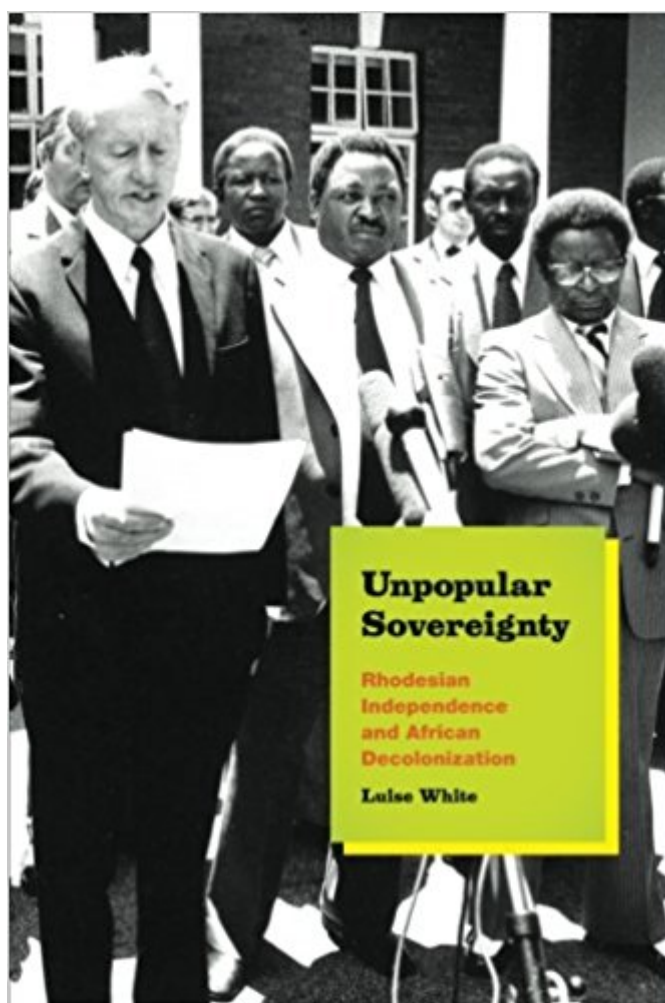


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Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence And African Decolonization



Synopsis

In 1965 the white minority government of Rhodesia (after 1980 Zimbabwe) issued a unilateral declaration of independence from Britain, rather than negotiate a transition to majority rule. In doing so, Rhodesia became the exception, if not anathema, to the policies and practices of the end of empire. In *Unpopular Sovereignty*, Luise White shows that the exception that was Rhodesian independence did not, in fact, make the state that different from new nations elsewhere in Africa: indeed, this history of Rhodesian political practices reveals some of the commonalities of mid-twentieth-century thinking about place and race and how much government should link the two. White locates Rhodesia's independence in the era of decolonization in Africa, a time of great intellectual ferment in ideas about race, citizenship, and freedom. She shows that racists and reactionaries were just as concerned with questions of sovereignty and legitimacy as African nationalists were and took special care to design voter qualifications that could preserve their version of legal statecraft. Examining how the Rhodesian state managed its own governance and electoral politics, she casts an oblique and revealing light by which to rethink the narratives of decolonization.

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"This is a thorough, comprehensive, and well-researched book that will be the essential starting point for the reconsideration of Zimbabwe's recent history and historiography. A sharply acute and very readable study that resets the foundations for the understanding of Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, it sets the events surrounding

and following UDI in the context of African decolonisation and in their international context. With fascinating accounts of the constitutional machinations and the regime of economic sanctions and its failures, it is unrivalled as a rich resource for the period based on a very wide range of sources. (Martin Chanock, author of *The Making of South African Legal Culture 1902-1936*) “White Unpopular Sovereignty is a groundbreaking contribution to studies of decolonization. She places the seemingly anomalous history of Rhodesian independence within the decolonization of the rest of Africa. This is combined with a reanimation of the history of the high politics of late colonialism by incisive accounts of the effects of various franchise commissions and experiments at constitution writing. The result is one of the most decisive challenges to linear versions of decolonization: of Rhodesia-into-Zimbabwe, to be sure, but also, more broadly, of colonies into nation-states. Written with characteristic brilliance, verve, and wit, *Unpopular Sovereignty* will become indispensable reading for scholars of colonialism and of the postcolonial world. (Mrinalini Sinha author of *Specters of Mother India*) “Set in the late-colonial context of decolonization in Africa, this masterful book demonstrates that sovereignty does not flow in a linear fashion and according to preordained coordinates; and, that its predicates and foundations – political autonomy and self-government, on the one hand, and political identity and subjectivity, on the other – abide time and space in unpredictable ways. Relating the arguments to contemporary Zimbabwe, *White* demonstrates once and for all that the nature of sovereign power or associated political processes and outcomes are better understood through the manners in which shifting terrains of global, regional, and local alliances shaped the interests and the terms of the quest for power for protagonists – white minorities and so-called native populations alike. This is a truly impressive intervention in the historiography (and theory) of decolonization in Zimbabwe that holds significant insights for accounts of postcolonial sovereignty everywhere. Simply wonderful and a joy to read. (Siba Ntzioula Grovogui, author of *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*)

Luise White is professor of history at the University of Florida. She is the author of four books, including *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, also published by the University of Chicago Press. [View all posts by Luise White](#)

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