***Published in Women’s History Review 25.4 (2016) pp. 551-562***

**From Settlers to Strays: White Zimbabwean Women, Historical Memory and Belonging in the Diaspora c.1980-2010.**

**Kate Law**

*Based on interviews with thirty women, this article examines white attitudes to the coming of Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980. As is detailed, many of the interviewees constructed problematic versions of the past, foregrounding what Annie E. Coombes has termed the ‘deceptively benign’ nature of settler colonialism. Through an examination of the historical context in which the interviews were conducted, the article comments on the ways in which the interviewees mobilised certain postcolonial narratives regarding Zimbabwe’s recent past to validate their own opinions. By examining the voices of some of Southern Africa’s ‘orphans of empire’ it engages with existing literatures on white women and empire, settler colonialism and diaspora studies.*

Kate Law is Lecturer in Gender Studies at the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa. Her first book *Gendering the Settler State: White Women, Race, Liberalism and Empire in Colonial Rhodesia, 1950-1980* (New York: Routledge) is due for publication in 2016. For all enquiries contact lawkv@ufs.ac.za

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

‘Many a trip continues long after movement in time and space have ceased’.

John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*.

As historical anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler wrote nearly ten years ago,

‘remembering and reminders of past colonial relations of power have emerged as fundamental to a range of postcolonial intellectual and political agendas that make the recording, rewriting and eliciting of colonial memories so pertinent and charged’.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In the case of postcolonial Zimbabwe, the past has been mobilised to support the 34-year rule of Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) through ‘patriotic history’.[[2]](#endnote-2) In this formulation, an ultra-nationalistic narrative abounds in which history is strategically deployed to underscore the validity of ZANU-PF rule. In this rendering, claims to citizenship and belonging are intertwined with historical narratives characterised by an increasingly narrow definition of who can lay claim to being Zimbabwean. This project has marginalised and excluded voices that do not speak to the themes of ‘patriotic history’. Yet alongside ZANU-PF’s view of ‘patriotic history’ and the past, there exists an expatriate perspective. Attempting to explore a different set of experiences that offer alternative histories, this article examines the voices of thirty white women, the overwhelming majority of whom lived in the diaspora when interviewed in 2009. Analogous to state-sponsored rhetoric, the interviews reveal that these women also constructed highly problematic readings of the past which act as apologias for colonialism in order to justify the settler presence in colonial Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In what follows, this article examines the historical context in which the testimonies were produced, whilst highlighting the dissonance between theory and application in the interview process. It then provides a brief overview of colonial Zimbabwe’s history, as a prism through which the interview responses can be understood.[[4]](#endnote-4) Foregrounding the voices of the interviewees, the main body of the article consists of empirical data, centring on issues surrounding decolonisation, history and contemporary Zimbabwean politics. The article concludes by noting the wider implications of this research, not least for scholars working on settler colonialism and diasporan studies.

Place and Past in the Interview Process

The research for this article was conducted in 2009, during the height of what has come to be known as the ‘Crisis in Zimbabwe’. Although its roots stretch back further than the turn of the millennium, it took on a particular intensity in the early 2000s.[[5]](#endnote-5) A state-sponsored project that used violence and intimidation as its *modus operandi*, ZANU-PF began systematically destroying political opposition even as it was redrawing the boundaries of Zimbabwean citizenship. While the country’s ensuing economic devastation affected all sectors of society, issues over land ownership had a particular impact on the white community. Conceptualised as an integral part of the third *Chimurenga* (revolutionary struggle), in July 2000 ZANU-PF announced its ‘Fast Track Land Reform Program’ (FTLRP), which sanctioned the widespread dispossession of white farmers from their land.[[6]](#endnote-6) Following on from this, in 2001 the Citizenship Act was passed. This decreed that suffrage would be denied to those who could not prove that their parents had been born in the country. It is evident that this state driven alienation of white Zimbabweans had great bearing on the testimonies produced, with interviewees deftly mobilising partial historical and contemporary narratives in order to frame their own life stories and legitimate the expression of problematic opinions.

More so perhaps than any other type of research material, the use of interview testimonies necessitates reflexivity. In particular, my positionality as a woman with an Anglo-Saxon sounding name gave me access to a range of people that an interviewer from a different racial background may not have been privy to. While I was an ‘outsider’ in the sense that I am not Zimbabwean, I was also an ‘insider’ in terms of gender.[[7]](#endnote-7) In the eyes of my interviewees, my gender and whiteness formed the basis for a shared set of cultural characteristics, which helped facilitate the interviews. As Rory Pilossof notes in his work on Zimbabwe’s white farming community: ‘some interviewees were so “comfortable” that they had no qualms about using the racist or prejudiced language… which would not have found expression in other, less congenial circumstances’.[[8]](#endnote-8) While this research was heavily influenced by feminist research methodologies which aim to negate the hierarchy of the interview process, I was frequently surprised by how ‘open’ the women I interviewed were with expressing outright racism.[[9]](#endnote-9) If anything, this candour made it difficult to represent sensitively the participants’ viewpoints without reductively cleaving to caricature. Consequently I am aware of how much my own ‘voice’ appears in this article.

While circumstances in Zimbabwe framed the interview responses, they also had a bearing on the type of research I was able to conduct. The research for this article was conducted as part of my doctoral thesis, which began in 2008. My *alma mater* was unwilling to support financially a research trip into a country considered politically volatile and potentially dangerous, thus no interviews were conducted in Zimbabwe. Consequently I advertised for interviewees’ through the website www.rhodesia.com which has potentially skewed responses from those who live in the diaspora. [[10]](#endnote-10) Sometimes known as the ‘when-we’s’ for their romanticisation of all things Rhodesian, the possible political motivations of the women involved must be noted. For Tony King, ‘many Rhodesians on the Internet are stuck in an idealistic time warp about the “old days” in the mother country... [with] the web now serving to maintain and develop a sense of Rhodesian identity which has no mother country to look to’.[[11]](#endnote-11) Furthermore, King also notes that ‘the white diaspora from Rhodesia numbered some 150,000 between 1976, when large-scale emigration started, and 1982, when the numbers leaving trailed off. In total, over half the white population left in the space of six years, so the Rhodesian presence is much greater overseas than in Zimbabwe’.[[12]](#endnote-12) While acknowledging the impact that time and place had in generating these testimonies it would be illogical to question their validity because of the problematic details they contain. Yet it is also important to recognize that these responses bear powerful witness to certain types of colonial nostalgia that are not necessarily representative of broader Rhodesian/Zimbabwean opinions. As is detailed, the testimonies of these women, as historical actors, were deeply rooted in colonial discourses that associated white minority governance with modernity, progress and civilization. In order to fully understand this viewpoint it is essential to reflect on the history of the country, to understand the intransigence of settler colonialism in a continent that was rapidly decolonizing.

Swimming Against the Tide: Colonial Rhodesia c.1965-1980

Decolonization intensified in the 1960s as the ‘Wind of Change’ swept the continent in earnest.[[13]](#endnote-13) By February 1965, 28 countries had achieved independence. One place, however, that the wind appeared to circumvent was central southern Africa. Following the dissolution in the 1960s of the Central African Federation (CAF), of which Southern Rhodesia was the senior partner, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, latterly Zambia and Malawi, achieved independence from Britain.[[14]](#endnote-14) In an attempt to stop the coming of majority rule, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence from Britain (UDI) to preserve the interests of its 277,000 white settlers.[[15]](#endnote-15) While Britain’s retreat from empire was often influenced by a mix of economic and international pressures and the forces of anti-colonial nationalism, Rhodesia was the first instance in which Britain came up against white minority rule.

While British Prime Minister Harold Wilson famously declared that it would only be a matter of weeks before the rogue state was bought to terms, the settler colony defied economic sanctions, a diplomatic freeze and the waging of increasingly effective guerrilla warfare for 14 years.[[16]](#endnote-16) Despite this, the eventual coming of Zimbabwean independence in April 1980 did not come through the barrel of the gun. Rather, independence was achieved through negotiation at the Lancaster House conference.[[17]](#endnote-17) Held over a three-month period, eventually reaching resolution in December 1979, the conference’s main aims were to draft a post-independence constitution; to broker a ceasefire; and to ensure that white interests would be represented in the new national order.[[18]](#endnote-18) Consequently the negotiated settlement, for at least the first ten years of independence, forced the new government to compromise its ambitions. As the terms of Lancaster House were to be in force for ten years, white Rhodesians, now *de facto* Zimbabweans, enjoyed a certain degree of economic, social and political protection.

To employ Karin Alexander’s terminology, however, white Zimbabweans thought of themselves as ‘orphans of empire’, feeling betrayed by Britain and afraid of the prospect of black majority rule.[[19]](#endnote-19) Much of this anxiety rested on whites’ often (very limited) understanding of the nature of the post-colonial transition, and centered on the worry that a black government would pursue policies based on retribution. As scholar Josephine Fisher notes, ‘the white community appears to have been mentally unprepared – caught on the wrong foot as it were – at the end of the war’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Celebrating the country’s independence on 30 April 1980 at Harare Stadium where official celebrations took place, Mugabe stressed the need for reconciliation amongst the white and black population. He proclaimed that ‘if yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interest, loyalty, rights and duties as myself’.[[21]](#endnote-21) Warned by Mozambique’s president Samora Machel of the destabilising effects of white flight, Mugabe thus tried to allay white fears and anxieties. It is this historical backdrop that informs the interview responses below.

‘A load of bullshit’: Life after 1980.

Reflecting on the official governmental rhetoric, Angela suggested that ‘the speech [Mugabe’s] gave a lot of terrified white people a glimmer of hope. It was an intelligent and well thought out speech’.[[22]](#endnote-22) Despite this, thousands of white Rhodesians ‘deserted Rhodesia for material and personal security and the future of their children, or were too “Rhodesian” to tolerate the transformation of their country into Zimbabwe’.[[23]](#endnote-23) Indeed, stating it bluntly, Christina thought that the official policy of reconciliation was ‘a load of bullshit’.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Following the transition to independence, Zimbabwe was theoretically following the two-stage theory of democratic revolution.[[25]](#endnote-25) While there has been much debate about the sincerity of ZANU-PF’s desire to create a socialist state, the new government prioritised the extension of service delivery and job creation, in an attempt to ensure that the economy did not remain solely in white hands.[[26]](#endnote-26) Apart from the apparent fear of the unknown, many white women were aggrieved at attempts to de-racialise the economy. Louise decided to leave Rhodesia, ‘when my husband was told that he would be losing his job after the election so that it could be handed to an ex-terrorist purely because the ex-terrorists had to be kept happy with nice jobs’.[[27]](#endnote-27) Despite some attempts to indigenise the economy, many white Zimbabweans had their public sector jobs guaranteed in ‘sunset clauses’. Often black Zimbabweans were appointed alongside, not instead of, whites. While economic concerns played a part in motivating white ‘fears’, many women also equated Africanisation with a fall in ‘standards’. As Martha noted, ‘we knew that we had made the right decision [to leave] when our children came home from school complaining that they could not understand the teacher, a black man who had been transferred into the school as part of the “integration” process, for appeasement’s sake’.[[28]](#endnote-28) Furthermore Karen left Zimbabwe in 1983 because ‘the bottom dropped out of the schooling’.[[29]](#endnote-29) While Hilda did give ‘the new regime time to settle’ she eventually emigrated because of the ‘deterioration in the schooling and health care system’.[[30]](#endnote-30) Despite the fact that Mugabe preached a policy of reconciliation, Christina suggested that ‘it was crystal clear we were NOT wanted as the “bad whities”. There was no reconciliation, nor attempt to make us feel we had a future in Zim’.[[31]](#endnote-31) As David Goldberg argues, and as is evidenced in the interview process, racist discourses move around, with words such as ‘standards’ being proxies for tropes which are no longer acceptable to articulate.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Reflecting on the interview process as a whole, questions that centred on the nature of Zimbabwean independence were often answered in the greatest depth, and frequently with a passion; indeed, it was often at this stage in the process that the most *revealing*, intimate answers can be found. A common feature which emerges from many interviews, is the belief that the post-2000 ‘crisis’, was ‘inevitable’ right from independence. Thus this section of the article now turns to explore the teleological interpretation that many white women employed to understand the nature of post-colonial Zimbabwe. What emerges is a picture of a community which is unable and indeed unwilling to separate its thoughts and feelings about the advent of independence from the recent ‘crisis’.

A large proportion of interviewees claimed that from April 1980 they ‘knew’ that Zimbabwe would ‘fail’ as an independent state; consequently as Stoler notes, the memories elicited were ‘clearly shaped by dominant historical narratives’.[[33]](#endnote-33) According to Diana, ‘we had always said that we would not stay in Rhodesia under Robert Mugabe’s rule, as he was a terrorist thug… once he gained power… we stuck to our decision… we did not trust him and history has proved that we were correct’.[[34]](#endnote-34) Similarly, Helen ‘felt like a CLAIRVOYANT, I knew that it would never work... I just knew, deep down that this was a disaster in the making… that it was only a matter of time before it all collapsed and the honeymoon and the euphoria would be over, to me the writing was on the wall’.[[35]](#endnote-35) Yet despite these very deterministic views about the transition to majority rule, some women, such as Robyn, remained ‘open minded and positive for the future of the country’;[[36]](#endnote-36) indeed Agnes was ‘most surprised at how life carried on’.[[37]](#endnote-37) Furthermore, according to Jessica, ‘the transition to majority rule was smooth and without incident – it did not affect me or my family and we coped in a mature and accepting manner’.[[38]](#endnote-38)

While some women reserved judgement on the initial transition to independence, and were cautiously optimistic about living in Zimbabwe, for the most part what emerges is a picture of a fearful community who were unable, and perhaps more importantly unwilling, to remain in Zimbabwe and meaningfully engage with the post-colonial state apparatus. Therefore this teleological appreciation of the transition to majority rule demonstrates a simplistic, highly selective reading of the past. One such way this selective reading of the past further manifests itself, is through understandings of the events surrounding the first significant episode of state sponsored violence, the *Gukurahundi* of 1983-1986.[[39]](#endnote-39)

During the period of *Gukurahundi*, around 20,000 people were killed by the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, Mugabe’s self-styled personal militia.[[40]](#endnote-40) As scholar Shari Eppel notes, ‘as they murdered and destroyed, 5 Brigade told victims that they were being punished because they were Ndebele – that all Ndebele supported Zapu, [Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union] and all Zapu supporters were dissidents’.[[41]](#endnote-41) Consequently *Gukurahundi* is a decisive moment in Zimbabwean history in which the ‘real’ authoritarian nature of Mugabe’s regime first revealed itself. Echoing this idea, many white women also argued that *Gukurahundi* was proof that Mugabe was an evil tyrant determined to bring Zimbabwe to its knees. While there may be more than a grain of truth in such assessments, what is most revealing about white attitudes towards the nature of post-colonial politics is the very one-dimensional, detached way that many interviewees discussed the events of *Gukurahundi*. For Erica, ‘the black Matabele people in the south were systematically murdered off by Mugabe’s Shona people… outsiders never really understand that the black people of Africa are totally tribal’.[[42]](#endnote-42) Erica’s ‘unguarded insight’ thus reveals deeply-seated beliefs about history, rooted in a particular colonial fantasy.[[43]](#endnote-43)

For Christina the ‘wholesale slaughter of the Matabele’ was one of a ‘legion’ of negatives that followed independence.[[44]](#endnote-44) Therefore, by seeing *Gukurahundi* as something that was essentially a ‘tribal’ issue, many whites exculpated themselves from failing to challenge the state for the widespread human rights abuses it was committing. Therefore, as Rory Pilossof cogently notes, the events of *Gukurahundi* revealed that whites ‘would not raise issues of a political nature with the government as long as their interests were, on the whole, maintained’.[[45]](#endnote-45)

‘I could not call myself a Zimbabwean’: History and Identity since 2000

Many of the women I interviewed used post-2000 events to frame their answers about identity and belonging, with several women describing themselves as ‘Rhodesian’ despite the fact that at the time of interview, Rhodesia had not physically existed for 29 years. Women who identified themselves as Rhodesian were keen to emphasise their ‘pioneer’ credentials, in an attempt to legitimise their use of the term, and references to the idea that their ancestors ‘carved out a country in a complete wilderness’ were commonplace.[[46]](#endnote-46) Additionally, the desire to assert a Rhodesian rather than Zimbabwean identity was also informed by a desire to alert me, as the interviewer, to the fact that Zimbabwe had ‘failed’ as another post-colonial African state, in an attempt to legitimise the articulation of archaic, racist tropes. For instance, Martha is ‘a Rhodesian and proud to be so called. I could not call myself a Zimbabwean – Zimbabwe ruins is exactly what Zimbabwe has become – a ruin of a country, thanks to nepotism, corruption, greed and barbarism’.[[47]](#endnote-47) Similarly Karen is ‘definitely a Rhodesian. Zimbabwe was and is a ruin’.[[48]](#endnote-48) While Helen is ‘a white living in Zimbabwe’ she also notes that ‘I will always in my heart be a Rhodesian.’ However, drawing on another identity, Helen notes that she is a ‘white African.’ Indeed many white women were happy to identify themselves as white Africans, in an attempt to legitimise their claim to ‘belong’ within the continent and also as a way of reconnecting with the past.

It is however, interesting to note that the majority of interviewees who described themselves as Rhodesian live in the diaspora, perhaps further evidence of the unreconstructed understandings of Zimbabwean independence. It also reflects the ambiguous sense of belonging these women feel in their adopted countries. Furthermore while reconciliation opened up ‘a dialogic space’,[[49]](#endnote-49) by and large ‘the white response was not encouraging and as Alexander observes and the pace of becoming Zimbabwean [was] slow’.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Alongside these voices, however, a ‘critical’ element does emerge. Lucy argued that ‘if they’re still calling themselves Rhodesian they need to move on’.[[51]](#endnote-51) Ann asserted ‘I call myself a Zimbabwean. Once we made the painful move to the States… I realized just how impotent we white Rhodesians were, how wrong we had been, and that I was actually a Zimbabwean through and through’.[[52]](#endnote-52) For Mary:

I do not believe any white person still in Zimbabwe would consider themselves “Rhodesian” – we have all moved on. The fools who do call themselves “Rhodesians” are the ones who left either before independence or shortly afterwards. They are the ones who live in a world that just doesn’t, and shouldn’t, exist anymore. We have a name for them “the Whenwe’s” – because every sentence starts with “When we...” And I know most of them are more than chuffed to be able to say “told you so” because of the current situation in Zim – maybe if they had had the balls to stick around and try and make the country work it would have had a better chance. I have no time for anyone who calls himself a Rhodesian.[[53]](#endnote-53)

While women such as Lucy and Mary have actively embraced their Zimbabwean identity they are in the minority. What emerges from the interview process is a picture of a community that struggled to accept or rejected a Zimbabwean identity, rather preferring to remain as unreconstructed Rhodesians. Echoing the work of Alexander it appears that many women interviewed ‘felt alienated and unwelcome despite having largely abdicated from actively engaging in the project of nation building’.[[54]](#endnote-54)

From Patriots to Ex-Patriots: Understandings of Place and Settler Colonialism.

Through analysing the interview data, it is clear that issues regarding place and exile feature strongly in many of the testimonies. Although 87% of the women interviewed voluntarily left the country shortly before or after independence, their sense of forced dispossession, particularly in light of events in the country since 2000, is tangible. This section of the article thus analyses the life stories and diasporic trajectories of these women, in an attempt to understand how these narratives fit into broader narratives of settler colonialism and diaspora studies.

In his recent overview of the nature of settler colonial studies, Lorenzo Veracini points to three broad phases in the history of the conceptIn the first instance he details how settler colonialism was initially deemed to be unrelated to studies of imperialism and empire. He then moves to analyse how it became deeply twinned with a particularly intransigent form of colonialism in an era of increasing decolonisation. Thirdly he suggests that in the late 1970s, settler colonialism was seen as the antithesis of theories of underdevelopment as it provided high standards of material living. In recent years, however, it seems that another phase is developing which seeks to de-homogenise white settler societies, emphasising their plurality. One of the writers arguably at the forefront of this latest development is Will Jackson, in his work on colonial Kenya.[[55]](#endnote-55) Through analysing the lives of Kenya’s white ‘insane’, Jackson launches a serious challenge to what has almost become a caricature of the white settler as a progenitor of imperial prestige. Rather, for Jackson, settler colonialism also produced a less salubrious archetype; the poor white, who transgressed colonial norms.

Through the presentation of the testimonies above, this article also attempts to broaden and reconfigure the historiography. This article has begun the long overdue task of attempting to ‘gender’ settler colonial studies, offering modifications to existing androcentric frameworks. As Jane Haggis has argued: ‘the task of identifying European women’s various participations with colonialism and imperialism is a vital dimension of our effort to build a comprehensive history of our past’.[[56]](#endnote-56) No more so than in these interviews do the past and the present interact. As has been demonstrated, the interviewees were keen to foreground what writer Annie E. Coombes has termed the ‘deceptively benign’ facets of settler colonialism, which in turn mask the discriminatory and violent nature of colonial encounters.[[57]](#endnote-57) For the most part, these women had internalised the discourses of settler colonialism, which reinforced their belief in a white ‘civilising’ presence in the African continent that stood for ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’. The exodus of white settlers following the transition to independence therefore led to moral decay, giving way to corruption, greed and barbarism that settlers always *knew* a black majority-rule government would bring. If the women did allow themselves a brief moment of reflexivity, it was to position themselves behind the metropolitan coloniser. As Lorenzo Veracini perceptively argues, ‘the settler is not sovereign, it is argued; he is not responsible for colonialism and its excesses’.[[58]](#endnote-58) While the exile of these women was in the most part voluntary, ‘finding somewhere to live was not a straightforward matter of “going home”’.[[59]](#endnote-59) The experience of living in the diaspora created enough temporal space for some women to reappraise the structures of colonial society. However, the vast majority chose to defend the racialised hierarchies upon which colonial society was built; harking back to the ‘good old days’ of the colonial period.

As Katja Uuishakala’s ethnographic research demonstrates, while Rhodesia ceased to be a political entity in 1980, it remained ‘imagined’ and culturally produced to many Zimbabweans who had left the country. As this article has argued, it is crucially important to understand the history of colonial white Rhodesians to situate their trajectories and opinions in the post-colonial period. For Uuishakala, ‘the background of prolonged war, its cocoon like insulation and the consequent determined sense of togetherness…is one of the key points to understanding the intensity with which the Rhodesians have stuck together in exile.[[60]](#endnote-60)’ By the very nature of their ‘exile’ these Zimbabweans now constitute part of a broader diaspora. While the Zimbabwean diaspora might be most readily associated with patterns of globalisation and what Emmanuel Akyeampong has termed ‘the exigencies of global capitalism’,[[61]](#endnote-61) there is room within the conceptual boundaries of the term to accommodate, however awkwardly, the voices and experiences of white Rhodesians, now *de facto* Zimbabweans.[[62]](#endnote-62)

Conclusions

This article has responded to a critique made by gender and empire historians that only the voices of politically ‘acceptable’ (to the historian) women are recovered, by exploring the multiple voices and to use Kathleen M. Blee’s term, ‘complicated attitudes’, of over thirty white women.[[63]](#endnote-63) While there are limitations to these interviews, not least the dissonance between their voices and my subsequent representation of them, and the fact that the women here do not speak for *all* white women, this article has foregrounded their voices as historical actors in Zimbabwe’s past. As this article has demonstrated, it is clear that many women employed a highly selective reading of their life in colonial Zimbabwe, often employing a teleological appreciation of history. Furthermore through this particular reading of the past, many women claimed to ‘know’ that following the election of Robert Mugabe in April 1980 it was ‘inevitable’ that the country would experience the deepening crisis in which it has recently found itself. While for many interviewees the events surrounding episodes such as *Gukurahundi* were definitive evidence of Mugabe’s tyranny, many women described it as a ‘tribal’ issue (i.e. not concerning whites), failing to see the ramifications it had for Zimbabwean society as a whole.

Through focusing on the voices of white women, this article has challenged the privileging and ‘mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation’.[[64]](#endnote-64) In doing so it is hoped that this article will serve as a springboard for other scholars to map the diasporic trajectories of white Zimbabweans in other geographic locations in the postcolonial period. Furthermore, through analysing the voices of white women, this article has pointed to the contested and complex notions of white belonging in post-colonial Africa. Despite dominant state discourses of exclusion, as is evidenced throughout the interview process, much of the white community abdicated from engaging with the post-colonial state and refocusing their own senses of identity with the new world order, clinging to the nostalgia of an indefensible past.

1. Ann Laura Stoler with Karen Strassler (2006) Memory work in Java: a cautionary tale, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Eds) *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge), p. 284. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For further detail on Patriotic History see Blessing-Miles Tendi (2010) *Making History in Mugabe’s Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* (Oxford: Peter Lang). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The country has been known by four different names: Southern Rhodesia, Rhodesia, Rhodesia-Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe. Unless otherwise stated for the colonial period the name Rhodesia will be used. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The notion of a “linear” past is of course problematic. While this article does not suggest one normative past, an overview of colonial Zimbabwe’s history is provided to help orient the reader. It has been the writer’s intention to do this with sensitivity. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For an excellent overview of the ‘crisis’ argument see: Brian Raftopoulos (2003) The State in Crisis: Authoritarian Nationalism, Selective Citizenship and Distortion of Democracy in Zimbabwe, in Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos and Stig Jensen (Eds) *Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Harare: Weaver Press), pp. 217-42. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. According to David McDermott Hughes, by 2002 over 4,000 white families had been forced off the land. See (2010) *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See for instance Margaret Strobel (2006) Doing Oral History as an Outsider, in Perks and Thomson (Eds) *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge), pp. 43-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Rory Pilossof, (2009) The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: White Farming Voices in Zimbabwe and Their Narration of the Recent Past, c.1970-2004, Ph.D. thesis (University of Sheffield), p. 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For more on feminist approaches to interviewing see Majorie DeVault, (1990) Talking and Listening from Women’s Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis, *Social Problems*,37, pp. 96-116. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. After placing an advert on the website, I was inundated by requests, as 95 women made contact with me. In order to work within the parameters of the ethical approval procedures at my university, which included a project invite and signed consent form, the figure of those wanting to be interviewed dropped to 35. While this is still a good sample size, I found that the geographic spread of the women would have made it impossible for me to interview them all in person. Rather I opted to send email questions and follow up with particular participants (in the end 30). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Tony King, (2003) Rhodesians in Hyperspace: The Maintenance of a National and Cultural Identity, in Karim H. Karim (Ed.) *The Media of Diaspora* (London: Routledge), p. 187.   [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid.,p. 177. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See L. J. Butler and Sarah Stockwell (Eds) (2013) *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Initially promoted as a way to satisfy both nascent African nationalism and white settler interests, the obduracy of Federation was laid bare in the context of a rapidly decolonising continent. For further details see Ronald Hyam, (1987) The Geopolitical Origins of the Central African Federation: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1948-1953, *The Historical Journal*,30.1, pp. 145-172; Forthcoming: Andrew Cohen, (2015) *The Politics and Economics of Decolonization in Africa: The Failed Experiment of the Central African Federation* (London: I. B Tauris). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Population figures taken from Josiah Brownell (2010) *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race* (London: I. B. Tauris), p. 3. For more on the move to UDI see for instance Frank Clements (1969) *Rhodesia: The Course to Collision* (London: Pall Mall); Ian Hancock (1984) *White Liberals, Moderates and Radicals in Rhodesia 1953-1980* (London: Croom Helm); Donal Lowry (1997) “Shame upon ‘Little England’ while ‘Greater England’ stands!” Southern Rhodesia and the Imperial Idea, in Andrea Bosco and Alex May (Eds), *The Roundtable, The Empire/Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy* (London: Lothian Foundation), pp. 305-42; Martin Meredith (1979) *The Past is Another Country: Rhodesia 1890-1979* (London: Andre Deutsch). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. By far the most compelling account of white Rhodesian society in this period is provided by Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock (1993) in *Rhodesians Never Die, The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia c.1970-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Chaired by British Foreign Secretary Lord Peter Carrington, the conference was attended by Ian Smith and Abel Muzorewa as leaders of the newly minted Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, as well as Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo as leaders of the Patriotic Front (PF). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. One particular issue that almost saw the breakdown of the conference centred on land redistribution. In an attempt to secure the position of whites in the post-colonial dispensation it was agreed that land could only be sold on a willing buyer – willing seller basis and thus there would be no mass expropriation of white owned land. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Karin Alexander, (2004) Orphans of the Empire: An Analysis of Elements of White Identity and Ideology Construction in Zimbabwe, in Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage (Eds) *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, (Harare: Weaver Press), pp. 193-212. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Josephine. L Fisher (2010) *Pioneers, Settlers, Aliens, Exiles The Decolonisation of White Identity in Zimbabwe* (Canberra: Australian National University Press), p. 174. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Robert Mugabe’s Reconciliation Speech, 30 April 1980, http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/demgg/070221rm.asp?sector=OPIN&year=2007&range\_start=31 [accessed 2 November 2011]. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Interview with Angela. All interviews were conducted in Autumn 2009, see appendix 1 for detail on interviewees. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die,* p. 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Interview with Christina. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. For more on the two-stage theory of democratic revolution see Andre Astrow, (1983) *Zimbabwe: A Revolution that lost its Way?* (London: Zed). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See for instance Kate Law (2009) Episodes of Ambiguity: Socialism in Zimbabwe 1980-1985 *Australasian Review of African Studies*,30, pp. 49-63. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Interview with Louise. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Interview with Martha. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Interview with Karen. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Interview with Hilda. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Interview with Christina. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. David Goldberg (1993) *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (London: Wiley). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Stoler with Strassler, ‘Memory work in Java’, p. 290. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Interview with Diana. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Interview with Helen. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Interview with Robyn. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Interview with Agnes. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Interview with Jessica. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Taken from the Shona, *Gukurahundi* refers to ‘the first rain of summer that washes away the chaff left from the previous season’. See Shari Eppel (2004) “Gukurahundi” The Need for Truth and Reparation, in Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage (Eds), *Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation), pp. 43-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Ian Phimister, (2008) ‘The Making and Meanings of the Massacres in Matabeleland’, *Development Dialogue*,50, p. 197. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Eppel, ‘Gukurahundi’, p. 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Interview with Erica. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Neil Roos (2011) Work Colonies and South African Historiography, *Social History*, 36 (1), p.69. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Interview with Christina. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Rory Pilossof, ‘The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: White Farming Voices’, p. 91. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Interview with Erica. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Interview with Martha. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Interview with Karen. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Fisher, *Pioneers*,p.52. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid.,p.240. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Interview with Lucy. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Interview with Martha. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Interview with Mary. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Alexander, (2004) Orphans of the Empire, p.194. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Will Jackson (2013) *Madness and Marginality: The Lives of Kenya’s White Insane* (Manchester: Manchester University Press). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Jane Haggis (1998) White Women and Colonialism: Towards a non-Recuperative History, in Clare Midgley (Ed.), *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 45-79. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Annie E. Coombes (2006) Memory and History in Settler Colonialism, in Annie E. Coombes *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa* (Manchester, Manchester University Press), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Lorenzo Veracini (2010) *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Pamela Shurmer-Smith (2011) Once the Dust of Africa is in your Blood: Tacking Northern Rhodesia’s White Diaspora, *ACME: An International E-journal for Critical Geographies,* 10 (1), p. 84. Those who did join the diaspora mostly clustered in South Africa and Australia. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Katja Uuishakala (2008) Memory Meanders: Place, Home and Commemoration in an Ex- Rhodesian Diaspora Community, Ph.D. thesis, p. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Emmanuel Akyeampong (2000) Africans in the Diaspora: The Diaspora and Africa, *African Affairs*, 99 (395), p. 186. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. An edited collection by Joann McGregor and Ranka Primorac recently appeared on the subject of Zimbabwe’s diaspora. While all the other chapters were based on sustained empirical evidence, the one chapter on white experiences, by Primorac, relied on memoirs and autobiographies. It seems that the authors missed a real chance to unpack, explain and nuance white experiences in the diaspora, rather choosing to treat white and black experiences as two distinct entities. See (2010) *Zimbabwe’s New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*  (Oxford: Berghan). [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Kathleen M. Blee, (2006) Evidence, Empathy and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan, in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (Eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge), pp. 322-331. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Tina Campt and Deborah A Thomas (2008) Gendering Diaspora: Transnational Feminism, Diaspora and its Hegemonies, *Feminist Review*,90, p. 2.

    Appendix 1: Interviewee Details

    Based on the results of 30 interviews, in particular this article draws on the testimonies of 15 women. All names have been changed.

    Susan left school in 1960 and commenced studies in Cape Town, training to be a Commercial Teacher. She returned to Rhodesia in early 1964 and worked as a secondary school teacher, marrying shortly thereafter. Susan emigrated to Australia in 1981.

    Louise was born in 1946 and worked in administration. She left Rhodesia in early 1980.

    1. Martha was born in South Africa in 1940, emigrating to Rhodesia in 1945. Following her schooling she worked briefly for the BBC in Britain, returning to Rhodesia then marrying. Alongside her husband, she farmed in the Selukwe (Shurugwi) area, and moved to the United States in the early 1980s.

    Karen was born in September 1941, studied a secretarial course and married in 1962. She permanently left Rhodesia in 1983, relocating to South Africa.

    Hilda was born in Britain in 1954 and emigrated to Rhodesia with her family in 1956. She left Rhodesia in the late 1970s, moving to South Africa.

    Christina was born in 1961 and went to university in South Africa; she emigrated there in 1982.

    Diana was born in 1947 and from 1965-1975 she worked full time in Rhodesia’s tax office, she left Zimbabwe in September 1980.

    Helen was born in 1956 and at the time of interview still lived in Zimbabwe.

    Robyn trained as a theatre nurse, married in September 1980 and emigrated to Britain in 1989.

    Agnes left Zimbabwe in 1991.

    Jessica was born in July 1948; she married in 1969, becoming divorced in 1978. She re-married in 1979 and left Zimbabwe shortly after independence.

    Erica completed a degree at University College Rhodesia and worked in accounting throughout all her career. She emigrated to South Africa in 2000.

    Angela trained as an architect in South Africa between 1975-1985, she has her own business and at the time of interview practiced in Harare.

    Lucy was born in 1950; she completed a degree at University College Rhodesia, and worked as a librarian. She left Rhodesia in January 1980, emigrating to Britain.

    Mary was born in 1964 and remained in Zimbabwe until the early 2000s. At the time of interview she was hoping to return to Zimbabwe. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)