campus frontiers were central to the history of Zimbabwe's liberation movements and the development of the postcolonial state.

## Key Words

Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, Western Africa, decolonization, global, nationalism, politics, refugees.

In January 1966, an emergency meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers was called in Lagos to address the crisis caused by Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain in November and its white nationalist project to segregate the country along racial lines.<sup>1</sup> African leaders at the Organisation of African Unity in early December

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1 The white nationalist government in Rhodesia created a segregationist project similar to that in South Africa. In South Africa, the National Party had, by 1959, segregated the entire higher education system after an earlier decision in 1954 to stop admitting all non-South African black students to their universities. Rhodesia, a much weaker state, was never able to segregate the country's multiracial university despite constant threats to do so.

had resolved to declare war on Rhodesia, but had stopped short of any military action and instead demanded that Britain, as the decolonising sovereign, end the rebellion. The Lagos meeting, which was boycotted by Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, was an attempt at a more cautious response.<sup>2</sup> The UK, Canada, Nigeria, and others, favouring a gradualist approach to independence for Africans in Rhodesia, suggested they impose sanctions and provide university education to Rhodesian Africans abroad — a fig leaf for action significantly short of military intervention. University graduates occupied a privileged place as future professional experts in these policy-makers' imaginations of state building, modernisation, and decolonisation. Since the late 1950s, African student migrations had boomed when a surge of new international scholarships and exchange programmes were established as part of Cold War and decolonisation efforts to use higher education to promote rival 'socioeconomic and political models across the globe'.<sup>3</sup> But Zambian and Kenyan delegations were sceptical of the argument that decolonisation depended on the extent of a population's university education. Zambian Vice President Reuben Kamaga asked the leaders what training Zambia had had before independence, stating that 'there were more educated Africans in Rhodesia than in Malawi and Zambia put together', and hence 'the need for further education should not be used to justify deferring the granting of independence.'<sup>4</sup> The gradualists, however, prevailed and the meeting ended with the establishment of a Sanctions Committee and a Commonwealth Special Programme for the training of Rhodesian African university students who had fled the country as refugees.<sup>5</sup>

This article explores the significance of refugee student activists, who studied on campuses far beyond the organisational reach of nationalist movements, in the politics of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. The Commonwealth Special Programme was one of a number of refugee scholarship schemes set up for black Southern Africans.<sup>6</sup> These schemes

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See A. Mlambo, 'Student protest and state reaction in colonial Rhodesia: the 1973 Chimukwembe student demonstration at the university of Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21:3 (1995), 473–90; D. Hodgkinson, 'Nationalists with no nation: oral history, ZANU(PF) and the meanings of Rhodesian student activism in Zimbabwe', *Africa*, 89:51 (2019), 40–64; M. Gelfand, *A Non-Racial Island of Learning: A History of the University College of Rhodesia from its Inception to 1966* (Salisbury [Harare], Zimbabwe, 1978). For recent histories of Rhodesia's nation building, see L. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization* (Chicago, 2015); and D. Kenrick, *Decolonization, Identity and Nation in Rhodesia* (London, 2019).

- 2 G. Mazarire, 'ZANU's external networks 1963–1979: an appraisal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43:1 (2017), 86.
- 3 L. Tournès and G. Scott-Smith, 'A world of exchanges: conceptualizing the history of international scholarship programmes (19th to 21st century)', in L. Tournès and G. Scott-Smith (eds.), *Global Exchanges: Scholarships and Transnational Circulations in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2017), 15.
- 4 Commonwealth Secretariat Archives, London (CSA) International Affairs Collection 2000/063, minutes of the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in Lagos, Jan. 1966.
- 5 By 1979, the Commonwealth programme had disbursed £30 million to support over 4,000 university students abroad. Under the programme, nurses were trained at Banjul in The Gambia, teachers were taught in Fiji, agronomists studied at Georgetown in Guyana, and thousands went to universities in India, Cyprus, Malta, Canada, and New Zealand. CSA International Affairs Collection 2003/053, speech by T. Dormer, the Commonwealth Secretariat's administrator of the Special Programme for the Training of Rhodesian Africans, Mar. 1980.
- 6 Many of these were administered by agencies such as the Commonwealth Special Programme, the UN Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa, the World Universities Service, and the

took young Zimbabweans across the world — to universities in postcolonial states in Africa (such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone), the Caribbean, South Asia, and the Pacific; to Communist states in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; and to cities and towns across North America and Western Europe.<sup>7</sup> On these foreign campuses, young Zimbabweans encountered vibrant forms of political activism, new types of sociability and friendships, and the possibility of professional futures abroad. For some, this caused their commitment to Zimbabwean politics to fade. For others, it provoked in them a renewed approach to help liberate their country.<sup>8</sup> Nationalist leaders such as Dzingai Mutumbuka were keen to encourage their participation. Mutumbuka, who had been a refugee student in the UK at Sussex and was arrested during an anti-apartheid protest against a South African rugby tour, had by the late 1970s become ZANU's secretary for education.<sup>9</sup> In 2016, he recounted what he had said to a group of Zimbabwean student refugees in London in 1979:

The struggle is fought on many fronts. It's not enough to say you're fighting the struggle because you're carrying the card, because the struggle takes various forms. Everything should be seen as part of the struggle to contribute to freedom.<sup>10</sup>

Figuring out what those 'various forms' of participation actually meant, however, was a much more complex and contested process for refugee students.

To understand the significance of student activism in the liberation struggle, this article makes two substantial contributions to existing historiography. First, I argue for a particular approach to the history of African student activism in this era, which — excepting South Africa — is still shaped by a body of 1970s scholarship that considers African student protest as a product of contests with the postcolonial state over the formation of social or political elites.<sup>11</sup> Although these instrumentalist approaches rightly show that the political significance of student activism requires studying more than just students, the assumed effect of university education problematically flattens out the complex realities that these young people faced, elides the intellectual and political projects they imagined themselves to be agents within, and obscures how student activism shaped their political afterlives. These aspects have been examined in great depth in the historiography of the first

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International University Exchange Fund. For Ghana's scholarship scheme, see M. Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism: Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization* (London, 2018).

7 By the mid-1960s, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)-supporting Zimbabweans were studying on Soviet scholarships at institutions in Moscow, Leningrad, Kalinin, Minsk, Prague, Sofia, and Odessa. J. Hessler, 'Death of an African student in Moscow', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 47:1 (2006), 446. According to Vladimir Shubin, 'in four decades 599 Zimbabweans received Masters degrees and 17 PhD degrees in the USSR/Russia.' V. Shubin, *The Hot Cold War* (London, 2008), 294.

8 L. White, 'Students, ZAPU, and Special Branch in Francistown, 1964-72', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:6 (2014), 1289-303.

9 The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was one of two liberation movements. The other, older movement was ZAPU.

10 Interview with Dzingai Mutumbuka, Washington, DC, 12 Apr. 2016.

11 A. Mazrui, *Political Values of the Educated Class in Africa* (Oakland, CA, 1978); J. Barkan, *An African Dilemma: University Students, Development and Politics in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda* (Nairobi, 1975); R. Balsvik, 'Student protest—university and state in Africa 1960-1995', *Forum for Development Studies*, 2 (1998), 301-25.

generations of anticolonial nationalist leaders, whose life histories — and formative experiences at Western universities — have been viewed as central to national histories.<sup>12</sup> But much less attention has been given to the student experiences of successive generations who went on to important political careers in government, opposition parties, and public positions.<sup>13</sup>

An emergent scholarship on the Global Sixties has stepped away from such instrumentalist explanations to explore the specific political effects of African students in this era, particularly those who studied abroad. Much of this research has investigated how African students shaped the subversive politics of the sixties in the Global North as an inspiration for groups such as the German Socialist Students or the Black Panthers.<sup>14</sup> However, an exciting spate of recent scholarship has begun to grapple with the effect of such experiences on students' own political lives and, by extension, the politics of their African states. The cultural and transnational activism of students in Dar es Salaam, richly explored by Andrew Ivaska, has been a particularly strong focus in this literature.<sup>15</sup> Furthering Edward Said's argument that exile can sharpen people's sense of national belonging and political purpose, Pedro Monaville has shown how Congolese students in early 1960s Belgium, who were frustrated by their everyday experiences of racism, built new political movements with support from antiracist solidarity groups around the image of Patrice Lumumba, whose assassination had shocked the world.<sup>16</sup> Others, such as Elleni Centime Zeleke, Sara Pugach, and Emma Lundin have written important new histories on the intellectual debates that student migrants had about national transformation and feminist empowerment as well as their protests against authoritarian forms of post-colonial rule.<sup>17</sup> Daniel Branch and Constantin Katsakioris, who are more concerned

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- 12 S. Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: The England-Returned* (Oxford, 2010); M. Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, CA, 2015); M. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2015); P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis, 1986); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006); N. Owen, 'The soft heart of the British Empire: Indian radicals in Edwardian London', *Past and Present*, 220:1 (2013), 143–84; H. Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900–1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communitism* (London, 1997).
- 13 D. Hodgkinson and L. Melchiorre, 'Introduction: student activism in an era of decolonization', *Africa*, 89:SI (2019), 1–14.
- 14 Tournès and Scott-Smith, *Global Exchanges*; Hessler, 'Death of an African student', 33–63; M. Matusevich, 'Journeys of hope: African diaspora and the Soviet society', *African Diaspora*, 1 (2008), 53–85; D. Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), 80; C. Katsakioris, 'The Soviet-South encounter: tensions in the friendship with Afro-Asian partners, 1945–1965', in P. Barbiracki and K. Zimmer (eds.), *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s* (Arlington, VA, 2014); S. Pugach, 'African students and the politics of race and gender in the German Democratic Republic, 1957–1990', in Q. Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, 2015); Q. Slobodian, 'Dissident guests: Afro-Asian students and transnational activism in the West German protest movement', in W. Pojmann (ed.), *Migration and Activism in Europe Since 1945* (New York, 2008).
- 15 A. Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham, NC, 2011).
- 16 E. Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London, 2001), 179; P. Monaville, 'The political life of the dead Lumumba, the Congolese student left, and Cold War histories', *Africa*, 89:SI (2019), 15–39.
- 17 See S. Pugach, 'Agents of dissent: African student organisations in the German Democratic Republic', *Africa*, 89:SI (2019), 90–108; M. Schenck, 'Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan student migrations during the Cold War, 1979–1990', *Africa*, 89:SI (2019), 144–66; E. Lundin, "'Now is the

with Cold War educational migrations than student activism per se, have nevertheless highlighted the frustrations that young people who studied at Bulgarian and Soviet universities faced when they returned home to increasingly conservative politics in Kenya (after 1963) and Ghana (after the 1966 coup) and professional labour markets that refused to recognise their qualifications.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than focus on an individual's journey, the experience of a particular cohort, or the history of a particular set of ideas, this article seeks to explore where and how student activism enabled young people at universities across the world to participate in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and how it affected the shape of their lives and the history of the nation. To do this, I focus on young people's experiences of what I call their political studenthood: the transitional subjectivity of the student activist.<sup>19</sup> By this, I mean how becoming a student activist shaped young people's behaviour, ideas, and aspirations; opened up routes to enter the political mainstream; and continued to inform their political lives thereafter. Building on the few studies of Zimbabwean student refugees during these years, I argue that because of the authority that academic training held among liberation leaders and the historic role that students had played in nationalist politics, young people at universities could perform important roles in the liberation struggle by embracing a recognisable form of political studenthood.<sup>20</sup> Performing one's political studenthood therefore could dramatically shape young people's life trajectories and their involvement in leading the state building of independent Zimbabwe. Their participation and routes into mainstream politics, however, were not straightforward. Zimbabwe's liberation politics were dangerous to navigate, and success was contingent on a number of factors that included political acumen, supportive patrons, luck, and geography.

In this article, I argue that one of the key factors in shaping young people's participation in the liberation struggle as student activists was their location. To this end, my second historiographical contribution is to argue for an expanded conceptualisation of the political geography of the liberation struggle that can account for these globally dispersed refugee activists. Specifically, I argue that young people's experiences of refugee political studenthood were not trivial, minor aspects in the liberation struggle but important frontiers that — like frontiers in African history more broadly — shaped the functioning of their political communities, which in this case were liberation movements. Between 1964 and 1980,

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time?": the importance of international spaces for women's activism within the ANC, 1960–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:2 (2019), 323–40; E. Burton, 'Navigating global socialism: Tanzanian students in and beyond East Germany', *Cold War History*, 19:1 (2018), 63–83; E. Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964–2016* (Chicago, 2019).

- 18 D. Branch, 'Political traffic: Kenyan students in Eastern and Central Europe, 1958–69', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53:4 (2018), 811–31; C. Katsakioris, 'Nkrumah's elite: Ghanaian students in the Soviet Union in the Cold War', *Paedagogica Historica* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2020.1785516>; C. Katsakioris, 'Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960–74: anticolonialism, education, and the socialist alliance', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56:1 (2021), 142–65.
- 19 For more on this concept, see D. Hodgkinson, 'Remaking political studenthood: Zimbabwean student activism during the 2000s "crisis"', in B.-M. Tendi, J. Alexander, and J. McGregor (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Zimbabwean Politics* (Oxford, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198805472.013.2>.
- 20 Mazarire, 'ZANU's external networks', 83–106; J. McGregor, 'Locating exile: Zimbabwean nationalists and anti-imperial space in Britain, 1965–1980', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 57 (2017), 62–75; C. Zembe, *Zimbabwean Communities in Britain: Imperial and Postcolonial Identities and Legacies* (London, 2018).

Zimbabwe's liberation movements operated in exile after the Rhodesian government banned both ZAPU and ZANU and placed most of their leaders in remote detention facilities until their release in the mid-1970s. As with other Southern African liberation movements, ZAPU and ZANU in exile consisted of the movements' leadership structures, military forces, and solidarity networks, which were together responsible for strategy, fundraising, diplomacy, and prosecution of the armed struggle. The Frontline States played a key role in hosting military camps in rural 'rear bases' and nationalist leaderships in capital cities such as Lusaka and Dar es Salaam, which became vibrant anticolonial 'hubs' for international politicking and diplomatic intrigue.<sup>21</sup>

Several scholars have argued that the institutional cultures of exiled liberation movements gave rise to Southern African postcolonial governments that were 'authoritarian, intolerant, [and] careless if not actively abusive of human rights'.<sup>22</sup> Weak institutional arrangements, limitations on resources, ideological heterogeneity, and dispersed geography meant that liberation movements faced acute 'challenges to making political order' that were exacerbated by targeted Rhodesian campaigns of infiltration and subterfuge.<sup>23</sup> As such, leadership contests occurred routinely across organisational levels of liberation movements, in which belligerents mobilised around varied types of social distinctions including generation, age, ideological agenda, ethnicity, education level, and gender.<sup>24</sup> In military camps across the Frontline States, liberation leaders tried to overcome these issues by establishing what Michael Panzer calls their 'contingent sovereignty' through brutal corporal regimes that upheld militarised forms of authority.<sup>25</sup> Perceived troublemakers could be

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- 21 The Frontline States included Zambia, Tanzania, and after 1975 Mozambique and Angola. Exciting new scholarship on cities as decolonial 'hubs' includes J. Ahlman, 'Road to Ghana: Nkrumah, Southern Africa and the eclipse of a decolonizing Africa', *Kronos*, 37:1 (2011), 23–40; E. Burton, 'Hubs of decolonisation: African liberation movements and "eastern" connections in Cairo, Accra and Dar es Salaam', in L. Dallywater, H. Fonseca, and C. Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960–1990* (Berlin, 2019), 25–56; G. Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–74* (Cambridge, 2021); A. Ivaska, 'Movement youth in a Global Sixties hub: the everyday lives of transnational activists in postcolonial Dar es Salaam', in R. Jobs and D. Pomfret (eds.), *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2015), 188–210.
- 22 R. Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party & State in Southern Africa* (Woodbridge, UK, 2013), 4. See also P. Trehwela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Johannesburg, 2009); T. Cleveland, "'We still want the truth": the ANC's Angolan detention camps and post-apartheid memory', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 25:1 (2005), 63–78.
- 23 J. Alexander, 'Loyalty and liberation: the political life of Zephaniah Moyo', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 11:1 (2017), 176. See also J. Alexander, J. McGregor, and B.-M. Tendi, 'The transnational histories of Southern African liberation movements', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43:1 (2017), 1–12; L. White and M. Larmer, 'Mobile soldiers and the un-national liberation of Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:6 (2014), 1271–4; S. Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile* (Oxford, 2013).
- 24 The reasons behind the various leadership contests in exile have been debated extensively. See L. White, *The Assassination of Herbert Chitepo: Texts and Politics in Zimbabwe* (Bloomington, IN, 2003); B.-M. Tendi, 'Transnationalism, contingency and loyalty in African liberation armies: the case of ZANU's 1974–1975 Nhari Mutiny', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43:1 (2017), 143–59; D. Moore, 'The ideological formation of the Zimbabwean ruling class', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17:3 (1991), 472–95.
- 25 M. Panzer, 'Building a revolutionary constituency: Mozambican refugees and the development of the FRELIMO proto-state, 1964–1968', *Social Dynamics*, 39:1 (2013), 5–23. See also A. Lissoni, 'Transformations in the ANC External Mission and Umkhonto we Sizwe, c. 1960–1969', *Journal of*



made to do extended physical drills, were imprisoned in dank, deep ‘detention pits’, and in some cases were shot.<sup>26</sup> Tensions nevertheless did emerge that ripped through the leadership structures of both liberation movements, causing internal crises that temporarily incapacitated them. Although these dynamics were present throughout the liberation struggle, two events were particularly significant in regard to the overall organisational capacity of these movements. In 1970–1, a crisis in ZAPU led a group of leaders to splinter from the movement to form the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe, and key military commanders defected to ZANU.<sup>27</sup> In 1974–5, a similar crisis in ZANU involved a group of junior officers kidnapping most of the organisation’s political and military leadership — what became known as the Nhari Mutiny — before a loyal military commander then extrajudicially killed seventy mutineers.<sup>28</sup> In the aftermath of this event, ZANU Chairman Herbert Chitepo was suspiciously assassinated, and the majority of the movement’s leaders were arrested by Zambian authorities.<sup>29</sup>

Despite typically being located far from the political hubs or military camps in Frontline States, refugee students could be deeply involved in liberation politics through their activism with solidarity networks and among diasporas.<sup>30</sup> To understand their importance to liberation movements, I argue for viewing these universities as frontier spaces in the struggle for national liberation. This approach embraces the view that frontiers are places that have been fundamental to shaping politics in African history, rather than somewhere on the receiving end of or unaffected by political change. John Iliffe’s work on precolonial demographic history, for instance, considers frontiers as the continent’s innumerable boundaries between human settlement and hostile natural environments. The historic preponderance of these frontiers meant that social conflicts could just as easily lead belligerents to mobility and the ‘exit option’ as they could to warfare. Frontiers, Iliffe argues, ‘obstructed state formation’ and shaped patriarchal social orders.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Paul Nugent sees frontiers as central to African processes of state formation. Geographical

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*Southern African Studies*, 35:2 (2009), 287–301; P. Hayes, ‘Nationalism’s exile: Godfrey Nangonya and SWAPO’s sacrifice in southern Angola’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:6 (2014), 1305–24; C. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO’s Exile Camps* (Cambridge, 2015); C. Williams, ‘Introduction: thinking Southern Africa from “the camp”’, *Social Dynamics*, 39:1 (2013), 1–4; R. Suttner, ‘Culture(s) of the African National Congress of South Africa: imprint of exile experiences’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21:2 (2003), 303–20.

- 26 Alexander, ‘Loyalty and liberation’, 175; J. Alexander and J. McGregor, ‘*Adelante!* military imaginaries, the Cold War, and Southern Africa’s liberation armies’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 62:3 (2020), 636; G. Mazarire, ‘Discipline and punishment in ZANLA: 1964–79’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:3 (2011), 571–91.
- 27 During ZAPU’s internal crisis in 1969–70, young educated soldiers rebelled against the authorities in military camps in Zambia in what became the ‘March 11th Movement’. See O. Tshabangu, *The March 11 Movement in ZAPU: Revolution within the Revolution for Zimbabwe* (York, 1979); E. M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People’s Union, 1961–87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia* (Trenton, NJ, 2005), 141–60.
- 28 Tendi, ‘Transnationalism, contingency and loyalty’, 143–59.
- 29 White, *Herbert Chitepo*.
- 30 Mazarire, ‘ZANU’s external networks’, 83–106.
- 31 J. Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (3rd edn, Cambridge, 2009), 3. See also M. Vaughan, ‘Africa and the birth of the modern world’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 16 (2006), 143–62.

margins, he argues, were fundamental to colonial statecraft, the regulation of fiscal flows, and the development of colonial and postcolonial social contracts.<sup>32</sup> To Nugent, frontiers are the zones that were on the boundaries of the colonial state's authority and which, over time, became colonial borders. Despite their differences, both of these approaches take frontiers as territorial phenomenon, as 'interstitial zones' or 'hinterlands', and emphasise their importance to shaping African politics.<sup>33</sup>

My approach also emphasises their political importance, but takes a less territorial use of the concept to understand the more geographically dispersed political communities of liberation movements. To this end, I build on Igor Kopytoff's influential argument that frontiers are a 'social construction by immigrants in an area that to them represents an institutional vacuum'.<sup>34</sup> By this, I mean those university campuses that were outside the reach of the structures of liberation movements to which those young people claimed to belong. These universities were, of course, institutions in their own right, which young people hoped would equip them with the technocratic and political skills and authority that they would need to transform the Zimbabwean state — but they were nevertheless beyond the institutional control of liberation movements. Seen in this way, the significance of refugee student activism to liberation movements becomes much more legible. Through a comparative history of three student frontiers, I show how in places such as the UK, young Zimbabweans' experience of political studenthood could be the beginning of a life in politics and, by extension, a key foundation for many of the Zimbabwean state's early developmental successes. In contrast, for people studying on some postcolonial African campuses, such as Makerere in Uganda, student politics was often seen as purposeless: a high-risk distraction from the more substantial contribution they could be making as soldiers at the front.

Before turning to this, a word on sources. While I describe the general trajectories of some key cohorts of refugee activists, this article is not a survey or collective life history of the Zimbabweans who studied abroad during these years. Instead, this article is part of a broader oral history project on Zimbabwean student activism.<sup>35</sup> As such, it draws from the long, rich tradition of using oral sources to uncover the histories of people on

32 P. Nugent, *Boundaries, Communities and State-Making in West Africa* (Cambridge, 2019), 4.

33 For similar territorial uses, see D. Hughes, *From Enslavement to Environmentalism: Politics on a Southern African Frontier* (Seattle, 2006), 3; M. Legassick, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography', *Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collected Seminar Papers*, 2 (1971), 1–33.

34 I. Kopytoff, 'The political dynamics of the urban frontier', in I. Kopytoff (ed.), *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington, IN, 1987), 255. For an innovative use of the frontier as a politically constructed space, see H. Schmidt, 'Love and healing in forced communities: borderlands in Zimbabwe's liberation war', in A. Asiwaju and P. Nugent (eds.), *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities* (London, 1996), 183–204.

35 My interviewees in this project all waived anonymity. The broader ten-year project involved interviewing over 140 former activists and interlocutors; see D. Hodgkinson, *Zimbabwe's Student Activists: An Oral History from Colonial Rule to the Coup* (Cambridge, forthcoming). This article is based on interviews with 23 activists from this period that include Arthur Chadzingwa, Tafi Chigudu, Hope Chigudu, Fay Chung, Henri Dzinotiyewi, Michael Holman, Farai Madzimbamuto, Chris Magadza, Phineas Makhurane, Ian Makoni, Simba Makoni, Teresa Makoni, Ibbo Mandaza, Alois Mlambo, Simpson Mutambanengwe, Joe Mutizwa, Dzingai Mutumbuka, Brian Raftopoulos, Lloyd Sachikonye, Judith Todd, T. G. Zengeni, Kane Zhou, and Ranga Zinyemba.



the peripheries of state control as well as to research subjectivities. As Alessandro Portelli argues, such sources ‘tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did’.<sup>36</sup> Around 2015, I talked with 23 people who had been student refugees during the struggle. They told me stories about their respective journeys to campuses in such far-flung places as Auckland, Nairobi, Lusaka, and New York. All of their stories were shaped by the speaker’s particular genre of storytelling and in light of the subsequent events that had shaped their lives. Despite their individuality, all of these storytellers cast their experiences of political studenthood as their entry point into national politics, as the start of their political or public careers, and in some cases as the start of their adult lives. Zimbabwe’s troubled history of postcolonial rule also loomed large over these stories, insofar as talking about their past activism functioned as a reclamation of their previous role in and hopes for a political project that had become corrupted.<sup>37</sup>

## DECOLONISATION AND POLITICAL STUDENTHOOD

What political studenthood meant for Zimbabweans abroad in this period was informed by their sense of the historic role that student activists had played in liberation movements up until then. In the founding of Southern Rhodesia’s nationalist politics in the mid-1950s, the first generation of nationalist leaders had won control over mass politics in part by forcibly excluding women and undermining their less-educated rivals by emphasising their intellectual status and ‘cosmopolitan competencies’, such as their reified personal qualifications and oratory in English.<sup>38</sup> As well as embracing the authority that education held in long-standing demarcations of Rhodesian citizenship, these nationalist leaders imagined political transformation according to a colonial-inspired belief in modernity, wherein the primary agents of development were state bureaucracies run by university-educated professionals.<sup>39</sup>

The intellectual authority of political studenthood, of course, was not the only guarantor of advancement in politics. Whilst nationalist leaders in the early 1960s welcomed students’ daring street protests against the Rhodesian Front’s repressive legislation, they were infuriated when students attacked them. During the split in Zimbabwean nationalism

<sup>36</sup> A. Portelli, ‘The peculiarities of oral history’, *History Workshop Journal*, 21:1 (1981), 99–100.

<sup>37</sup> For the specific ways that stories of anticolonial activism were told, see Hodgkinson, ‘Nationalists with no nation’.

<sup>38</sup> See M. West, *The Rise of the African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), 203–35. Since the 1950s, Zimbabwe’s nationalist politics has been patriarchally ordered to the disadvantage of women, particularly black women. To this day, female activists can perform only a limited set of political roles and, as Rudo Mudiwa argues, risk being dismissed through the accusation of being a prostitute. R. Mudiwa, “‘As it was bodily, so it is politically’”: prostitutes, wives and political power in Zimbabwe’, in Tendi, Alexander, and McGregor, *Handbook of Zimbabwean Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198805472.013.12>. Andrew Ivaska discusses the politics of Eduardo Mondlane’s cosmopolitanism in A. Ivaska, ‘Liberation in transit: Eduardo Mondlane and Che Guevara in Dar es Salaam’, in C. Jian et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (New York, 2017), 27–38.

<sup>39</sup> Education had been central to the construction and control of the colonial state since literacy was enshrined as a qualification for political representation in Rhodesia’s Legislative Assembly in 1898.

in 1963, student leaders such as Frank Ziyambi, Byron Hove, and Shakespeare Tonderai Makoni were among the first to support breakaway leaders and publicly denounce Joshua Nkomo, the ZAPU leader, and his allies as 'a gang of spent forces'.<sup>40</sup> In response, ZAPU leaders suggested that their student opponents should be 'hunted down and destroyed'.<sup>41</sup> The violent rebuke illustrated that academic status could get you nowhere without party loyalty. As such, for Ziyambi, Hove, and Makoni, their denunciation was celebrated in ZANU and launched their political careers.

University education also provided nationalist movements with an important global mobility during these years. Scholarship schemes, in part, reflected the international dimensions of anticolonial politics, as key negotiations over the process of decolonisation and the building of new international orders took place in London and at the UN in New York, as well as in new Third World hubs such as Accra and Cairo. Nationalism abroad, Nkomo wrote, 'consisted largely of students all over the world but mainly in London and New York'.<sup>42</sup> In these places, Zimbabwean students founded nationalist student organisations and built networks of solidarity that could fundraise and advocate in international circles. In London in 1962, Simpson Mutambanengwe set up the Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesian) Students' Union and convened an international seminar, funded by the British National Union of Students (NUS), that called on student unions to protest a Rhodesian government crackdown on ZAPU.<sup>43</sup> Such activities were particularly important from 1959, when the Rhodesian government began using large-scale imprisonment to suppress the nationalist movement and incapacitate its leadership.<sup>44</sup> As a student at Lund University, for instance, Sydney Sekeramayi worked with 'groups in Sweden which were supporting the liberation struggle. . . [to] mobilis[e] material support, especially to those who were in prison or detention'.<sup>45</sup> These activities earned Mutambanengwe and Sekeramayi reputations in the movements, and through this visibility they gained positions in ZANU's leadership. In 1964 Mutambanengwe became ZANU's foreign secretary and Sekeramayi became ZANU's representative in Sweden.<sup>46</sup> Nationalist leaders had also taken advantage of the mobility offered by student schemes and furthered their own studies abroad. Some leaders, such as Herbert Chitepo, Josiah Chinamano, and Bernard Chidzero, had done postgraduate study in Europe and North America, whilst others travelled to gain undergraduate degrees, such as Nathan Shamuyarira and Edson Zvogbo.<sup>47</sup>

40 P. Makhurane, *Phineas Makhurane: An Autobiography*, (Gweru, Zimbabwe, 2010), 67.

41 *Ibid.* 68.

42 J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London, 1984), 113.

43 Modern Records Office, Warwick University (MRO) MSS.280/31/4, Zimbabwe Student's Union public pamphlet announcing their formation with S. Mutambanengwe as inaugural president, 1961.

44 J. Alexander, 'The productivity of political imprisonment: stories from Rhodesia', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 47:2 (2019), 300–24.

45 T. Sellstrom, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa, Volume I: Formation of a Popular Opinion (1950–1970)* (Uppsala, 1999), 322.

46 Mazarire, 'ZANU's external networks', 99–100.

47 Chitepo studied law at London's Inns of Court, Chidzero did an MA and PhD in Canada, and Chinamano did a post-graduate in Birmingham. Zvogbo was a beneficiary of a US government scholarship and Shamuyarira studied on the Parvin Fellowship. Church and private initiatives also enabled Ndabaningi Sithole and Abel Muzorewa to study at universities or theological colleges. The Salisbury-based Lotus Group founded a scholarship for study in India.

## POLITICAL STUDENTHOOD IN THE STRUGGLE

Exile presented liberation movements with extreme challenges in creating political order. These challenges both provided important openings for some student activists to take up significant roles in liberation movements and increased the dangers of their involvement. Their participation during these years, however, occurred against a general trend of ever-increasing numbers of university students, which decreased the visibility that political studenthood alone could provide for young people within liberation movements. Also, although there were key moments when liberation movements were in great need of student activist members, by the late 1970s both ZAPU and ZANU were much larger, more sophisticated organisations, which further narrowed opportunities to shape liberation leadership.<sup>48</sup> By 1979 it was estimated that there were 4,000 university students studying under refugee schemes abroad — far more than were studying within Rhodesia.<sup>49</sup> Many of these scholarships were not high-status postgraduate degrees from prestigious universities, but technical trainings — ‘from pilots to engineers to plumbers to typists’ — that were set up by liberation leaders in anticipation of national requirements after independence.<sup>50</sup> The expansion and increasingly technical nature of scholarships diluted the ‘restrictive meritocracy’ that had historically given student activists their visibility among nationalist leaders.<sup>51</sup> An effect of this dilution was that young people’s political futures were increasingly shaped by new hierarchies based on the personal relationships they were able to cultivate with liberation leaders, the scale and importance of their activism, the prestige of where one studied, and how many degrees one had.

There were nevertheless desperate moments in exile when political studenthood was a very effective route into the depleted liberation leadership structures, particularly in the early years following the detention of most leadership structures. Through these years, Gerald Mazarire argues, ZANU ‘survived as an external liberation movement through the benevolence of international networks and individuals’.<sup>52</sup> ZANU’s chairman in exile Herbert Chitepo immediately drew refugee student activist leaders into leadership. In 1966, for instance, Henry Hamadziripi was summoned from Oxford to join the Revolutionary Council in Lusaka and he, after seven years, called on Rugare Gumbo and Kumbirai Kangai to leave their activities in the Zimbabwe Students Union of the USA and join him in Zambia, where they were elected ZANU leaders. By the early 1970s, a group of refugee students that included Dzingai Mutumbuka, Simbi Mubako, Sam Geza, and Fay Chung had progressed into academic careers and decided to work at University of Zambia (UNZA) in Lusaka in order to be closer to the struggle — from where they too were incorporated into nationalist structures.<sup>53</sup> The contingencies of

48 The starkest example of this scale of state making in exile was ZAPU’s army, which by 1980 was larger and better equipped than the host Zambian armed forces.

49 F. Chung, *Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe* (Harare, 2006), 219.

50 Interview with Mutumbuka, 2016.

51 L. Mann, ‘Wasta! the long-term implications of education expansion and economic liberalisation on politics in Sudan’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 41:142 (2014), 575.

52 Mazarire, ‘ZANU’s external networks’, 84.

53 *Ibid.* 96, 99.

politics, however, meant that entry did not mean survival. Many of these leaders, including Gumbo and Hamadziripi, were arrested in 1978 in Mozambique for allegedly plotting a coup against Robert Mugabe, who had been installed as ZANU leader in 1976.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, Mutumbuka benefitted from this event. In 1975, he had been posted as a ZANU representative in London where he became close to Mugabe on a tour in West Germany. Through this relationship he became secretary of education in 1976, and after 1978 he took over the function of manpower planning on account of Hamadziripi's marginalisation.<sup>55</sup>

Participation and recognition were more complex for students in Rhodesia and the Frontline States. Up until 1973, university students such as Arthur Chadzingwa could use the university's commitment to academic freedom to publicly denounce the Rhodesian government.<sup>56</sup> He and others did this while secretly operating in ZAPU's underground structures, disseminating information, mobilising support, and recruiting new members. Undertaking this high-risk work — getting caught involved a prison sentence — was difficult though, as it first required gaining the trust of an active member. Students in Frontline States faced a different set of constraints. As historians have shown, both the University of Dar es Salaam and UNZA were vibrant sites of local student organising and radical activism. It was as an undergraduate student at Dar es Salaam, for instance, that future Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni said he caught 'the liberation bug'.<sup>57</sup> For Zimbabwean students, however, their activism on these campuses did not have the autonomy of student frontiers, as it was heavily shaped by their close proximity to the liberation movements.<sup>58</sup>

Although proximity increased its visibility, UNZA was not as highly regarded by liberation leaders as more prestigious institutions were. Moreover, this proximity brought acute dangers to potential student activists. Students that came straight from Rhodesia and had no prior connections to liberation movements were viewed with suspicion — particularly by less-well-educated military leaders — as it was well known that the Rhodesian security services used students to infiltrate their movements.<sup>59</sup> Fay Chung, for instance, claimed that a CIA student informant accessed the ZANU leadership to act as an agent provocateur

54 B.-M. Tendi, *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker* (Cambridge, 2019), 118.

55 Interview with Dzingai Mutumbuka, Harare, 10 Jan. 2015.

56 See D. Hodgkinson 'Subversive communities and the Rhodesian sixties: an exploration of transnational protests, 1965–1973', in Jian et al. (eds.), *Handbook to the Global Sixties*, 39–52; Mlambo, 'Student protest and state reaction'; Gelfand, *A Non-Racial Island of Learning*.

57 Cited in Ivaska, 'Movement youth', 188. For student activism in Dar es Salaam and Lusaka, see A. Ivaska, 'Of students, "nizers", and a struggle over youth: Tanzania's 1966 national service crisis', *Africa Today*, 51:3 (2005), 83–107; M. Burawoy, 'Consciousness and contradiction: a study of student protest in Zambia', *British Journal of Sociology*, 27:1 (1976), 78–98; L. Melchiorre, "'Under the thumb of the party": the limits of Tanzanian socialism and the decline of the student left', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46:4 (2020), 635–54; H. Macmillian, 'The University of Zambia and the liberation of Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:5 (2014), 943–59.

58 Some nationalist leaders also studied in Zambia, such as Zimbabwe's current president Emmerson Mnangagwa, who gained two law degrees at UNZA in 1974 and 1975.

59 For instance, Craig Williamson, an undercover South African policeman, infiltrated the International University Exchange Fund and rose to become its deputy-director. He was exposed in 1980.

through student politics at UNZA, where Chitepo's daughter Nomusa was studying. The accusation of being an informant quashed people's careers, as happened with Joseph Masangomai, a ZANU student leader in Lusaka.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, proximity increased the risks of becoming enveloped in the violent politics of these hubs, particularly during periods of upheaval when liberation leaders were kidnapped and shot.<sup>61</sup> Following Chitepo's assassination, for instance, ZANU student activists at UNZA were arrested and imprisoned by the Zambian police.<sup>62</sup> Lastly, students at these universities were also hesitant to organise autonomously in ways that might upset nationalist leaders because of their influence over selection processes for prestigious overseas scholarships.<sup>63</sup> This, as we will see, was not the case on student frontiers further removed from liberation movements.

## STUDENT PRAXIS AT 'FRONTIER' UNIVERSITIES

Arriving at new campus frontiers, young Zimbabweans faced the dilemma of how to participate in the struggle. Through comparing three sets of experiences below, I show that politics on some student frontiers was much more consequential than on others. Depending on where you were, political studenthood could be a frustrating waste of time or the route into political careers in which people transformed Zimbabwe from the centre of government.

### Makerere-as-frontier: Student life in Idi Amin's Uganda

For leaders of newly-independent African states, hosting refugee students was an easy way to demonstrate their commitment to the struggle against white settler rule. For Zimbabwean student refugees, though, practising anticolonial politics on postcolonial campuses was not straightforward. While postcolonial leaders were keen supporters of liberation struggles, they were often extremely sensitive to any local student dissent and heavily curtailed campus freedoms. One such postcolonial frontier was Makerere University in Idi Amin's Uganda.

A group of six Zimbabweans arrived at Makerere on refugee UNDP scholarships in 1974, three years after Amin seized power in a military coup. Most of this cohort had fled Rhodesia after participating in the 1973 *Chimukwembe* demonstration.<sup>64</sup> This was the country's biggest pre-independence student demonstration, which occurred during an intensification of the war and in response to institutional racism at the university and the Rhodesian Front's white nationalism more generally. The protest ended with the arrest and rustication of 150 students. In response, a group of 17 young Zimbabweans fled into Botswana, where they gained access to refugee scholarships that lead six to Makerere, including Tafi Chigudu, Elias Nyakunu, and Lawrence Siziba.

60 Chung, *Second Chimurenga*, 116, 101.

61 Tendi, 'Transnationalism, contingency and loyalty', 143–59.

62 Chung, *Second Chimurenga*, 96.

63 Mazarire, 'ZANU's external networks', 92; interview with Chris Magadza, Harare, 9 Feb. 2015.

64 Mlambo, 'Student protest and state reaction', 473–90.

As with the university in Rhodesia, Makerere was founded as a late-colonial Anglophone university whose purpose was to create a political elite. This prominence made Makerere into 'an influential forum for debate, cultural expression and social critique' in independent Ugandan politics.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the 1960s, Makerere students led protests against US interests in the Congo, Rhodesian capital punishment, and British arms sales to South Africa. However, unlike in Tanzania where Nyerere founded the university at Dar es Salaam as part of his socialist nation-state-building project, Uganda's first president Milton Obote viewed Makerere and its liberal process of Africanisation with suspicion and as at odds with his late-1960s radical 'Move to the Left' policy.<sup>66</sup> To bring the university under control, Obote infiltrated faculty and student circles with General Service Unit agents and a network of student informers. This tactic was continued by Amin, who organised his own 'labyrinthine spy network' of State Research Bureau agents on campus whilst also co-opting the institution's status through frequent visits to present himself as a revolutionary pan-Africanist. Amin ruthlessly suppressed any potential dissent or pro-Obote sentiment among Makerere's Student Guild with violence or threats of arrest. In 1972 the university's vice-chancellor Frank Kalimuzo was brutally murdered, allegedly by government operatives.<sup>67</sup> The following year the Student Guild was banned and its president Olara Otunnu fled to Kenya after criticising the regime.<sup>68</sup>

Life was particularly hard for women on campus, as male intelligence operatives acted with impunity and coerced women into sexual relationships. For Hope Chigudu, a Ugandan woman studying at Makerere who later became a feminist civic leader, life at university during this period was 'terrible': 'If you were a woman, the military guys could just come on campus and take you.'<sup>69</sup> She said that this campus insecurity caused Ugandan students to be silent on political issues and instead formed religious organisations, as they were less obvious targets for persecution.

Zimbabwean students, however, were struck by the freedom of Makerere in contrast to the infantilising racial social orders of student life in Rhodesia. Tafi Chigudu remembered that his lecturers at Makerere 'treated you with mutual respect. You could talk to them, walk with them into their lecturer's room. You wouldn't walk into your white lecturer's room at the University of Rhodesia.'<sup>70</sup> The radical anticolonial politics of Southern African liberation movements were also tolerated by Amin, who famously enjoyed his self-portrayals as an anticolonial hero, in contrast to left-wing Ugandan student activism which was considered subversion. For Zimbabwean students like Chigudu, Nyakunu, and Siziba, this meant there 'was no problem politicking'.<sup>71</sup> As Hope Chigudu said of Tafi Chigudu, her future husband:

65 D. Mills, 'Life on the hill: students and the social history of Makerere', *Africa*, 76:2 (2006), 149, 262.

66 S. Ryan, 'Uganda: a balance sheet of the revolution', *Mawaza*, 3:1 (1971), 47. For a comparative history of Dar and Makerere, see M. Mamdani, 'The African university', *The London Review of Books*, 19 July 2018, 29–32.

67 Ryan, 'Uganda', 57.

68 F. Byaruhanga, *Student Power in Africa's Higher Education: A Case of Makerere University* (London, 2006), 63.

69 Interview with Hope Chigudu, Harare, 17 Dec. 2014.

70 Interview with Tafi Chigudu, Harare, 25 Mar. 2015.

71 *Ibid.*



He was talking about politics all the time. He was reading Marxism . . . He had study groups and I think he had identified people at university that were like minded that he could talk to. We learnt a lot from him, it was a Training in Politics for Idiots.<sup>72</sup>

Their articulation and academic skills — to get to university as a black student in Rhodesia required extremely high grades — gave Zimbabwean student refugees an intellectual status on campus. These attributes, according to Hope Chigudu meant that Tafi, Nyakunu, and Siziba ‘were happy socially but politically they weren’t happy’.<sup>73</sup>

Amin’s staunch partisan support for liberation and the extremely high risks for Ugandan students in politically organising made Makerere a frustrating and boring frontier for Zimbabwean student activism.<sup>74</sup> Fired by their commitment to the struggle, Tafi Chigudu, Nyakunu, and Siziba were contemptuous of Ugandan students’ religiosity and viewed most of their Ugandan classmates as ‘avoidable’ and politically ‘ignorant’.<sup>75</sup> To an older Hope Chigudu, ‘[The Zimbabweans] were too young to contextualise it: to understand why there appeared to be ignorance on campus.’<sup>76</sup> Their sense of political malaise in Kampala was compounded by the upheavals in ZANU during this period surrounding the Nhari mutiny. Tafi Chigudu remembers how ‘the politicians were all over [Makerere]’, in particular Nathan Shamuyarira, a ZANU leader who was then a lecturer at Dar es Salaam. Chigudu, Nyakunu, and Siziba avoided these politicians as ciphers who were ‘trying to mobilise you to support a certain leader’.<sup>77</sup>

The purposelessness of Zimbabwean political studenthood at Makerere in these years did not lead to disillusionment with the struggle. Instead, the Zimbabweans romanticised what they imagined were the more ‘authentic’ military structures of liberation: ‘the people that were fighting up there at the front in Zambia and Mozambique’.<sup>78</sup> The belief that real participation was through violent resistance caused Tafi Chigudu, Nyakunu, and Siziba to decide to become soldiers, whilst the three others opted to continue their academic studies. Chigudu said, ‘The three of us had made up our mind, that instead of doing a post-graduate [degree] we would go and join the other people [in Mozambique].’<sup>79</sup> They then made the difficult journey from Uganda to Mozambique, where for four years they fought as soldiers.

### Political studenthood in West Africa

Makerere’s suppressive atmosphere during Amin’s rule was very different from other African campuses in the 1970s. In Nigeria and Sierra Leone, which hosted hundreds of Zimbabwean refugee students, student politics enjoyed a rich period of political

72 Interview with Hope Chigudu.

73 *Ibid.*

74 As well as hosting students, Amin also helped train hundreds of Zimbabwean soldiers for breakaway ZANU leader Ndabaningi Sithole.

75 Interview with Tafi Chigudu.

76 Interview with Hope Chigudu.

77 Interview with Tafi Chigudu.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*

vibrancy.<sup>80</sup> In Siaka Stevens' Sierra Leone, Zimbabwean refugees at Fourah Bay College played an important role in this history. In January 1977 student refugees such as Josephat Nhundu and Stephen Nyengera were tear-gassed by police in downtown Freetown whilst demonstrating their support for visiting Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda.<sup>81</sup> This incident of police heavy-handedness mobilised Sierra Leonean students and inspired a sequence of events that, Ismail Rashid argues, ultimately led local student leaders to form the Revolutionary United Front.<sup>82</sup>

In Nigeria, throughout this decade of military rule, Zimbabwean students were also at the centre of some of the country's national events.<sup>83</sup> During these years, Nigerian students embraced leftist ideas to make sense of the stark inequalities that had emerged because of the oil boom following the 1973 OPEC oil crisis. Radical political study groups and publications — such as *The Vanguard*, *Struggle*, and *Forward* — emerged across Nigeria's universities. Tajudeen Abdulraheem and Adebayo Olukoshi argued that 'the flowering of Leftist ideas' built off of local histories of trade union organising and 'benefited from a degree of state tolerance arising out of the support for the federal government by the Soviet Union and East European States during the [civil] war'.<sup>84</sup> Students' embrace of socialism was accompanied by their support for Southern African liberation, which was hugely popular following the Soweto uprising in 1976.<sup>85</sup>

Whilst Nigeria's military leaders were sceptical of students' socialist critiques of their rule, they, along with Amin, were prominent supporters of Southern African liberation. After taking power in a 1975 coup, General Murtala Mohammed committed his support to the MPLA in the Angolan civil war, which included \$20 million in financial support.<sup>86</sup> Nigeria's support for liberation struggles, in part the outcome of M. D. Yusuf's efforts, was deepened by Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976 through a foreign policy publicly committed 'to the total liberation of black people in Africa'.<sup>87</sup> This involved policies such as providing liberation movements with diplomatic support and material resources, including \$6 million to Zimbabwe's liberation movements, establishing new pan-African school syllabi, and hosting hundreds of Zimbabwean students at the country's universities.<sup>88</sup>

80 Chung, *Second Chimurenga*, 219.

81 Kaunda had just endorsed ZANU and ZAPU's Patriotic Front agreement to fight together.

82 I. Rashid, 'Subaltern reactions: lumpens, students and the left', *Africa Development*, 22:3/4 (1997), 27; R. Press, *Ripples of Hope: How Ordinary People Resist Violent Oppression* (Amsterdam, 2015), 49.

83 Gowon ruled Nigeria from the end of the Biafran War in 1970 until he was ousted in a coup in 1975 by Murtala. In 1976, Murtala was assassinated and Obasanjo took over. Under Obasanjo, the country moved towards civilian rule with elections in 1979 that started the Second Republic.

84 T. Abdulraheem and A. Olukoshi, 'The left in Nigerian politics and the struggle for socialism: 1945–1985', *Review of African Political Economy*, 13:3 (1986), 73.

85 A. Black, 'Reminiscences from Ahmadu Bello University', in B. Beckman and Y. Ya'u (eds.), *Great Nigerian Students: Movement Politics and Radical Politics* (Kano, 2005), 73.

86 The MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) was one of three liberation movements that fought the civil war. J. Polhemus, 'Nigeria and Southern Africa: interest, policy, and means', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 11:1 (1977), 60.

87 This commitment was written into the 1979 constitution. See O. Aluko, *Necessity and Freedom in Nigerian Foreign Policy* (Ife, 1981).

88 J. Illiffe, *Obasanjo: Nigeria and the World* (Abingdon, UK, 2011), 45–7; Tendi, *Army and Politics in Zimbabwe*, 77.

Zimbabweans attended universities across the country, with most studying in the South at the Universities of Lagos, Ife, and Ibadan, where Ronnie Chiviya was an academic and ZANU representative. A small number including Kane Zhou, Adam Ncube, Agnes Ngoni, and Lloyd Sachikonye studied at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in the northern state of Zaria. ABU was ‘a politically conscious university’ whose students ‘had an anti-imperialist tradition’.<sup>89</sup> In 1978, the university gave Mozambican president Samora Machel an honorary Doctorate in Laws and in 1980 gave an honorary doctorate to Zimbabwe’s newly-elected prime minister Robert Mugabe. Lloyd Sachikonye arrived as an undergraduate on a UNEPSA scholarship in late 1975 and spoke of the intellectual vibrancy on campus, being taught by Bala Usman, Yusuf Bangura, and Björn Beckman and alongside students like Raufu Mustapha. There was tremendous interest in Southern African liberation amongst Nigerian students and the public at large, and Southern Africans were often invited to take part in debates on radio and on regional television and to contribute opinion articles for publications such as the *New Nigerian*. These experiences ‘really opened up one’s intellectual horizon’, Sachikonye said, by exposing Zimbabwean students to new ideas about social class formation and the relations between the state and civil society in African politics.<sup>90</sup>

The importance of Southern African liberation and the vibrancy of student activism on this campus frontier enabled Southern African refugees like Sachikonye to collectively build important forms of solidarity with their Nigerian peers. After Soweto in 1976, Sachikonye helped start an initiative with the Students Representative Council, staff representatives, and other student groups that founded the Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa (YUSSA), which grew into a nationwide organisation.<sup>91</sup> Under the auspices of YUSSA, students and staff members collected donations of money and clothes for people in Zambia and Mozambique and held seminars with representatives from SWAPO, ZANU, and the ANC.

Yet there were also significant risks involved in student politics in Nigeria. ABU was an important site in the 1978 nationwide ‘Ali Must Go’ student campaign against the minister of education Colonel Ali, whose free-market policies included increasing tuition and accommodation fees and keeping soldiers in schools to enforce discipline.<sup>92</sup> On 19 April 1978, the military ruthlessly suppressed a large student demonstration at ABU where they shot and killed seven demonstrators. The Zimbabweans were involved in the protests, where, according to Zhou, they ‘survived very narrowly’ by fleeing from campus along with most protestors. Later in the day the military called the students back, but unlike the Nigerian students, Zhou said that they ‘had nowhere to go’ and so returned. They were told not to participate and transferred to a college 200 miles away for a month.<sup>93</sup> Sachikonye recalled how difficult it was for both him and his fellow Nigerian activists:

89 Black, ‘Reminiscences’, 76.

90 Interview with Lloyd Sachikonye over Skype call from London to Harare, 20 Jan. 2021.

91 P. Wilmot, *Nigeria’s Southern Africa Policy, 1960–88* (Uppsala, 1989), 8.

92 B. Akintola, ‘The perils of protest: state repression and student mobilization in Nigeria’, in W. Adebani and E. Obadare (eds.), *Encountering the Nigerian State* (New York, 2010), 107.

93 Interview with Kane Zhou, Mberengwa, Zimbabwe, 1 Mar. 2015.

It was real trauma, partly because two years earlier Soweto in South Africa had roused a lot of passion amongst the Nigerian students themselves, and that had also been the context in which we had formed YUSSA. So the repression that we were observing, that was taking place in South Africa had, if you like, come to the doorstep in Nigeria itself.<sup>94</sup>

Zhou spoke of the event in more bitter terms, and of how he felt belittled by his Nigerian peers for going back to the campus. He recalled: 'They despised us so much. They said, "You are seven million blacks failing to kill 250,000 whites who are colonising you. You are cowardly people."' <sup>95</sup>

However, for others like Sachikonye the experience did not undermine the bonds of solidarity with his Nigerian friends. It was through them and his experiences at ABU, he said, that he learnt to appreciate 'pan-Africanism as an important ideology', and the inspiration he felt from

the tolerance that Nigerians displayed to both whites and Africans from other countries, . . . it really contributed to our outlook that you don't have to be strident about identity all the time.<sup>96</sup>

Unlike Makerere, ABU was a vibrant frontier where local student organising and institutional hospitality inspired Zimbabwean students to develop their political ideas and mobilise collectively in order to contribute to the struggle. These experiences had their difficulties, but for some Zimbabweans it expanded their ideas about pan-Africanism and African postcolonial politics.

This did not mean, though, that political studenthood offered Zimbabwean refugees a future in politics. The small numbers of Zimbabwean students in Nigeria in comparison to elsewhere, such as the UK, meant that their activism never really attracted much attention in liberation movements. Under these circumstances, many Zimbabweans such as Sachikonye chose to focus on their studies. However, like Chigudu, others such as Zhou, Nhundu, and Nyengera reasoned that the importance of the struggle meant they should go to the war front in Mozambique and Zambia.<sup>97</sup> These frontier experiences showed that, despite the vibrancy of political studenthood on some postcolonial frontiers, students' relatively small numbers gave them little opportunity to make a name for themselves, which was not the same elsewhere.

### Empire's heartland: Zimbabwean students in the UK

The UK was one of the most popular destinations for Zimbabwean student refugees, who studied at universities across the country.<sup>98</sup> The prominence of Rhodesia in the UK media gave Zimbabwean refugees a reified status in the imaginations of radical British students. As such, Zimbabwean refugees found that as students they could have a dramatic effect on

94 Interview with Lloyd Sachikonye.

95 Interview with Kane Zhou.

96 Interview with Lloyd Sachikonye.

97 Chung, *Second Chimurenga*, 211. Zhou did not go in the end, after hearing about his brother's brutal experiences there.

98 White student migration relied heavily on personal networks. Michael Holman, for instance, was rusticated in 1966. He got into Edinburgh in 1969 through Malcolm Rifkind, a former lecturer in Rhodesia (and later UK foreign secretary). Holman eventually became Africa editor for the *Financial Times*.

UK politics, and student refugees such as Basker Vashee led protests against UDI at the London School of Economics that ushered in ‘the birth of the student movement’ in the UK.<sup>99</sup> By the late 1960s, UK university campuses were the centre of ‘the Sixties’ social and cultural upheavals, wherein many young people embraced a generational division that cut across music, fashion, sexual relations, drug use, and politics. In the basket of New Left political ideas that accompanied these upheavals — which included antiracism, Maoism, women’s liberation, and nuclear disarmament among others — politics was set in a global frame in which Rhodesia, alongside Vietnam, loomed large as examples of unjust global systems of capitalism and neo-imperialism. To radical British students, Zimbabwean student refugees were seen as important allies and agents in their campaigns against racism in the UK — the heartland of empire — which from the late 1960s were politicised by Conservative MP Enoch Powell’s rabble-rousing speeches against mass immigration and diatribes against ‘grinning piccaninnies’.<sup>100</sup>

In helping combat white supremacist racism in the UK, Zimbabwean refugees undertook a shared labour with British students that provided a basis for solidarity and collective organising. It also gave Zimbabweans access to prominent public platforms where they could build their reputations as public orators and intellectuals. For instance, in the 1970 UK general election, the Students’ Union of York University paid and vocally supported Shakespeare Tonderai Makoni to stand as an independent candidate for the Conservative seat of Howden. Makoni, who had been a ZANU student activist in Rhodesia, had fled in 1967 and was studying economics at York on a British Council scholarship. The York students saw the Zimbabwean’s candidacy as powerful means of challenging the ‘racialism [which] has been made an issue in the election by Enoch Powell’. In his hustings speech, Makoni declared that he was ‘the first to make . . . anti-racism in the world an issue in British politics’.<sup>101</sup>

Others, such as Simba Makoni (no relation to Shakespeare) were also held up as important political leaders by radical British students. In 1974 Makoni had arrived at the University of Leeds after fleeing from Rhodesia following his arrest and expulsion.<sup>102</sup> By this time, Leeds students had a history of anti-Vietnam sit-ins and antiracist demonstrations, and its student union chair Jack Straw had gone on to be the head of the NUS in 1970.<sup>103</sup> Within this student milieu, Makoni was sought out as something of a celebrity. As he said:

It was publicised in the media that the three university leaders that were expelled from the University [of Rhodesia] were in Botswana, they have been admitted into the University of Leeds. On our first day at the University of Leeds, Sue Slipman [president of the Communists

99 J. Rose and S. Sagall, ‘Obituary: Basker Vashee’, *The Guardian* (London), 4 Aug. 2005 (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/aug/04/guardianobituaries.zimbabwe>).

100 P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 384.

101 ‘Candidate takes stand on race’, *The Yorkshire Post*, 2 June 1970. For British politics, Makoni’s candidature was a minor event. Although he attracted local newspaper coverage, he received 154 votes against over 22,000 for the Conservative incumbent.

102 Mlambo, ‘Student protest and state reaction’, 473–90.

103 C. Hoefflerle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (Abingdon, UK, 2013), 135–79; interview with Jack Straw, Oxford, 18 Aug. 2019.

Students League] looked for us . . . and through her we got introduced to many others. For the first six months of our degrees, we were doing lots of speaking tours at universities, explaining the situation in Rhodesia and connecting it with the armed struggle.<sup>104</sup>

These encounters helped young Zimbabweans build their reputations and networks and reshaped their understandings of the struggle. As JoAnn McGregor has argued, these were experiences of 'joint solidarity and related convivial sociability [that] promoted optimistic, utopian views of the struggle and Zimbabwean futures'.<sup>105</sup> For Simba Makoni, it was through his friendship with Slipman that 'that [he] became ideological'.<sup>106</sup> Farai Madzimbamuto, the son of the ZAPU leader, Daniel Madzimbamuto, had a similar experience when he came to embrace Maoist ideas through protesting with his fellow student activists in the UK to keep the white supremacist 'National Front off the streets'. Speaking in 2014, Madzimbamuto used these ideas to argue in light of ZANU's post-colonial rule that Mugabe and his allies were 'what Mao called "comprador capitalists"'. That's exactly what we've got now. It's been a nervous disappointment seeing the whole thing [ZANU(PF)'s rule] unfold.<sup>107</sup>

As well shaping their ideological understanding of liberation, Zimbabwean refugees' political studenthood provided important ways to directly participate in the struggle. ZAPU and ZANU had tiny formal organisational capacities in the UK, and so both movements relied on their refugee student members.<sup>108</sup> Unlike the small numbers in Nigeria, in 1971 there were 7,905 Zimbabweans living in the UK.<sup>109</sup> As Mazarire shows, on these UK (and US) frontiers student members established branch structures, lobbied political parties, raised awareness among solidarity networks, published pamphlets, fundraised for legal representation for detainees and their families, administered offices, and organised tours for nationalist leaders from the Frontline States.<sup>110</sup> Organising through student networks on this scale in the absence of nationalist institutions provided Makoni with his route into nationalist leadership. He said that when he tried to engage with nationalists in the UK, he realised:

There was no organisation of ZANU in Yorkshire, so we influenced the creation of [a branch of] ZANU in Yorkshire . . . I was the secretary. We took all the Zimbabweans who wanted to support ZANU from York, Bradford, from Sheffield, from Hull, from all the Yorkshire towns, then in a short while, we were connecting with those in Birmingham, in London, in Manchester, we formed the UK district of ZANU . . . Within around 18 months I had been elected the secretary of the ZANU UK district.<sup>111</sup>

104 Interview with Simba Makoni, Harare, 23 Jan. 2015.

105 McGregor, 'Locating exile', 74.

106 Interview with Simba Makoni.

107 Interview with Farai Madzimbamuto, Harare, 12 Dec. 2014.

108 As McGregor explains, ZAPU had an office in King's Cross next door to Sinn Féin. ZANU for a time shared an office with South Africa's PAC, Angola's UNITA, and southern Sudanese Anyanya. McGregor, 'Locating exile', 69.

109 D. Pasura, *African Transnational Diasporas: Fractured Communities and Plural Identities of Zimbabweans in Britain* (Basingstoke, UK, 2014), 34.

110 Mazarire, 'ZANU's external networks', 93–6.

111 Interview with Simba Makoni.



When he had moved to Leicester to do his doctorate, Makoni, who was still under thirty, was responsible for all of ZANU's operations in Western Europe from his student flat. Others, such as Ibbo Mandaza, Witness Mangwende, and Felix Muchemwa followed a similar route doing postgraduate degrees at UK universities before joining ZANU's political or military structures in Dar es Salaam and Mozambique.<sup>112</sup>

Unlike students in Frontline States or soldiers in military camps, these refugee students operated with remarkable autonomy from liberation movements' leadership. Cyril Ndebele, for instance, explained how he organised a ZAPU student conference in London:

All the students from Europe, USSR, USA, Sweden came. . . . We informed Lusaka . . . [that] it was a closed conference for students only. . . . They tried to disallow that, they sent Edward Ndllovu [a ZAPU leader], and we kept him out! I went to explain to him in a pub in Hampstead Heath that we are very loyal . . . but he couldn't accept, as ZAPU leader, that he was excluded from a ZAPU meeting!<sup>113</sup>

These campus frontiers in the UK were important to the liberation struggle. On them, young Zimbabweans' performances of their political studenthood gave them a means of participating in the struggle that could also provide them with visibility and respect among liberation leaderships, thereby opening the door to their future involvement in shaping the movements and, after independence, the country. Makoni used this route to carve out a particularly impressive political career that skyrocketed after independence. In 1980, at the age of thirty, he became Zimbabwe's youngest cabinet minister. He later became the secretary of SADC, and in 2008 he controversially challenged Mugabe for the presidency on the basis of his technocratic expertise. But whilst his actions were rewarded, not all such frontier innovations were.

## NATIONALIST ATTEMPTS TO POLICE STUDENT FRONTIERS

Nationalist party leaders had ambivalent relationships with the young people on student frontiers. Leaders worried that students beyond their control could embarrass them, upset diplomatic relations, and introduce dangerous ideas into their movements. Yet, unlike in camps, there were no obvious disciplinary controls to exercise over them. ZAPU students were well aware of what was expected of them. In a 1965 letter from ZAPU's Lusaka office to all Zimbabwean students overseas, students were told 'to behave well in [your] host countries and not to discredit the Zimbabwean people through uncouth behaviour'.<sup>114</sup> Poor behaviour, the letter warned, would mean recall. Similarly, Dzingai Mutumbuka stated how the party recruited student informants who would 'send reports on the behaviour of others because we didn't want them to besmirch our struggle and our party'. But, as Mutumbuka conceded, many of these frontier campuses were 'at arms-length' to the movement: 'There were some where we had a direct connect, there

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Ibbo Mandaza, Harare, 10 Dec. 2014.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in McGregor, 'Locating exile', 73.

<sup>114</sup> Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, Berlin MfAA C409, Zambian ZAPU leadership's communiqué to Zimbabwean students in Europe, 1965. My thanks to Sara Pugach for sharing this source.

were others where the connection was loose.' The effect was that ZANU leaders 'would not know what was happening unless somebody would have informed us'.<sup>115</sup>

Leaders were particularly fearful that students' 'social deviance' would cause public scandals. Mutumbuka illustrated this in a story about seventy-eight students studying in Malta. According to the report he received, he said, 'they started drinking, they started womanising, and one of them was so drunk he was thought to be dead and was dropped in a mortuary only to wake up.' In response, Mutumbuka flew to Malta, met with the Maltese hosts, and then arranged to meet the Zimbabwean students. He recounted:

I talked to them and said, 'Look, I'm here. I've heard a lot of dreadful things. . . . I'm going back but I'm not going alone.' I called the names of four of the students, and I said, 'I have your passports and your tickets, you're going back. That is the penalty for misbehaviour.'<sup>116</sup>

Although not the brutal punishment of the camps, such actions by nationalist leaders could be devastating for students, whose future prospects often hinged on whether they held a degree.

Leaders were also concerned about students' ideological deviance, an issue that also arose in military training camps and which led to violent struggles between soldiers and their superior commanders.<sup>117</sup> Whilst both ZAPU and ZANU leaders made great use of communist rhetoric, the political aims of Nkomo and Mugabe were focused on the extension of the franchise and the mass expansion of welfare. Radical Marxist ideas were therefore perceived as a threat by these leaders. Arthur Chadzingwa, who was ZAPU's UK representative from 1976, recounted:

The reason why I was sent to London was because they said there is a disease amongst those people, armchair revolutionaries. . . . [who believed] that the struggle is run on Marxist-Leninist lines and only then can you liberate Zimbabwe.<sup>118</sup>

Chadzingwa explained how he rebuked students for holding such positions:

'You are drinking in the pub. . . . Everyday 500 people cross the border. Where are they going? They say they are going to fight to liberate Zimbabwe. They cannot quote Karl Marx. When you go back to Zimbabwe you will be in a minority. What are you going to do with their goats? Are you going to nationalise them according to your ideology? No, let's be practical. This is a national liberation struggle.'<sup>119</sup>

In this instance, unlike the brutal punishments of the camps, Chadzingwa sought to shame Zimbabwean student activists into ideological line.

Winning the argument was not the approach taken in other circumstances, as Joe Mutizwa, a ZANU supporter at the London School of Economics, experienced. In 1978 ZANU had fallen into another violent leadership crisis about ethnicity, which was affecting student politics in London. As Mutizwa said, 'It was very, very messy and dangerous.' To

115 Interview with Dzingai Mutumbuka.

116 *Ibid.*

117 D. Moore, 'Democracy, violence and identity in the Zimbabwean War of National Liberation: reflections from the realms of dissent', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 29:3 (1995), 375-402.

118 Interview with Arthur Chadzingwa, Harare, 9 Jan. 2015.

119 *Ibid.*

ensure unity and discipline, ZANU's leaders 'decided to use fear to bring people into line'. To do this, the guerrilla commander of Tete Province Chironto Mugara was sent to London.<sup>120</sup> Mutizwa recounted:

So 1978, he came to the students in London. . . . The impact of that was unbelievable. . . . People just stepped into line. I laugh with him when I see him. He says, 'I didn't even know why I was being sent to London. All I was told was to intimidate them.' He said, 'I hear there is nonsense here. Where I come from, there's no nonsense. I'm right at the front, commanding so many thousands of guerrillas. This nonsense must stop now.' . . . There was not a peep.<sup>121</sup>

Such ad hoc means of disciplining young people were responses to the autonomy that they exercised on student frontiers and which leaders were never able to institutionally control.

### CONCLUSION: LEGACIES AFTER INDEPENDENCE, 1980

Thousands of young people left Rhodesia between 1965 and 1980 to further their studies on refugee scholarships at universities across the world. In the context of liberation in exile, these campus frontiers provoked young Zimbabweans to consider their participation and future in the struggle. Political studenthood was historically valued within nationalist movements as an identity that gave young people a privileged involvement in the struggle and which marked them out for leadership. These young Zimbabweans, however, found that political geography mattered when it came to their political participation. For students on postcolonial frontiers in Uganda, Idi Amin's harsh repression on campus and strong support for liberation meant that student activism seemed to serve little purpose either in participating in the struggle or in opening a route to a political future. In contrast, military-ruled Nigeria provided a vibrant set of student frontiers, where pan-African solidarity and radical student networks provided the basis for critical debate, fundraising, and awareness-raising. The small number of these students and their position in a country that was already a staunch ally in the war of liberation, however, gave them little room to craft a reputation or a future in the liberation movements. Frustrated by these marginal roles, many of those who were committed to action chose to give up on political studenthood and took up armed resistance as soldiers in the Frontline States. On other frontiers, such as those at the heart of empire in the UK, the thousands of Zimbabwean refugees found that political studenthood opened up a valuable array of radical British groups and solidarity organisations who were keen and willing to work with these refugee students to fundraise, lobby, and organise in aid of liberation. For young people on these frontiers, political studenthood not only provided them with intellectual authority but also gave them exposure to liberation leaders who were key to ensuring their advancement within the movement. These leaders valued student frontiers but worried about the effects of students' autonomy. To manage this, leaders invested energy but never systematically succeeded in policing students' social behaviours and political ideas.

Frontiers are important in African history because they shape the nature of political communities, and Zimbabwe's liberation frontiers are no exception. As scholars have shown,

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Joe Mutizwa, Harare, 17 Feb. 2015.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

the repressive behaviours developed through prosecuting an armed struggle were revived after ZANU's 1980 election victory, when members of ZAPU were immediately marginalised. In the seven years that followed, the ruling party set about crushing their rivals and their supporters.<sup>122</sup> Alongside this repression in the decade following independence was ZANU's extensive project of state building, which was something of a bricolage. Amidst the repressive clampdown on rivals, the government introduced a minimum wage and significantly expanded access to healthcare and education, removing school fees at primary level.<sup>123</sup> Those who had been student refugees played a key role in this state-building effort. In the 1980s, fearing the flight of white expertise after independence, Mugabe and his ministers actively encouraged the expatriate graduates of refugee scholarships to return home to join the country's elite professional classes and contribute to the government's programme of National Development and Africanisation. Ibbo Mandaza, who helped Chidzero and Mutumbuka develop Zimbabwe's manpower plans, said that this was 'the mobilisation of Zimbabweans in the diaspora for professional life'.<sup>124</sup> The Zimbabwean Public Service Commission toured foreign countries on recruitment drives. This courting was in contrast to the experience of uneducated war veterans, who were marginalised and left with little after being decommissioned. Hence many people who had been on these frontiers and gained degrees but eschewed political studenthood — including Chigudu and Zhou — enjoyed the fruits of independence. Chigudu was able to use his Makerere economics degree to get a midlevel position in the Ministry of Finance and Zhou began work as a geologist in a mining company.

The effect of political studenthood on liberation's frontiers runs deeper still, as it shaped the top levels of liberation leadership at independence. Although student activism was an increasingly complex route to leadership over the course of the struggle, many young Zimbabweans did navigate it as they sought to realise their aspirations for transforming the country. In delivering the success of Zimbabwe's developmental state, scholars have understandably emphasised 'the legacies of Rhodesia's strong centralised state bureaucracies'.<sup>125</sup> Yet credit for these technocratic achievements is also due to the people who began their political careers as student activists whilst studying on liberation's frontiers. Of the former activists I interviewed, during the 1980s Dzingai Mutumbuka led the Ministry of Education's efforts, Ibbo Mandaza was permanent private secretary in the Ministry of Manpower, and Brian Raftopoulos helped develop the first National Manpower Survey. Many others went on to prominent careers in Zimbabwe's public institutions and private sector. It was a time, Raftopoulos said, 'where the logic of arguments held sway'.<sup>126</sup> In this way, liberation's frontiers were centrally important to ZANU's decade of developmental state building, when different traditions of politics existed across the movement. This accommodation was gradually closed down over the course of the first two decades

122 This is known as *Gukurabundi* and involved widespread torture and the deaths of thousands of civilians.

123 I. Mandaza (ed.), *The Political Economy of Transition, 1980–86* (Dakar, 1986).

124 Interview with Ibbo Mandaza.

125 J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'Introduction: politics, patronage and violence in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39:4 (2013), 751.

126 Interview with B. Raftopoulos, Harare, 22 Oct. 2014. Raftopoulos had been a student activist at the School of Oriental and African Studies supervised by Shula Marks.

after liberation, and the party's technocratic expertise significantly diminished. By the mid-1990s, in Mandaza's words, 'most of us were shunted aside' or bowed to party loyalty as the authoritarian rule born out of prosecuting a military struggle came to dominate Zimbabwe's politics.<sup>127</sup>

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127 Interview with Ibbo Mandaza.