

A barren mistress: American rhetoric in the Rhodesian illegal declaration of independence

*Neil D. Graves*¹

Abstract

This month marks the fortieth anniversary of the Lancaster House Agreement on 21 December 1979 which officially ended the Rhodesian Bush War and led directly to the creation of the Republic of Zimbabwe five months later. One immediate effect of the signing of this agreement was the nullification of the illegal Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) that on 11 November 1965 had declared Rhodesia free from British colonial control. This was only the second UDI in history - the first being the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 – and superficially the context of the two declarations appear similar, a circumstance that motivated the authors of the Rhodesian UDI to model their Proclamation on Thomas Jefferson’s illustrious American original in an attempt to generate international sympathy for their cause. However, the extent of the relationship between the two documents, their linguistic modelling, rhetorical effects and political philosophies, remains largely unexplored. This paper dissects the rhetoric of the Rhodesian UDI in the light of the lexis, structure, syntax, physical context and ideology of its American predecessor. What is apparent is that the American model provides only a thin veneer of respectability, with the suppressed dissimilarities between the two documents revealing the repugnance of a racist Weltanschauung that underpins the Rhodesian government’s claims for independence. This is ultimately contextualised by a chronologically mediating text, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s bestselling C19th novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which addresses the central issue of the responsibility of a white Western government towards its black African citizenry.

Keywords: Rhodesia, Declaration of Independence, America, rhetoric, colonial.

¹ Senior Lecturer, English Literature. Department of English, University of Botswana. E-mail: Neil.Graves@mopipi.ub.bw

Introduction

Forty years ago this month marks the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement on 21 December 1979 which officially ended the Rhodesian Bush War, nullifying the illegal 1965 Rhodesian Declaration of Independence (UDI). This led directly to the country's first universal suffrage democratic elections and the creation of the Republic of Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980. This anniversary provides an appropriate moment to reflect upon these momentous events which shaped not only the past but the current history of Zimbabwe; for the two fundamental political stumbling blocks that informed the 1965 UDI – free and fair democratic elections undertaken by a universal franchise, and the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement – land reform and a stable agricultural economy, remain topical and problematic to this day. The 1979 Agreement had a number of immediate impositions before the country could transition to a Republic over the course of the next six months, and central to these were the nullification of the illegal Unilateral Declaration of Independence that had been in effect for fourteen years, and the temporary imposition of direct British rule, which was a form of government alien to colonial Rhodesia since 1923. This paper is an examination of the rhetorical strategies that the Rhodesian UDI document of 1965 appropriates from the American UDI document of 1776 - these being the only two unilateral declarations of independence from British colonial control in history - in order to attempt to gain legitimacy for itself before an international community. Several journalists and scholars have followed the contemporary British Prime Minister Harold Wilson in recognising that the Rhodesian UDI was in part modelled on Thomas Jefferson's famous American original text, but hitherto no study has considered the linguistic relationship between the two historical documents and the relationship between the texts has received scant critical attention. (Wood, 2005, p. 471; Rhodesia Declares Independence, Provokes Wrath, 1965, pp. 1-A, 7-A; Hillier, 1998, p. 207; Palley, 1966, p. 750; Gowlland-Debbas, 1990, p. 71). To rectify this scholarly lacuna is the objective of this paper.

British PM Harold Wilson observed on the same day that the Rhodesian Proclamation was declared on 11 November 1965 that this text “borrowed for the purposes of small and frightened men the words of one of the historic documents of human freedom, even to the point of appropriating the historic reference to “a respect for the opinions of mankind”” (Wilson, 1965), but in fact its replication of the American Declaration is far more substantial. The whole introduction is quoted virtually verbatim, two other phrases in the body of the document are quoted precisely, and the beginning of the conclusion paraphrased. In addition to these direct lexical references, the Rhodesian Proclamation is rhetorically modelled on the American Declaration in its structure, syntax, and physical context. The structures of the two texts are similar; both have sections that develop from an introduction to an indictment and a denunciation or vindication through to a conclusion. Syntactically the two documents demonstrate similarities which are manifested in terms of rhythm and rhetorical effect. The immediate physical contexts of the documents' announcements are further related, with the Rhodesian government's timing of their Proclamation on Armistice Day – a day of remembrance for the fallen as well as a celebration of the victory of freedom over tyranny – and by the ringing of their own Rhodesian “Liberty Bell” to commemorate this repudiation of British colonial control. However, I argue that notwithstanding these four deliberately fashioned appropriations, the implicit and explicit ideologies of the two documents are so contrasted that any genuine sympathy which the

Rhodesian governments sought to create by means of this connection to the American Revolution from despotic control is undermined and exposed as spurious.

In so doing I also mediate between these two political documents with a literary text, Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 American novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which immediately upon publication became a classic of the anti-slavery movement. In the nineteenth century Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold more copies than any book in the world except the Bible, and was quickly translated into thirty-seven languages. This important text assists in bridging the gap between the two UDIs, not only historically as a midway point in time, but primarily through its candid rationale to proselytize concerning the pertinent issue of the moral responsibility of white Western governments towards the freedom of black Africans. In the American Revolution one white Western Government sought freedom from another white Western government, and in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe interrogated this white American Government's racist attitudes towards its black African enslaved population. The Rhodesian crisis combined these two issues of white-vs-white independence and racism towards its own black citizens, with the latter ironically becoming the major stumbling block in obtaining the former.

Rhodesia and America: Complementary and contrasting historical contexts

In order to understand the relationship between the two UDI texts it is important to comprehend the complementary, yet contrasting political contexts between the American and Rhodesian colonial rebellions, and in particular that of the southern African country which albeit more contemporary is not so widely known. On the 11 November 1965 Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of the erstwhile British colony of Rhodesia, broadcast a proclamation to the Rhodesian public over national radio, announcing that it was an "indisputable and accepted historic fact" that Rhodesia had been self-governing since 1923, and lamented that the British government persisted in "maintaining an unwarrantable jurisdiction . . . to the detriment of the future peace, prosperity, and good government of Rhodesia" (Proclamation, 1965). Claiming the unequivocal support of the populace, the proclamation asserted that it was "essential that Rhodesia should obtain, without delay, sovereign independence, the justice of which is beyond question" (Proclamation, 1965). Despite claiming the continuance of Rhodesian loyalty to the British Crown, Smith also unveiled a new constitution that ostracized formal British involvement in the country. The proclamation asserted the moral and political rectitude of the Rhodesian cause which, as Smith argued in his address to the Rhodesian public, was of "worldwide significance", stating that "We have struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilization, and Christianity—and in the spirit of this belief we have thus assumed our sovereign independence" (Smith, Announcement, pp. 204-205). Resonating with the language and echoing the rhythms of previous famous declarations of liberty, Smith and his government claimed an "undoubted right . . . to promote the common good so that the dignity and freedom of all men may be assured" (Proclamation, 1965).

This proclamation was in fact a Unilateral Declaration of Independence and was in part modelled on the American Declaration of Independence of 1776. This was historically appropriate, for despite preceding it by almost two centuries, the American Declaration was the only previous Unilateral Declaration of Independence by a British colony (Watts, 2012, p. 1). However, contrasting the American Declaration that was welcomed in some parts of the world as a break for freedom from despotic foreign control, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Rhodesia was universally condemned. The British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his

government implored citizens of Rhodesia to remain loyal to the British Crown, labelling the incident an “IDI” or “Illegal Declaration of Independence” (Proposals for Settlement of Rhodesia Problem, 1967, p. 136), “an act of rebellion against the Crown and against the Constitution as by law established, and actions taken to give effect to it will be treasonable” (Wilson, 1965). Within hours of the Proclamation the UN General Assembly passed a condemnatory resolution, by 107-to-2 votes, denouncing Smith’s government’s actions and extorting Britain to end “the rebellion by the unlawful authorities in Salisbury [the capital city of Rhodesia]” (Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months*, 2008, p. 7). The following day the UN Security Council denounced the declaration of independence as illegal and racist in Resolution 216, and on 20th November in Security Council Resolution 217 condemned it as an illegitimate “usurpation of power by a racist settler minority”, instructing nations neither to recognise what it deemed “this illegal authority” (Gowlland-Debbas, 1990, pp. 183, 185) nor to conduct business of any kind with it. There was considerable international support for Britain to remove Smith’s government by military force - including pleas from Rhodesian black nationalists - but Wilson instead resolved to utilise economic sanctions, supported by The United Nations which instituted the first mandatory trade sanctions in history requiring member states to cease all trade and economic links with Rhodesia in Security Council Resolutions 232 (December 1966) and 253 (April 1968) (Gowlland-Debbas, 1990, pp. 18, 701).

Although the two historical UDIs appear contextually similar – both America and Rhodesia were colonies governed by British ex-patriots who claimed that the British were “persisting in maintaining an unwarrantable jurisdiction” (Proclamation, 1965; Declaration, 1776) over them – a phrase found in both documents - and were sufficiently politically mature to conduct self-rule – a closer examination reveals this common ground to be superficial. In 1776 America and Britain were already at war over sovereignty, and the British Crown was committed to Empire-building rather than to decolonisation. However, by 1965 Britain was in the process of shedding itself of all its colonial dependencies; indeed by this time the countries bordering Rhodesia had already acquired independence - Malawi and Zambia both in 1964, with Botswana soon to follow in 1966. The Rhodesian and British Governments had been negotiating Rhodesia’s independence for many years, and although the two sides were in disagreement concerning the central issue of the electoral franchise of the new country, the fact that all parties desired an independent Rhodesia was not in doubt. As can be seen in the quotations from the United Nations Security Council, this central issue was perceived as one of racism, for the Government of Rhodesia was completely controlled by white representatives who held all 50 “A” roll parliamentary seats despite the citizenry of the country being approximately 95% black.¹

Accordingly for Ian Smith and the Rhodesian cabinet to model their own Unilateral Declaration of Independence upon that of their American predecessors was immediately recognised as controversial; such was argued by Prime Minister Harold Wilson to the British Parliament in his initial response the Rhodesian UDI on 11 November 1965:

The illegal regime which now claims power and authority in Rhodesia marked its usurpation of authority- with a proclamation which borrowed for the purposes of small and frightened men the words of one of the historic documents of human freedom, even to the point of appropriating the historic reference to "a respect for the opinions of mankind."

I would repeat to them and to the Rhodesian people as a whole the words I used in my farewell statement on leaving Salisbury, which also quoted these words:

“When, nearly two centuries ago, the American States declared their independence from a British Government, which, to say the least, was remote, oppressive and unimaginative, they insisted that their actions be inspired by "a proper respect for the opinions of mankind." Nor were they alone in the world. Could anyone say that either of these things would be true of a Rhodesia which chose illegally to claim its independence?” (Wilson, 1965)

Akin to the American Declaration of Independence, the Rhodesian Declaration shocked the world. 11 November is Armistice Day which commemorates the end of the 1st World War, and at precisely the prescribed two minutes silence of remembrance at 11am in 1965 Prime Minister Smith declared Rhodesia independent, signing the proclamation document with the other eleven ministers of the Cabinet. They still pledged allegiance to the British Crown and the event was stage-managed at this specific time in order to emphasise Rhodesia’s international service to its mother-country, reminding the British of the sacrifices of the loyal colony. The Proclamation even ended with the time honoured phrase "God Save The Queen" (Proclamation, 1965), and the head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation Ken Flower later claimed that "the rebellion was made to appear as though it was not a rebellion." (Wood, *So Far and No Further!*, 2005, p. 471) This moment was the culmination of several years of fruitless negotiations regarding the independence of Rhodesia between both the Conservative and Labour Governments of Great Britain, and the United Federal and Rhodesian Front Governments of Rhodesia.

This deadlock centred on two issues. Of primary importance to the Rhodesian Government was the recognition that since 1923 the country was unique amongst British colonies, being the only one that was internally self-governing, and constitutionally not unlike a dominion such as Australia, Canada, or New Zealand. It was empowered to control its own affairs in almost all respects with what amounted to no interference from London. With Britain granting independence in the 1960s to surrounding African nations which the Rhodesian Government considered to be far less socially and economically developed, politically experienced, and stable, the perceived reticence of the British Government towards Rhodesia was generally considered a gross act of betrayal. On the other hand, for the British Government the central issue was that the terms for independence had to be acceptable to the people of the country as a whole, particularly in colonies with a substantial population of Western settlers. Black Nationalist movements had gained enormous traction in Africa in the 1950s and 60s - often known collectively by the title “the Wind of Change” which originated in British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s challenge to the apartheid South African Parliament in 1960 (Blake, 1977, p. 331) – putting pressure on the British Government to accede independence only upon the condition of majority rule. This developed into the ascendant policy known as “NIMBAR”, or “no independence before majority rule”. Successive British Governments before November 1971 regarded “NIMBAR” as the basic precondition for the granting of independence to Rhodesia, and articulated it into what became known as the Five Principles:

The Principle and intention of unimpeded progress to majority rule would have to be maintained and guaranteed;
There would also have to be guarantees against retrogressive amendment of the Constitution;

There would have to be immediate improvement in the political status of the African population;
There would have to be progress towards ending racial discrimination;
The British Government would need to be satisfied that any basis proposed for independence was acceptable to the people of Southern Rhodesia as a whole.
(Decolonisation: Issue on Southern Rhodesia, 1975, p. 8)

The situation in Rhodesia was essentially what W. E. B. Du Bois had famously predicted would become “[t]he problem of the twentieth century ... the problem of the color line” (Watts, 2012, p. 2). Ian Smith’s Government considered that the British condition of acceptability “to the people of Southern Rhodesia as a whole” had been met by holding an *indaba* or tribal conference of chiefs and headmen on 22nd October 1964, and a general independence referendum on 5th November 1964, both of which returned enormous majorities in support of the Rhodesian Government’s stand for independence under the 1961 constitution. However, the results were either rejected or ignored by the British Government due to the composition of the voters: the voting Chiefs received Rhodesian Government salaries and were not representative of the general people; and the electorate in the referendum was almost entirely white. This impasse was never bridged and stalemate ensued – the British PM Harold Wilson described the chasm between the two governments as “a deep difference of philosophy-a gulf that we now know could never be bridged because it was a gulf covering all the differences between different worlds and different centuries” (Wilson, 1965) - leading eventually to the UDI crisis the following year when the Smith Government realized that the British were content to let the matter drag on indefinitely in this unresolved fashion.

Identification: Lexis, structure, syntax and physical context of the declarations

The following linguistic and extra linguistic analysis asserts that the Rhodesian Proclamation appropriates the lexis, structure, syntax and physical contextual material of the American Declaration in a wholesale manner, suggesting beyond reasonable doubt that the Rhodesian authors intended the identification to be either consciously or subconsciously cognizant to a worldwide audience, no doubt desiring by this identification to create public empathy for their cause. The most obvious debt is by direct quotation or the perspicacious paraphrasing of material. The introduction to the Proclamation is lifted wholesale from the Declaration with only minor changes:

Decl: When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people
Procl: Whereas in the course of human affairs history has shown that it may become necessary for a people

Decl: to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another
Procl: to resolve the political affiliations which have connected them with another people

Decl: and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them,

Procl: and to assume amongst other nations the separate and equal status to which they are entitled:

Decl: a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Procl: And Whereas [sic] in such event a respect for the opinions of mankind requires them to declare to other nations the causes which impel them to assume full responsibility for their own affairs:

(Declaration, 1776) (Proclamation, 1965)

There is only one significant difference between the two introductions and that is the omission from the Rhodesian Proclamation of the brief initial statement of the American argument that their nation is “entitle[d]” to be “separate and equal” (a phrase in both texts) according to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” (Declaration, 1776). This latter phrase is conspicuously erased in the Rhodesian document, but comprises part of the crucial American rationale in its claim for independence, as I consider in the analysis of the texts’ ideologies.

Beyond the introduction, one paragraph from the middle of the Rhodesian Proclamation quotes two separate phrases from the American Declaration, presented in both documents as evidence that the British are to blame for the current crisis. The Proclamation quotes the first American indictment of King George III who, it is claimed, “refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good”, and then part of the American denunciation of the British Parliament which “extend[s] an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us” (Declaration, 1776; Proclamation, 1965). In the Rhodesian Proclamation both of these complaints are levelled against the British government and not against the Crown, for unlike the Americans, the Rhodesians initially desired to remain subject to the British monarchy, not declaring a Republic till 1970. The final duplication of lexis appears in the opening sentence of the Proclamation’s conclusion that paraphrases the corresponding passage in the Declaration, with both documents “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions” (Declaration, 1776; Proclamation, 1965).

These four directly quoted or paraphrased passages in the Rhodesian Proclamation make the debt to the American Declaration conspicuous. A comparison of the structures of the two texts reveals further evidence of deliberate appropriation, but also points to compelling evidence of the disparity between the documents’ ideologies. It is customary to distinguish between five sections in the American Declaration: the introduction, the preamble, the indictment, the denunciation, and the conclusion (Lucas, *The Stylistic Artistry*). The introduction states that it is a precept of Natural Law for people to assume independence, and that the causes for such must be reasonable and explicable to a wider audience. The preamble contains some of the most memorable phrases in the English language (Lucas, *Justifying America*, 1989, p. 85), and one sentence which it is claimed may be “the most potent and consequential words in American history” (Ellis, 2007, pp. 55-56): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Declaration, 1776). The preamble expands on the concept of Natural Law stated in the introduction and argues that revolution is justified when a government harms the natural rights of its citizens. The third and fourth sections of the Declaration comprise the main body of the document, in which the complaints of the American people are presented as evidence for their revolutionary action. There is a lengthy list of

grievances towards firstly the British King George III – an indictment, and then towards the British people – a denunciation, which seriously infringe on the American people’s rights and liberties. Finally the conclusion argues that in the light of the conditions outlined above the Representatives of the American people declare their nation to be independent.

The structure of the Rhodesian Proclamation is superficially similar, and indeed, by quoting verbatim the American introduction and paraphrasing the opening of the conclusion it seems likely that the authors intended its readers to comprehend the relationship. However, these similarities mask important differences. The Proclamation only exhibits four sections, developing similarly from an introduction to a body composed of complaints against the British Government and a conclusion, but replacing the American denunciation of the British people with a vindication of the government and people of Rhodesia. However, the main structural difference is the complete erasure of the lengthy American Preamble. This omission is startling for the Preamble is rhetorically and ideologically the heart and guts of the American document. The American document makes an argument for freedom based on the principles of Natural Law which are claimed “to be self-evident... truths”, such that “all men are created equal” and possess “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Declaration, 1776). These a priori principles are coupled with political theories that argue that governments “derive their just powers from the consent of the governed” and that “it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish” abusive governments in order “to effect their Safety and Happiness” (Declaration, 1776). This is entirely absent from the Rhodesian document, which develops from the near identical Introduction quoted from the American original straight into the “lists” of “indisputable and historical fact[s]” (Proclamation, 1965) in the main body of the text. This erasure, in a document which is deliberately and directly imitating its precursor, speaks volumes, and underscores the difference in ideologies between the two claims for independent self-government.

The second structural difference is in the subject matter and proportional quantity of the “lists” in the body of the documents. The Rhodesian Proclamation includes an indictment of British rule - although blaming the government rather than the Crown - but substitutes the denunciation of the British people with a defence of the actions and behaviour of its own people and government. Furthermore, whereas the formal complaints against British rule is the single largest part in the American document, comprising a whole catalogue of misgovernment, there are only two fundamental complaints against British control in the Rhodesian document that span merely half a sentence. The first complaint concerned Rhodesia’s foreign policy, claiming that the British government was “obstructing laws and treaties with other states and the conduct of affairs with other nations” (Proclamation, 1965), while the second complaint, a quotation from the American Declaration, is that the British were “refusing assent to laws necessary for the public good” (Declaration, 1776; Proclamation, 1965). By contrast the Declaration starts twenty-seven sentences (approximately half of the document) with the phraseology of either “He has...” or “For...” both of which catalogue “a history of repeated injuries and usurpations” (Declaration, 1776) by King George III. A similar lexical pattern is apparent in all of the seven paragraphs that comprise the body of the Proclamation, repeating the initial phrase “That...” with reference to either the people of Rhodesia, the governments of Rhodesia or UK, or to “indisputable and accepted historic fact” or “beliefs” (Proclamation, 1965).

What these reiterated opening phrases in the bodies of both documents do is to create a rhetorical effect akin to the poetic figure of anaphora. Syntactically the Rhodesian text clearly imitates and borrows from the American and attempts to establish the same rhythms. The

introductions of both texts present an impersonal and universal subject – the “people” – after which the Declaration starts virtually every sentence with the personalised subjects of either “we” or “he” - framing the body of the text controlled by the subject “he” with a beginning and conclusion presented by “we” - creating a syntactic pattern that encourages an “us against them” rhetorical effect. The Proclamation does likewise, with the various subjects of the text’s body framed at the beginning and at the conclusion by the precise repetition of the phrase “Now Therefore, We, The Government of Rhodesia...” (Proclamation, 1965). Indeed this phrase itself is duplicated syntactically from the American Declaration, which opens the conclusion with “We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America...” (Declaration, 1776). A similar syntactic pattern is apparent throughout the two conclusions, with the Proclamation repeating the sentence structure of the subject “we”, a subordinate clause which appeals to God as witness, followed by the main verb of “do...” which is found in the Declaration:

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, ...
(Declaration, 1776)

Now Therefore, We The [sic] Government of Rhodesia, in humble submission to Almighty God who controls the destinies of nations... Do, By This Proclamation ...
(Proclamation, 1965)

Also apparent in the syntactic relationship between these texts is the Proclamation’s duplication of triple noun phrases from the Declaration. One reason why some of the phrases from the American Declaration are so memorable is because of the rhetorical effect created by the triple concatenation of nouns. The most famous is “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, and the Declaration closes with another in its final sentence: “we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor” (Declaration, 1776). The Proclamation is at pains to duplicate this rhetorical effect, and does so repeatedly, which at times resonate so strongly with the iconic phraseology of the Declaration that subconscious identification between two texts presenting the same argument is virtually unavoidable. The Proclamation asserts that the British authorities have acted “to the detriment of the future peace, prosperity and good government of Rhodesia”, whilst by contrast their own Rhodesian government “have been responsible for the progress, development and welfare of their people” (Proclamation, 1965). These triple noun phrases are scattered throughout the Proclamation and serve to buttress the Rhodesian argument by a rhetoric of repetitious bombast. For instance the document observes that “they have seen the principles of Western democracy, responsible government and moral standards crumble” in other “primitive” countries adjacent to Rhodesia, who by contrast have “demonstrated their loyalty to the Crown and to their kith and kin in the United Kingdom” (Proclamation, 1965). Akin to the final sentence in the Declaration quoted above, the Proclamation closes by making a syntactic echo with its own triple noun phrase: “... Do, By This Proclamation, adopt, enact and give to the people of Rhodesia the Constitution annexed hereto” (Proclamation, 1965).

In addition to the formal linguistic parallels of quotation, structure and syntax, the Rhodesian government deliberately created echoes of the American Revolution in the physical

context of the announcement and delivery of the Rhodesian Proclamation. It has already been noted how carefully Prime Minister Ian Smith stage-managed his public reading of the UDI on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1965, aligning the Proclamation with Armistice Day in order to associate the Rhodesian act with the triumph of liberty over tyranny and to emphasise their continued loyalty to the British Crown. However, the Rhodesian government took a further physical step clearly intending to create the specific impression to both their own people and to those of the world that their cause was analogous to that of the Americans two hundred years previous. They manufactured a bell bearing the inscription “I toll for justice, civilization and Christianity”, which was rung annually by the Rhodesian Prime Minister on “Independence day”, 11 November, to commemorate the Proclamation of Independence, with the number of chimes signifying the number of years since the break with Britain (Rhodesia: Kicking the Gong Around, 1966). This bell was named “Liberty Bell” and was a 250lb bronze replica of the famous Liberty Bell once housed in Independence Hall in Philadelphia and an iconic symbol of the American Revolution. The resemblance was deliberate and the Rhodesian government advertised this fact: at an Independence Ball in the Rhodesian capital Salisbury in 1976 guests were presented with mats depicting the two bells together (Rhodesians celebrate 11th anniversary of breakaway, 1976). In fact this bell was a gift to the Rhodesian government from right-wing American allies, for the Rhodesian Foreign Ministry had forged strong links with ultra-conservative political elements in America which boasted 122 US-based branches of the affiliation the “Friends of Rhodesian Independence”, with an estimated membership of 25,000 Americans (Horne, 2001, p. 44). Ironically therefore, no doubt the American government’s support of the United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia was a bitter pill to swallow for the Rhodesian government, with the former British colony rejecting the parallel between the UDIs carefully orchestrated in Salisbury with its historical appeal to anti-imperial American heritage.

Contrast: Argumentative and ideological barrenness of the Rhodesian Proclamation

Comparison of the lexis, structure, syntax and physical context of the two UDIs reveals a large degree of indebtedness on the part of the Rhodesian Proclamation to the American Declaration, confirming beyond any reasonable doubt that the final draft of the document prepared by a sub-committee of civil servants headed by Gerald Clarke, the Cabinet Secretary, for PM Ian Smith and his cabinet to sign (Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 1997, pp. 100, 103) was directly modelled on the famous American original. By aligning their revolution with the American cause célèbre the Rhodesian government no doubt hoped to attract international sympathy and support - as was the case with their predecessors in 1776 - but as noted the international reaction recorded in the immediate responses by both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council was one of universal condemnation. In effect the American flavour infused into the Rhodesian break for independence failed from the outset to generate any international moral camaraderie. In terms of the Proclamation document itself, despite the formal indebtedness and duplications from the American original, the Rhodesian text fails in its most crucial function, that of argumentation. Not only is the American Declaration a landmark in history, it is also a powerfully persuasive and skilfully constructed text, and perhaps the greatest feature of the American Declaration is the vigorously presented argument. This argument succeeds in part due to the two elements that comprise firstly the soul and secondly the guts of the document: the ideology of Natural Law and

the pervasive catalogue of the “history of repeated injuries and usurpations” against British governance.

As the American Declaration of Independence is one of the most famous legal and political documents in human history, its argument has received a great deal of critical scrutiny (Lucas, *The Stylistic Artistry*), and no comprehensive account of its theoretical ideology or political philosophy is necessary herein. In brief, however, the core of the Declaration’s argument lies in its assertion of Natural Law which underpins the political philosophy of John Locke and other well-known intellectuals. The preamble argues progressively, almost syllogistically, from one contemporary commonplace belief to another², starting by explaining the reference to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” (Declaration, 1776) proposed in the introduction. Defining Natural Law as “truths [that are] self-evident” and need no explanation or defence, the two given examples of this are “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights”, concluding that three of these Natural Rights are “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (Declaration, 1776). From this a priori assertion of Natural Law the argument moves to the a posteriori propositions of political philosophy, arguing that the rationale for creating governments is “to secure these [three Natural] rights,” and concluding that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it” (Declaration, 1776). This theoretical argument appears as the soul of the Declaration, expressed in clear and beautiful Enlightenment prose that is extremely effective rhetorically, and seems undeniable to any “candid” (Declaration, 1776) judge. What remained in order to justify the American Revolution was to provide evidence to the reader that there was indeed “a long train of abuses and usurpations” by the current British Crown which threatened the attainment of these Natural Rights, “having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States” (Declaration, 1776). The preamble concludes that “To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world” (Declaration, 1776), and what follows is a damning catalogue of offences which constitute approximately half of the document. This is the empirical evidence, the unpalatable guts, which seeks to persuade the reader of the justice of the American cause.

It is this argument that provides the persuasive power of the American Declaration, and it is this argument that is entirely effaced in the Rhodesian Proclamation despite its superficial lip-service to the American original. The Proclamation presents no justification for revolutionary action, no philosophical theory or political ideology whatsoever, and it provides only brief and passing evidence of “unwarrantable” (Proclamation, 1965; Declaration, 1776) British control. The American preamble is missing in its entirety and replaced with nothing – the Proclamation develops straight from the Jeffersonian generalised introduction to various statements of “indisputable and accepted historical facts[s]” (Proclamation, 1965) of the good behaviour of the Rhodesian people and government; the criticism of the British government is almost entirely effaced, being reduced from the 824 words of evidence of execrable behaviour that comprises the main body of the Declaration to two generalised examples in one sub-clause in the Proclamation. On the two essential counts of rational theoretic argumentation and historical evidence of colonial mismanagement the Rhodesian document fails to make any justification for the dissolution of British sovereignty. What is curious is that this erasure has clearly be effected deliberately by the Rhodesian government, for their Proclamation quotes and paraphrases from the American source document, duplicating its introduction and conclusion, copying its structure, reproducing its syntax, drawing attention to its context, and yet omits what can be called its soul and guts. It is difficult to understand why this is so other than to conclude that the Rhodesian

government does not believe in the premises of Natural Law and Lockean political philosophy - and has no other theoretical argument to replace it with - and that there is virtually no evidence to present of British misrule. A brief summary of the Rhodesian Proclamation illustrates the barren nature of its presentation of “the causes which impel them to assume full responsibility for their own affairs:”

That the People of Rhodesia have:

- a) self-governed since 1923;
- b) fought wars in support of the British;
- c) witnessed colonial independence fail in neighbouring countries;
- d) full support for their government’s request for independence;

That the British government has:

- a) refused to grant independence according to Rhodesian terms;
- b) failed to ratify foreign and domestic Rhodesian legislation;

That the Rhodesian gov. has:

- a) patiently negotiated for independence, which is necessary now.

(Proclamation, 1965)

Herein there is no argument, no rational philosophical justification, no presentation of political theory, no specific examples of colonial mismanagement, and no genuine causes for radical action.

Mediation of Stowe’s Victorian classic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

In conclusion, it may be helpful to mediate between these two political texts with the hugely influential literary text, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 American novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which addresses unflinchingly the pertinent issue of the moral responsibility of white Western government towards the personal and political freedom of its black African citizenry. This was the crux of the impasse between the British and Rhodesian governments, both of whom desired an independent Rhodesia, but differed in what was the acceptable racial composition of the new government in power. In the American Revolution one white Western Government sought for freedom from another, and in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Stowe interrogated this white American Government’s racist attitudes towards its own black African enslaved population, drawing attention to the moral hypocrisy therein. The Rhodesian UDI crisis uncomfortably merged these two issues of white-vs-white independence and racism towards its own black citizenry, and it was the racist beliefs of this white government which ironically had become the major impediment in obtaining their independence from another white Western government. Stowe’s novel stands chronologically midway between the only two UDIs in history from British colonial rule, and in interrogating an ex-British white colonial government’s hypocritical treatment of its enslaved African citizens, it appropriately speaks also to the Rhodesian predicament.

In volume II chapter 23 of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* two brothers have witnessed the beating of one of their African slaves, Dodo, by the older brother’s son Henrique, and this incident prompts a discussion between them concerning elitist forms of government in the light of recent historical revolutions by socially or racially subjugated populations:

“I suppose you consider this an instructive practice for him,” said Augustine, drily.

“I couldn’t help it, if I didn’t. Henrique is a regular little tempest;—his mother and I have given him up, long ago. But, then, that Dodo is a perfect sprite,—no amount of whipping can hurt him.”

“And this by way of teaching Henrique the first verse of a republican’s catechism, ‘All men are born free and equal!’”

“Poh!” said Alfred; “one of Tom Jefferson’s pieces of French sentiment and humbug. It’s perfectly ridiculous to have that going the rounds among us, to this day.”

“I think it is,” said St. Clare, significantly.

“Because,” said Alfred, “we can see plainly enough that all men are *not* born free, nor born equal; they are born anything else. For my part, I think half this republican talk sheer humbug. It is the educated, the intelligent, the wealthy, the refined, who ought to have equal rights and not the canaille [mob].”

“If you can keep the canaille of that opinion,” said Augustine. “They took *their* turn once, in France.”

“Of course, they must be *kept down*, consistently, steadily, as I *should*,” said Alfred, setting his foot hard down as if he were standing on somebody.

“It makes a terrible slip when they get up,” said Augustine,—“in St. Domingo, for instance.”

“Poh!” said Alfred, “we’ll take care of that, in this country. We must set our face against all this educating, elevating talk, that is getting about now; the lower class must not be educated.”

“That is past praying for,” said Augustine; “educated they will be, and we have only to say how. Our system is educating them in barbarism and brutality. We are breaking all humanizing ties, and making them brute beasts; and, if they get the upper hand, such we shall find them.”

(Stowe, 1852; 2010, p. 245)

Augustine, the republican younger brother, notes that historically a repressed section of society will revolt against their oppressors and overthrow them, citing the bloody revolutions of France in 1789 and the ex-French colony of St. Domingo or Haiti in 1804. In so doing he paraphrases Jefferson’s famous claim in the American Declaration that “All men are created equal” and observes wryly the hypocrisy of this American belief that co-exists without contradiction alongside slavery. Alfred, one of the novel’s inveterate white racists, rejects the abstract philosophising of Natural Law, perceiving that we can see plainly enough that all men are *not* born free, nor born equal”, and goes on to argue that “The Anglo Saxon is the dominant race of the world, and *is to be so*” (Stowe, 1852; 2010, p. 246).

Due to the specific borrowings and omissions from the American Declaration, it is not difficult to perceive the attitudes of Stowe’s character Alfred in the Rhodesian Proclamation. Through deliberate omission, the Rhodesian text in effect rejects Jefferson’s moral principle of human equality and does so in order to promote the belief in white Western supremacy, a belief which the document claims is synonymous with “the principles of Western democracy, responsible government and moral standards” (Proclamation, 1965). This was what was perceived by the British PM Harold Wilson whilst negotiating with PM Ian Smith, describing the moral chasm between them as “between different worlds and different centuries” (Wilson, 1965). The black hero in Stowe’s novel, the escaped slave George, argues that “We *ought* to be free to meet and mingle, - to rise by our individual worth, without any consideration of caste or color;

and they who deny us this right are false to their own professed principles of human equality” (Stowe, 1852; 2010, p. 395). One proselytising idea apparent in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is to dramatize the Natural Right of black Americans for equality, revealing the moral hypocrisy apparent in white America which ignored the contradiction between belief in the moral principles espoused by their quasi-sacred text the Declaration of Independence and the endemic existence of slavery. No such hypocrisy exists in the cause of the Rhodesian Proclamation, for such moral principles themselves were rejected and erased. Unlike the American Declaration the Rhodesian Proclamation stresses the continued loyalty to the British Crown as a part of the colonial Empire, therein promoting the maintenance of such principles of empire as the superiority of the British over other races. Yet paradoxically it was precisely the principle of white minority rule that prevented the British government from granting Rhodesia independence, and no camouflaging of the Rhodesian cause in the guise of its illustrious American predecessor as that of an honest people struggling to end exploitation by the British Empire could genuinely obscure this fact.

Notes

¹ “The Rhodesian general election in May 1965 resulted in a landslide for Smith’s Rhodesia Front party, which won all 50 ‘A’ roll seats (there were only 15 seats for ‘B’ roll voters)... Race was not mentioned in terms of allocating a person to a roll, but the property, income and education qualifications for the ‘A’ roll ensured that it was predominantly European, resulting in the dominance of the white minority... numbering 224,000 according to the 1965 census, as opposed to over 4 million Africans” (Holt, 2015). See also (Palley, 1966, pp. 414-416).

² Such, at least, was the contemporary opinion of the Declaration’s author, Thomas Jefferson, who stated in a letter to Henry Lee on 8th May 1825 that “an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. this was the object of the Declaration of Independence [sic]. not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject; [. . .] terms so plain and firm, as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent [sic] stand we [. . .] compelled to take. neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. all it’s [sic] authority rests then on the harmonising sentiments of the day...” (Jefferson, 1825).

References

- Blake, R. (1977). *A History of Rhodesia* (1st ed.). London: Eyre Methuen.
- Ellis, J. (2007). *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*. New York: Knopf.
- Gowlland-Debbas, V. (1990). *Collective Responses to Illegal Acts in International Law: United Nations action in the question of Southern Rhodesia* (1st ed.). Leiden and New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Hillier, T. (1998). *Sourcebook on Public International Law* (1st ed.). London & Sydney: Cavendish Publishing.
- Holt, A. (2015, November 11). Southern Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). *The National Archives: UK Government*. Kew, Richmond, Surrey, UK. Retrieved from <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/southern-rhodesias-unilateral-declaration-independence-udi/>

- Horne, G. (2001). *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War Against Zimbabwe 1965-1980*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Issue on Southern Rhodesia. (1975, July). *Decolonisation: A Publication of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization*, 2(5). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/sites/www.un.org.dppa.decolonization/files/deco_n_num_5-1.pdf
- Jefferson, T. (1825, May 8). *Founders Online*. Retrieved from National Archives: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-5212>
- Kaufman, M. T. (1976, November 12). Rhodesians celebrate 11th anniversary of breakaway. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/11/12/archives/rhodesians-celebrate-11th-anniversary-of-breakaway-anniversary-of.html>
- Lucas, S. E. (1989). Justifying America: The Declaration of Independence as a rhetorical document. In T. W. Benson, *American Rhetoric: Context and Criticism*. 67-130. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Lucas, S. E. (n.d.). *The Stylistic Artistry of the Declaration of Independence*. Retrieved from National Archives and Records Administration: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/stylistic-artistry-of-the-declaration>
- Modern History Sourcebook: Rhodesia: Unilateral Declaration of Independence Documents, 1965*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Fordham University: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1965rhodesia-udi.asp>
- Palley, C. (1966). *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia 1888–1965, with Special Reference to Imperial Control* (1st ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Paper presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs on December 5, 1966, quoted in “United Kingdom: Proposals for settlement of Rhodesia problem”. (1967, January). *International Legal Materials*, 6(1), 134-140.
- Primary Documents in American History: Declaration of Independence*. (n.d.). Retrieved from The Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/rr//program/bib/ourdocs/declarind.html>
- Rhodesia Declares Independence, Provokes Wrath. (1965, November 12). *The St. Petersburg Times*. St. Petersburg, Florida: Times Publishing Company.
- Rhodesia: Kicking the Gong Around. (1966, November 18). *Time Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,828407,00.html>
- Smith, I. (1997). *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith*. London: John Blake Publishing.
- Smith, I. (n.d.). Announcement of Unilateral Declaration of Independence, November 11, 1965., *Modern History Sourcebook: East Africa and Rhodesia Newspaper, November 18, 1965*. Fordham University. Retrieved from <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1965rhodesia-udi.asp>
- Stowe, H. B. (1852; 2010). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (2nd ed.). (E. Ammons, Ed.) New York: W. W. Norton.
- The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America. (1776). *The Library of Congress: A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875*. Retrieved from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=005/lljc005.db&recNum=94>

- Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965) by the Government of Rhodesia. (1965, November 11). *Wikisource*. Retrieved from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Unilateral_Declaration_of_Independence
- Unilateral Declaration of Independence*. (2007). Retrieved from Rhodesians Worldwide: <https://rhodesians-worldwide.com/imagesx/udi.jpg>
- Watts, C. P. (2012). *Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence: An International History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilson, H. (1965, November 11). The position of the British Government on the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Rhodesia. *Modern History Sourcebook: Rhodesia: Unilateral Declaration of Independence Documents, 1965*. Fordham University. Retrieved from <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1965rhodesia-udi.asp>
- Wood, J. R. (2005). *So Far and No Further! Rhodesia's Bid For Independence During the Retreat From Empire 1959–1965*. Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing.
- Wood, J. R. (2008). *A Matter of Weeks Rather Than Months: The Impasse Between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith: Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War 1965–1969*. Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing.