

The **U**RBAN ROOTS OF

Democracy
AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

IN ZIMBABWE

HARARE AND
HIGHFIELD,
1940–1964

TIMOTHY SCARNECCHIA

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Toyin Falola, Senior Editor
The Frances Higginbotham Nalle Centennial Professor in History
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TIMOTHY SCARNECCHIA



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Kent, Ohio
February 2008

Abbreviations

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations
FCB	Fabian Colonial Bureau
HRP	Harare Residents' Party
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
NDP	National Democratic Party
N(UA)ARA	Native (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act
PASU	Pan-African Socialist Union
PCC	People's Caretaker Committee
RICU	Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
SCYL	Salisbury City Youth League
SRANC	Southern Rhodesian African National Congress
SRATUC	Southern Rhodesian African Trade Union Congress
SRLP	Southern Rhodesian Labour Party
SRTUC	Southern Rhodesian Trade Union Congress
UFP	United Federal Party
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZNP	Zimbabwe National Party

Notes to the Reader

Note on Name Changes

For non-Zimbabweans, locating Harare and Highfield may be a bit confusing. Prior to the 1980 independence, when Zimbabwe replaced Rhodesia, the name of the capital city was also changed from Salisbury to Harare. Prior to independence Harare had been the name of the oldest African township in Salisbury. After independence, it was renamed Mbare high-density suburb. Harare (now Mbare) was/is located southwest of Salisbury's city center. Divided from the city center by a railway track and marsh areas near the Mukuvisi River, the area was first called the "Native Location"; its name was later changed to Harari Location, and then Harare African Township by the 1950s. For consistency, I refer to it as Harare township throughout. Highfield began as a residential area for married government workers to live with their families. It was sometimes known as five-mile village because of its distance from the city center, but in the early 1950s it was expanded into a much larger residential area known as the New Highfield African Township, while the original area of houses became known as Old Highfield.

Cities and towns with new names after 1980

Previous Name	Current Name
Fort Victoria	Masvingo
Gwelo	Gweru
Que Que	Kwekwe
Salisbury	Harare
Sinoia	Chinhoyi
Umtali	Mutare
Wankie	Hwange

Note on Southern Rhodesian Currency

Southern Rhodesia, during the period covered in this book, used the British pound sterling currency system. The system consisted of pounds (£), shillings (s), and pence (sing. penny) (d). For example, a reference in the text to a monthly cost of living for an African urban worker as £14/8s/2d (or 14/8/2) means 14 pounds, 8 shillings, and 2 pence. There were 20 shillings to a pound, 12 pennies to a shilling, and 240 pence to a pound.

Note on Charles Mzingeli's Writing in Quotations

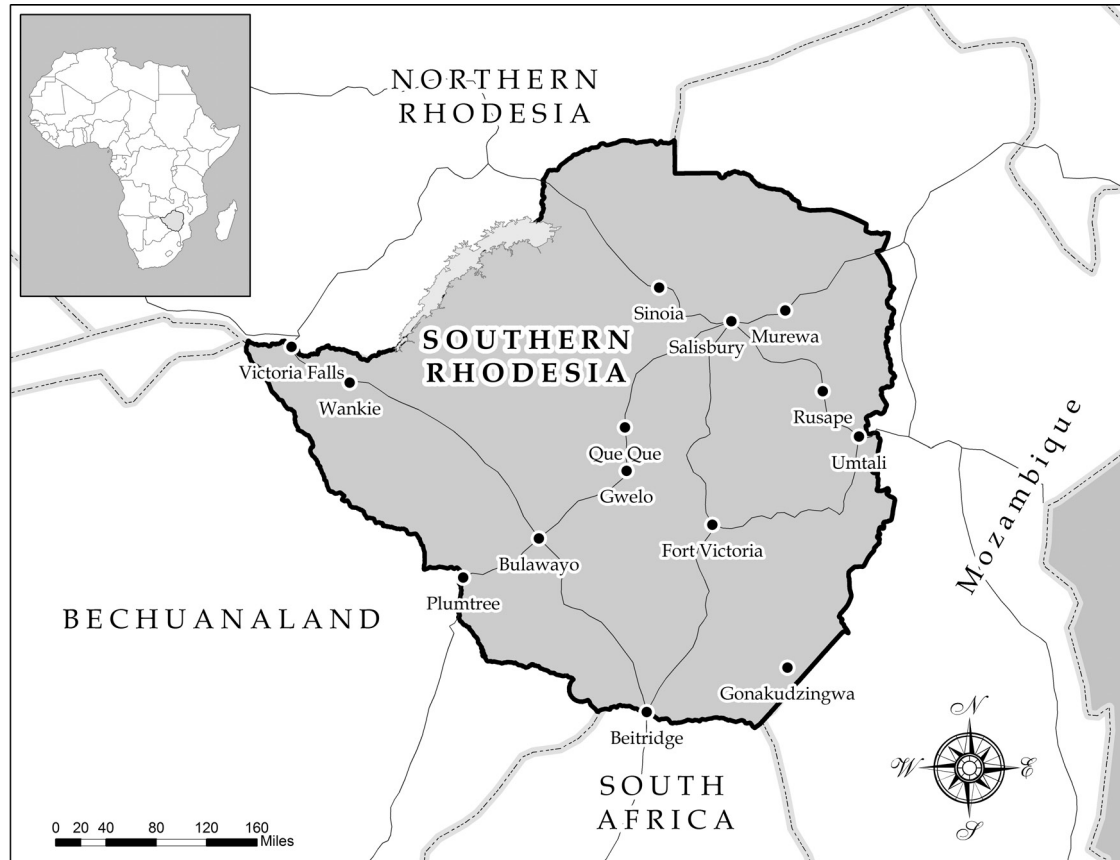
There are examples in the following text of longer quotations from Charles Mzingeli's writings, either from his letters sent to supporters in England or the minutes of political meetings sometimes typed by Mzingeli and sometimes by the RICU secretary. Rather than placing a "[*sic*]" at each grammatical or spelling error, I have left them verbatim in order to show how effective he was as a communicator in written English, even though he had only a basic education in English. His writing examples also help to capture his gift for oration in English and his ability to use the rhetoric of democracy and equality voiced in the laws of Southern Rhodesia—although rarely meant to include Africans—to make strong claims for the recognition of African rights.

Note on Sources

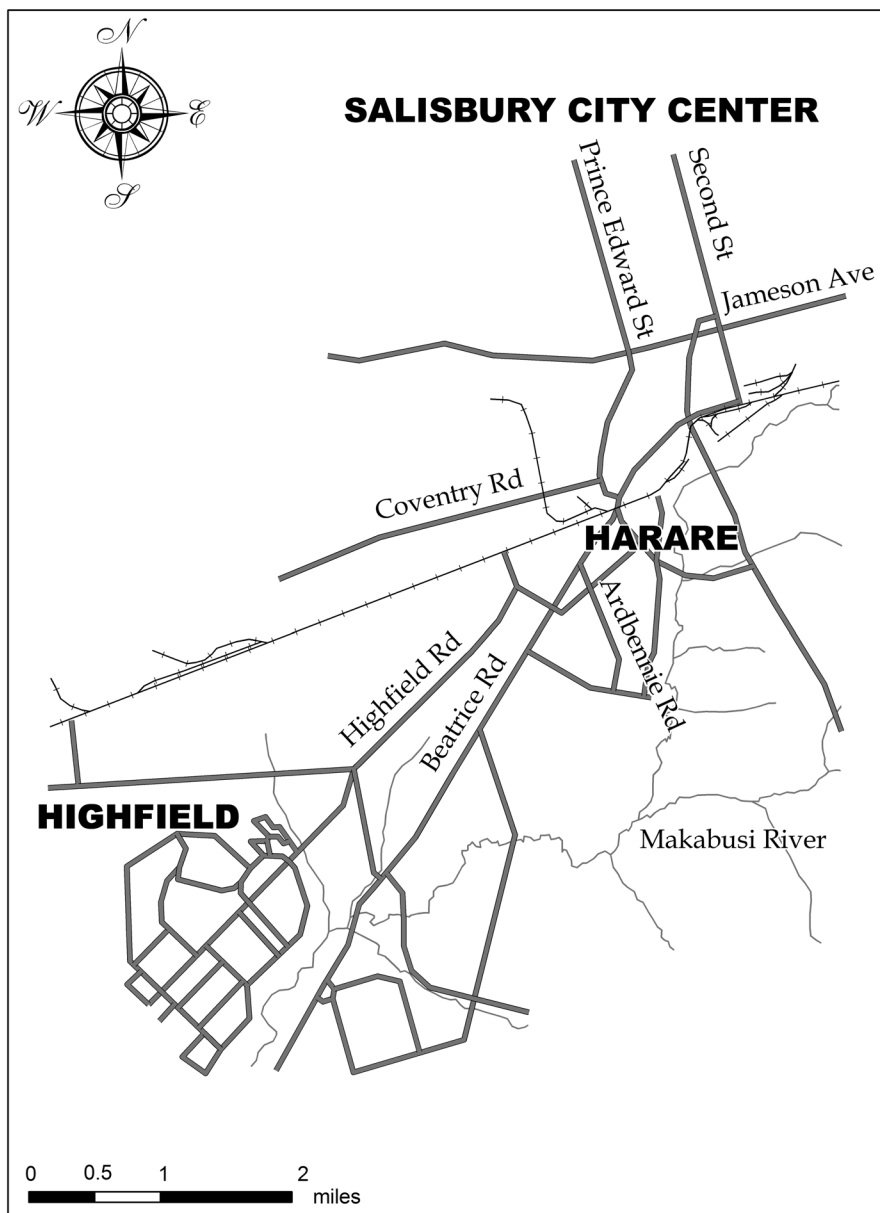
This book is based primarily on official papers and publications found in the archives in Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is also based on interviews conducted in Harare in 1991–92. Although some of these interviews are used in this book, the evidence collected during those years helped to shape the larger questions framing the narrative. In addition, the majority of the research on the earlier section on Charles Mzingeli came from archival sources found in the Records section of the Zimbabwean National Archives, a section that at the time had not been extensively used by researchers. In these files, as well as in the files located in the Harare Town Hall, I was able to find Mzingeli's minutes of meetings and his correspondences. He also sent many of his records to the Fabian Colonial Bureau in London, and their papers are in the Rhodes House Library in Oxford, U.K. As I carried out interviews in Mbare and Highfield, Charles Mzingeli's political career came to life, allowing me to investigate further the political setting in which he lived and worked. A series of interviews with Tobias and Fidelis Nhapi helped to identify the transition from Mzingeli's Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union to the Salisbury City Youth League in the 1950s, and then the shift to the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress. Interviews with former trade union leaders Reuben

Jamela and Shato Nyakauru were also fundamental in shaping the story of the conflict between trade unions and nationalist parties.

Once I returned to the United States, I had hoped to investigate some of the claims made in the interviews, particularly Jamela's story of support from the United States for his trade union congress in the early 1960s. I began with the U.S. State Department files in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., which contain detailed accounts by the American diplomats in Salisbury concerning the struggle between Jamela and the ZAPU leadership over the control of the trade unions. I then investigated the issue further at the George Meany Memorial Archives of the AFL-CIO. The papers in the AFL-CIO archives relating to Jamela and Southern Rhodesia, along with the careful work already done by Yvette Richards in her excellent book *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), allowed me to further verify Jamela's account of events. The most surprising evidence I found in the National Archives, and in the AFL-CIO archives, however, was the extent to which ZAPU and later ZANU leaders courted financial assistance from the United States government at the same time they were publicly lambasting Jamela as an "imperialist stooge." Much of the narrative reconstruction of events is based on reading accounts in the African press during this period. The U.S. Library of Congress holds many of the original volumes of these papers in its African Newspaper Collection, while the interlibrary loan departments of Georgetown and Kent State Universities were very helpful in obtaining microfilm versions of the *Central African Daily News* for the 1960s up to the point it was banned in 1964.



Map 1. Southern Rhodesia and region, showing major roads, ca. 1960.



Map 2. Harare and Highfield, 1960.

Introduction

The primary goal of this book is to provide an account of a democratic tradition that was present in the African townships of what was Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, and to show how that tradition was cut off by the political violence associated with the leadership struggles and factionalism of the early 1960s. The setting for this story is primarily centered in two places, Harare township (now Mbare) and Highfield township, although the narrative also follows nationalist leaders to London, Dar es Salaam, and Washington, D.C. Zimbabwean scholars, writers, and journalists, have written fondly of their own memories of the cultural and political life in these former African townships of Salisbury.¹ Others have written about the creative music scene produced from the mixing of cultures and working-class life in the townships, helping to show the unique culture and style produced in Harare and Highfield over the years.² In addition, historians have written extensively on the labor, gender, and social history of Salisbury's African townships and have developed a strong historiography of the townships' political and social life.

Given the rich body of literature on township life that already exists, the intent of this book is to concentrate on a specific aspect of township history: the development of a democratic political tradition created in the 1940s that survived into the 1950s. The first half of the book concentrates on the political career of Charles Mzingeli and the creation of a democratic politics primarily defined by his cosmopolitan and international connections to larger political currents and movements, including the Pan-African politics of Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in South Africa, then the British Labour Party and the Fabian Socialists, and also certain borrowings from the American political tradition. The nature of township life, including the high prevalence of male migrants and a high turnover rate for workers, made the establishment of an urban political tradition extremely difficult for Mzingeli.

The urban democratic tradition established in the 1940s and 1950s was to fall victim to a particular style of political violence that developed out of the peculiarities of township life and the demands of a more radical nationalist politics by the 1960s. Just as townships were designed to contain and control first workers and later entire African urban populations, the township design and structure eventually lent itself to internal control by political factions using harassment, intimidation, and violence to instill discipline and mobilize support. The argument made in this book, however, is that the decisions to use political violence were not predetermined by the spatial structure of township life. The goal of this book is to show how particular leaders and political parties made decisions to accept political violence as they sought to attain political control of township populations. Obtaining such control became an integral part of nationalist strategy in the 1960s as large sums of international financial support were resting on the claims of competing groups to greater grass-roots support. Violence became the most “efficient” short-term means of creating support, even if its long-term effects were disastrous.

Some readers may question the emphasis on the urban roots of Zimbabwe’s political violence. After all, there was plenty of violence in the rural areas during the 1960s and there was certainly a very strong nationalist sentiment and organization in the rural areas during these years. As Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger argue in *Violence and Memory*, “Although the ideas of urban-based movements were critically important, to build a rural movement, local leaders had to establish a rural social base and redefine issues of local concern within the frame of a nationalist project.”³ Additionally, the violence in the urban townships in the early 1960s was often eclipsed by the violence in rural areas where sabotage was used against state institutions and those African civil servants working for them. As important as it is to keep in mind the rural nature of much of Zimbabwean nationalism, it was, however, the urban areas that played the pivotal role in defining who would lead and how leaders would interact with their supporters. Apart from the physical presence of the nationalist leadership living in Harare and Highfield, the influences of urban cultures had already helped to establish a political style and, more importantly, urban institutions necessary for addressing urban issues and sensibilities in nationalist politics.

Similar to the European and American experiences, African townships were meeting places for Africans of different classes and cultures where a history of political and economic protests had allowed intellectuals to mobilize township residents over local issues and concerns. Urban life offered the possibility to seek out greater democratic participation for a broad cross-section of African men and women. Also, in contrast to most rural nationalisms, the urban areas produced a more “Jacobin” tradition of radical democracy in

which demands for African rights and citizenship were also demands to challenge the inequalities of the prevailing economic system.⁴ Although this definition of a radical democracy comes from European history, it serves well as a definition of the urban democratic tradition developed as a major theme in this book. As Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger suggest, an ideal approach to the history of nationalism in this period would combine these various rural and urban nationalisms in order to convey the interaction of diverse trajectories into one history. Such a synthesis is outside the scope of this work, but hopefully my concentration on the urban story can contribute to the eventual understanding of the broader history of these diverse nationalisms.

In order to develop the argument of this book over seven linear and chronological chapters, there are three main questions linked throughout: (1) how definitions and representations of gender differences become part of nationalist rhetoric as well as part of the mobilization and uses of violence; (2) how the changing relationship of leaders and led was reflected in the transformation of the public sphere; and (3) why the logic of “sellout” politics would eventually become the central political strategy used to confront real and potential rivals within the nationalist movement.

Gender Relations and Nationalism

The extensive literature on gender and nationalism generally defines nationalism as a male domain established to create a notion of the state and citizenship modeled after the patriarchal family. As Cynthia Enloe succinctly puts it: “Nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope.”⁵ Scholarship on Zimbabwean nationalism and gender has worked from a similar notion of this relationship.⁶ To drive this analysis further, however, it is important to explore how different categories of women and men experienced, contributed, and at times avoided nationalist projects.⁷ Teresa Barnes’s work has most significantly moved beyond narrative treatments of either an oversimplified category of “African women” or an exaggerated notion of nationalist unity.⁸ Women in the urban areas, according to Barnes, had a separate social and political world in which they carefully and selectively chose which battles to fight—oftentimes sacrificing their own status in order to help mediate the relationship between African men and their children within the highly stratified urban social setting.⁹ So while many women did in fact participate in both township and nationalist politics, their presence does not in itself provide evidence of a more inclusive or progressive politics from the standpoint of women’s demands or a more egalitarian vision of a future community or nation.

Barnes’s work also confronts the difficult issue of how to connect African women’s involvement in social welfare organizations with the creation of a

democratic political tradition. Tsuneo Yoshikuni summarized this problem, suggesting that “self-help and protest may appear to have little in common, but, nevertheless, it is worth asking whether protest somehow presupposes self-help, if not vice versa.”¹⁰ An element of the earlier democratic tradition in the townships was therefore the result of the work of women such as Mai Musodzi, Mai Sondayi, and Ms. Eleanor Solomon, all of whom were community leaders in their own right. In the late 1950s, the new generation of women who became prominent leaders took on very visible roles as community organizers, teachers, and nurses, as well as in less visible roles as community leaders and organizers of street-level support. Instead of looking for the moment when women were “permitted” to participate in politics, it may be more realistic to see how community politicians tried their best to incorporate the issues most important to the existing female leadership in the community. At the same time, by the mid-1950s, the shift from a more reciprocal nationalism to a more elitist conception of nationalism dramatically affected gender relations both in the nationalist movement and between leaders and led.

Masculinity and Violence

Since the early 1990s, the study of masculinity has become more prominent in Southern African studies. William Beinhardt’s 1992 article in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* opened up the discussion by questioning the foundations of historical works about men and violence in southern Africa.¹¹ He criticized the functionalist explanations that linked young men to violence. The dominant Marxist historiography of the 1970s and 1980s had developed a reasoning in which the exploitative mining industry in southern Africa, in particular the *chibaro* system developed in Rhodesia, became the basis for organizing the control of men in southern Africa’s capitalist economy. The use of residential hostels for men, the compound system, and the urban township were all portrayed as having had the same goal and same results. These confined spaces produced a highly regulated and violent exploitation of mostly young African male migrants who in turn expressed their experience of capitalist exploitation and alienation through their own cultures of violence. Beinhardt questioned the explanatory power of this argument, and many excellent studies have since shown the complexities of the impact of this system on masculinity in southern Africa.¹² Still, in a manner similar to the early works on African working-class history and women’s history, there has been a tendency to allow the concept of “masculinity” to do “too much.”¹³ It cannot explain everything or even anything outside of a broader contextualization of other social, cultural, and political factors. In this book, for example, I concentrate on the ways masculinity is inscribed in the rhetoric and strategies of nationalist leaders, while avoiding explanations

of events based on notions of masculinity among the nonelite men who acted out much of the violence in the townships. In the process, there is a danger of overstating the importance of masculinity as the *cause* of violence, as if the men caught up in a violent labor system that existed in southern Africa were naturally prone to violence. In order to remain on firm analytical ground and to avoid such sweeping generalizations, I prefer to examine the context of decisions made by leaders to deploy violence or to avoid using it. In this context, appeals to “acting like a man,” as part of nationalist rhetoric, need to be examined as part of an ongoing debate over gender relations within the townships that had developed over a number of years. Such an analysis, however, cannot in itself exonerate leaders from having acted in support of violence, particularly against women, through their lack of criticisms or at times acceptance of violence against women as part of party discipline. No matter how seductive the social psychological explanations of masculinity may be, violence is not something to be rationalized through, or contained within, notions of masculinity.

As in the case of ethnicity, the role of masculinity in nationalist mobilization required active intervention by leaders who operationalized a sort of hypermasculinity to serve their own goals. Many of the leaders themselves were from the educated, elite urban classes who had very little in common with the men who fought in the streets, but they used a language of nation and manliness that appealed to those who carried out violence against the state and against potential rivals. Understanding this process is an essential part of challenging nationalist historiography and its preoccupation, at least in Zimbabwe, with “liberation war heroes.” Such a narrow glorification of past violence as part and parcel of national history only serves to justify current violence in defense of the state or ruling party.

The Changing Nature of the Public Sphere: The “African Voice” and Radical Nationalist Rhetoric

One way of conceptualizing the history of nationalism in Zimbabwe is to picture a political space that was becoming increasingly viable for democratic participation during the 1940s and 1950s but was then, by the 1960s, abruptly closed down. Benedict Anderson’s influential conceptualization of colonial nationalism is useful for visualizing the historical contours of Zimbabwean nationalist politics. Anderson’s argument about the nature of anticolonial nationalism emphasizes the leading role of a group of bilingual intellectuals demanding recognition of their own rights as global citizens, as well as increased rights for the majority of less educated colonial subjects.¹⁴ Anderson’s formulation in turn recalls Habermas’s idea that the “public sphere” helps to emphasize the role of public intellectuals in exerting their influence, notably through newspapers, to openly criticize political

leadership, and above all to express a new discourse of public supervision—making public what had previously been the private “behind closed doors” relations between capitalists and politicians. The editorial staff of newspapers therefore became essential to a liberal definition of the “public sphere,” as editors became the voice of “public opinion.”¹⁵

This notion of the public sphere is a helpful way of understanding the very active African press that developed after 1940 under the editorial guidance of important African intellectuals across the period covered in this book. Public intellectuals such as B. J. Mnyanda, Jasper Savanhu, Michael Hove, Lawrence Vambe, and Nathan Shamuyarira all made use of the African press to challenge white minority rule while at the same time advocating for reforms within African society. There were, however, important shifts in the arguments used by such men between the 1940s and 1960s. While intellectuals in the earlier period, such as Mzingeli, Savanhu, and Mnyanda, had utilized the rhetoric of imperial citizenship and workers rights to gain state recognition for better living conditions, or better wages through collective bargaining, the new nationalists of the 1960s claimed rights based on notions of African sovereignty and historical solidarity that were not necessarily a direct response to the immediate needs of urban township residents.

This radical rhetoric helped to legitimate nationalist politicians’ claims to political power without requiring the new generation of leaders to prove their leadership to any particular constituency. It had a millennialist quality, promising a better future for those willing both to sacrifice materially and, increasingly, to risk their own lives in order to succeed. As with other millennialist movements, when the date of promised independence passed, the followers were told to increase their sacrifices and, more importantly, directed to wage a battle against nonbelievers, the “collaborators” and the “sellouts.” African politicians who had previously proven their capacity to lead effectively within existing township institutions were often characterized as sellouts for their continued cooperation with state institutions or multiracial organizations.

The earlier rhetorical strategies of African politicians and nationalists can be roughly divided into two camps before 1960. The more elite politicians utilized an older argument that went back to the liberal tradition of the Cape Colony in South Africa, namely that education and wealth were more important than race as markers of “the civilized.” The Southern Rhodesian Bantu (later “African”) Congress—referred to generally as “the Congress”—represents this elite position up until the 1950s. These men defended their elite position, particularly their educational and property qualifications for voting, against the majority of Africans who could not qualify based on education or wealth. Charles Mzingeli and his colleagues in township political organizations and trade unions represented a second position. Unlike the mission-educated elite in the Bantu Congress, these men saw themselves as the representatives of township residents and were quite clear in their

criticisms of racial segregation and economic exploitation as the root cause of the problems facing township residents. For Mzingeli in particular, the struggle involved increasing educational and employment opportunities so that a greater number of urban residents might, at some point, even in another generation, achieve acceptance as citizens within Southern Rhodesia. Mzingeli not only took on white politicians in his quest for political recognition; he also struggled with the leaders of the African Congress, whom he viewed as too elite and too far removed from township life to represent adequately the interests of urban Africans.

By the mid-1950s, the Salisbury City Youth League (SCYL) and the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC), organizations led by young professionals faced with racial discrimination in white-collar occupations, began demanding immediate educational rights and employment opportunities for the majority of Africans. No longer satisfied with incremental opportunities, this new generation of leaders challenged the notion that full citizenship required educational or property qualifications. After 1947, in particular, when the Southern Rhodesian government had increased urban segregation, it became clearer that elite status for qualified Africans was not in itself a guarantee of economic and social equality. In one of the SRANC's first publications an editorial states this antielitist populism: "Nationalism does not recognize the privilege of the lucky few who claim that they are here to rule perpetually, disregarding the legitimate aspirations of others."¹⁶ It is worth quoting the more detailed definition of "African Nationalism" presented by the author:

Nationalism, therefore is substantially that a nation is composed of a number of human beings who reciprocally regard one another as a part of the whole. Secondly, this implies that the concept of oneness of a people must be consistent with freedom and liberty for all.

Freedoms are inspirable [*sic*] from rights because, otherwise, their realization is hedged about with uncertainty which destroy their quality. If for instance the utterance of an opinion is followed by persecution, we shall cease to express our minds.

This means ceasing to be a citizen and the state for us ceases to have any meaning. For if we cannot embody our experience in its will, it ceases, to be a state we are required to owe allegiance.

Nothing therefore is likely to maintain a condition of liberty as the knowledge that the invasion of rights will result in protest, and, if need be, resistance.¹⁷

Declarations such as these, which were common in the 1950s, displayed a new level of defiance and an optimism that defiance combined with democratic notions of rights and freedoms would produce the desired liberation of the majority from the tyranny of the minority. The following chapters will describe how short lived this optimism would be, as the political violence of the early 1960s destroyed the very basis of democratic participation that

such rights and principles require. The battles over leadership within the nationalist movement and the practices used to silence and discredit opponents seriously challenged any sense of “freedom and liberty for all.” At the same time, the reciprocal relationships among individuals and between leaders and led were to break under the strain of conflict, making the democratic claims of African nationalism very difficult to imagine, let alone achieve.

From the mid-1950s on, the public sphere became less about competing visions of a political future and more about immediate confrontations between a more consciously “authentic” nationalism and those African politicians who still held out—at least until 1962—for a possibility of a peaceful negotiated transfer of power to majority rule. In order to fully appreciate the dilemmas political violence created for more democratic notions of nationalism, it is important to understand the achievements made prior to the 1960s to link demands for citizenship and rights within a more democratic political tradition. The impossibility of a compromised future between white politicians and African nationalists was not something that came all at once or in a decisive manner; it was a realization that came slowly and in stages.

The Violent Logic of “Sellout” Politics

The argument put forth in this book is that nationalist rhetoric after 1957 represented a shift away from local demands for citizenship and toward a nationalist position more in keeping with the anticolonial struggles going on elsewhere in the world during that period.¹⁸ As the southern African region became part of a larger revolutionary epoch, nationalist leaders had a new vocabulary to use in their claims to the nation. Younger leaders used this rhetoric as ammunition against the older generation or those their same age with more experience in trade union and political organizations, mobilizing support against the “sellout” or, by the early 1960s, the “imperialist stooge.” Once the Southern Rhodesian state started on the course of banning political parties and arresting leaders, political critique of the “sellout” became an even more effective way for leaders to assert their radical credentials and deal with potential rivals. A necessary challenge faced in writing this book is, therefore, to re-create the political narrative of these years to show just how much the strategy of sellout politics weakened the effectiveness of the nationalist movement and, along the way, sapped the strength of the movement in many key areas, in particular, strong trade union leadership and effectiveness.

The use of radical rhetoric and accusations of sellout politics to destroy more progressive democratic elements in a revolutionary setting has been a major theme in the history of modern nationalism. Robespierre’s “terror” during the French Revolution, the rise of fascism in Europe, Stalin’s