

# Press and Politics: A Look at the Role Played by Zambia in Zimbabwe's Fight for Independence as Perceived by Zimbabwean Newspaper, The Sunday Mail

Nyasha Mapuwei<sup>1</sup> Painos Moyo<sup>1</sup> Orpah Onwards Chivivi<sup>2</sup>  
1. Media and Society Studies, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe  
2. Business Management, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

## Abstract

Zambia claimed its independence at a time when Zimbabwe was far away from claiming its independence from British rule. The first Zambian president, Kenneth Kaunda, was in good relationship with Zimbabwean black politicians fighting to topple the Ian Smith regime that ruled Zimbabwe under the colonial name Rhodesia. Naturally Zimbabwean black politicians looked up to Zambia's Kaunda and further north to the influential Julius Nyerere of Tanzania for help in this tough struggle. The Zimbabwean liberation leaders could not look down to South Africa for help as South Africa was deep in apartheid rule and in liaison with the Smith regime. The Zimbabwean leaders however, made it difficult for helpers such as Kaunda by having differences among themselves which resulted in two powerful political and liberation movements in the form of PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF led by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe respectively. History books have suggested that Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda assisted the liberation struggle in its entirety but recent newspaper publication especially in the influential newspaper The Sunday Mail suggest a biased assistance to the Zimbabwean struggles as witnessed by eye witness accounts being chronicled in the newspaper. It is from this background that the researchers aimed at closely analysing the role played by the nation of Zambia and the leadership of President Kenneth Kaunda in the liberation struggle by Zimbabweans. The researchers also aim at analyzing the importance and reason for such coverage at this point in time for Zimbabweans. Research methods used include archival research, interviews, hermeneutics of interpretation and content analysis among others. The researchers found out that The Sunday Mail newspaper acknowledged the important role played by Zambia in the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe to the extent that Zambia sacrificed both human and capital resources in their endeavour. The researchers also found out that Zimbabwean liberation history cannot be complete without mention of the strategic political role played by Zambia. Although the newspaper seems to be blaming the Zambian government led by Kaunda of siding with the Nkomo and his PF-ZAPU political party and not with ZANU-PF and its leader Robert Mugabe who eventually became the first Zimbabwean black leader after Independence, the role of Zambia towards Zimbabwean liberation remains intact and irreplaceable.

**Keywords:** Kaunda, Zambia, Liberation war, Zimbabwe, Mugabe, Nkomo.

## 1.0 Introduction

Zimbabweans, according to Bhebhe, N. and Ranger, T. (1995) had by 1963 answered positively to the wave of change that was sweeping the continent of Africa since the 1950 with more black countries demanding Independence. Zimbabwe, being a member of the famed Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was left in the cold when the other two countries were granted Independence by Britain. The white minority population ruling Zimbabwe at that time took a different course of action by Declaration Unilateral Independence from Britain so as to avoid Britain from granting the country Independence based on equality. Blacks in Zimbabwe realized the only real chance for self rule was no longer through negotiation but by the barrel of a gun. They therefore needed friends to launch their guerrilla war and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, together with other friendly regional leaders such as Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Samora Machel (Mozambique), Muammar Gaddafi (Libya) and Olusogun Obasanjo (Nigeria) all offered to assist. However, because of the proximity and early Independence, Zambia accommodated Zimbabwean guerrilla recruits and offered training bases. This paper therefore is an assessment of the role played by Zambia in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle as seen through The Sunday Mail newspaper's chronology of the war by former freedom fighters.

## 2.0 Background and context

Zimbabwe, which is officially known as the Republic of Zimbabwe is a land locked country found between the Limpopo River in the south and the Zambezi River in the north. It shares borders with South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia. It gain independence in 1980 after a bitter war struggle spanning over 14 years and sucked in other Southern African countries and even countries in Europe and China. According to the United State of America records by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of 2013 the United Kingdom annexed Southern Rhodesia from the British South Africa Company in 1923. A 1961 constitution was formulated that favored whites in power. In 1965 the government led by the hardline Ian Douglas Smith unilaterally declared its

independence, but the United Kingdom did not recognize the act and demanded more complete voting rights for the black African majority in the country. United Nations sanctions and a guerrilla uprising finally led to free elections in 1980 and independence the same year. According to Bhebhe, N. and Ranger, T. (1995) Robert Gabriel Mugabe, the nation's first prime minister, became president in 1987 and has comprehensively dominated the country's political system since independence. It is however the period between the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 and the proclamation of Independence in 1980 that this paper seeks to unpack the role played by Zambia in assisting the guerrilla war for independence in Zimbabwe.

## **2.1 Zambia**

Zambia, which is officially known as the Republic of Zambia, just like its southern neighbor Zimbabwe, is also a land locked country sharing borders with Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Zambia became an official British protectorate in 1888 and was run by Cecil John Rhodes's British South Africa Company through governors appointed by the British government (Rotberg, R.I. 1967). It began to be known as Northern Rhodesia in 1911. In 1951, the country merged with Zimbabwe and Malawi to become known as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland until it became independent in 1964. Kenneth Kaunda became the founding president and ruled until 1991 when he was defeated by Frederick Chiluba in a general election. It is however during the period of Kaunda's rule that other Southern African states agitated for independence and Zimbabwe got a lot of support from its northern neighbor. The paper however seeks to unpack the nature of the support as seen by eye witness accounts as being published in the government-owned Sunday Mail newspaper of Zimbabwe.

## **2.3 Zimbabwean media**

Zimbabwe has always had some of the oldest media institutions in Africa starting with the Masvingo provincial newspaper The Nugget in 1888 and the influential Cape Argus of South Africa owned Mashonaland and Zambesian Times which were hand-written in 1890 (Saunders, R. 1999). Newspapers in Zimbabwe then began to spread throughout the newly establish British colony named Southern Rhodesia by establishing media organizations throughout the colony. The newspapers were known for supporting official government positions (Rusike, E 1991). In 1980 after independence the Argus Company sold the Zimbabwean entity to the Zimbabwean government using a US\$5 million loan assistance from the Nigerian government. The new black majority government created the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) to manage the public media on its behalf. It is from this background that this paper seeks to analyze the timing and reasons for chronicling the events of the war of liberation in the Sunday mail, 34 year after independence. The paper focuses on the stories that are discussing the role of Zambia during this war as narrated by eye witnesses in the Sunday mail.

## **2.4 Research Objectives**

The major objective of this paper is to critically find out the role played by the Independent Zambian black majority government in assisting fellow nondependent blacks living and fighting a minority white government. The idea here is to explain the shenanigans or the goings on behind the scenes within the relationships between Kenneth Kaunda's Zambian government and the two guerilla fighting political parties in Zimbabwe namely Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF and Joshua Nkomo's PF ZAPU. This paper also seek to examine the nature of support given to these parties by Zambia as well as the suspicion, disrespect, doubts and mistrust between Zambia and the Zimbabwean political parties. This paper sets out to make specific evaluation of the quality of the war coverage by the Sunday Mail. This paper also seeks to discuss the thematic areas covered by the newspaper regarding ZANU – PF, PF- ZAPU, Rhodesian Front and other active political parties during the war of liberation period.

## **3.0 Research methodology**

Although content analysis dominated the research methodology, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection and analysis were also applied. A non-probability sample of The Sunday Mail newspaper was used as the key contributor of stories under study. This approach was most appropriate in this study because the research was not meant to generalize the study but rather to investigate the variable relationships. It was also appropriate because the researcher used available samples for convenience. Available data was in form of newspaper columns and articles published in the Sunday Mail. After the data was collected, the articles were analyzed using content analysis method. According to Kerlinger 1986, (in Dominick 2006), content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for purposes of measuring variables. In the case of this study, newspaper articles were studied for their theme, message and tone with regard to Zambian role during the liberation war in Zimbabwe. However, this paper attempts to study the messages in the articles and editorials with the sole intention of explaining role played by Zambia in the fight for the Zimbabwean independence.

#### **4.0 Research Discussion**

Much as the role of Zambia and its founding father Kenneth Kaunda were never in question when it comes to Zimbabwean independence, further scrutiny shows that the northern parts of Zimbabwe believe Zambia could have done things differently and better than they did while the southern parts of the country believe Zambia did its best. It is also clear from the findings that cadres interviewed from the ZANU-PF camp showed some indifference while cadres from the PF – ZAPU camp happily recounted how Zambia allowed its territory to be used for training and carrying out war escapades. The founders of ZANU-PF seem to doubt the sincerity of Kenneth Kaunda in selecting to support ZAPU instead of ZANU. ZANU PF cadres are bitter and still believe Zambia and especially its leader then Kenneth Kaunda had a hand in the death of ZANU leader, the influential Dare ReChimurenga chairman Hebert Chitepo in 1975 in a car bomb in Lusaka which led to the arrest of the core of ZANU leaders.

The findings however, show a big sense of optimism in relations between the ZANU-PF led Zimbabwe government and Zambia, especially now that Zambia's current president Michael Sata of the Patriotic Front shares the same vision and goals with those of ZANU-Pf in Zimbabwe. Focus of analysis was on the type of questions asked by the interviewer and the answer given by the former guerrillas, the headlines given, words selection and story angles that recounted the years during the liberation war. The overall opinions in the newspaper articles as well as the specific emphasis of the stories were also studied. Interpretations on the implications of these articles on the relationship between Zimbabwe and Zambia were also probed. These findings are summarized below according to their thematic underpinnings.

#### **4.1 Zambia: A Friend of Southern Africa Independence struggles**

The Sunday Mail war chronicles and face to face interviews with guerrillas show that Zambia did a lot to liberate the southern African region and events were described from as far as 1960 and even earlier. On 03 February 1960, the then British prime minister Harold MacMillan proclaimed that Africa was facing an unprecedented "winds of Change" following his African tour that culminated into the famed Cape town speech, in which he predicted that it was just a matter of time before Africa begins to liberate itself. Zambia itself became one of the first Southern African countries, after Malawi, to gain independence but unlike Malawi's Kamuzu Banda who did not want to be involved in other countries' independence struggles, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda took it upon himself to help emancipate Africa and realize political independence.

Kaunda inherited a country in difficulty because first and foremost, Zambia is a landlocked country and it relied heavily on neighbours for trade and yet all its neighbours except Malawi were fighting for their independence. The two quickest routes to the sea saw Zimbabwe fighting the Rhodesia rulers and further south the mighty South African army of apartheid era. To the east, Zambia found Samora Machel's FRELIMO party fight the cruel Portuguese leaders in Mozambique and yet to the north, the Angolan liberation movements were also fighting the Portuguese for independence. Kaunda had no choice but to help in each of these liberation movements for the sake of Zambia itself. Tanzania became a natural ally as Julius Nyerere also helped these countries for the same cause.

According to Robert, A. (1976), Kaunda's real difficulties were in helping guerrillas and at the same time remaining safe from the white governments around him. This led to some of the guerrillas to label Kaunda as having played double standards with the white regimes as well as with the guerrillas. The guerrillas wanted Kaunda to face the whites head on and shown by their recounts and fell short of labeling Zambia's actions as betrayal.

#### **4.2 Zambia accommodates fleeing nationalists**

As agitations mount in Zimbabwe and the nationalists were being arrested on a daily basis, those still to be arrested went out of the country, first in search of education but eventually settling in Zambia for political purposes. A number of high profile ZANU and ZAPU nationalists worked in Zambia but at the same time were encouraged by the warm welcome at the hands of the Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda. According to Mubako, S. (1976) the ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU headquarters were both in Zambia with the fearsome Dare ReChimurenga headed by Chairman Herbert Chitepo actually having offices and a guerrilla training camp in Lusaka with the full knowledge of the Zambian president. It should therefore be said that it was during the long stay of these educated nationalists in Zambia that the idea of waging war from Zambia materialized as accounted by Kumbirai Kangai, one of the members of then then supreme body Dare ReChimurenga. Kangai said:

"I was received by John Mataure, who was the chief representative in Tanzania. After working there for some time, I was then called by Chairman Chitepo. He said you should come to Zambia. So I went to Zambia. While in Zambia the debate then began about sending comrades to the front. We said we should not

send people to the front; five, 10 people and they get killed. We said we should now embark on guerilla warfare. I had read Mao Tse-tung; I had read Fidel Castro and studied the Korean struggle so I was speaking in theoretical terms. We debated this for hours. While in Zambia, Rugare Gumbo joined me. So of the vast numbers of people in the United States when I was recruiting people to come back home, five people initially agreed to come back, but at the last minute three of them refused and so only me and Gumbo came back. Later the party agreed that we should embark on guerilla warfare.”

In the end, Zambia became home to Zimbabweans seeking employment as well as those seeking political endeavors. In most cases, those seeking employment exactly the same people seeking a base to launch the liberation war in Zimbabwe.

#### 4.3 Support from other countries

Although Zambia accommodated the Zimbabwean guerrillas, according to Tamarkin, M. (1990) other countries supported the guerrillas financially to the extent that the relationship between the Zimbabwean guerrillas and the Zambian government could have been term “business as usual” as shown by their willingness to purchase farming areas that were used as training camps.

Said one of the nationalists encamped in Zambia during that time:

“When I came in, we had very limited support. Then our support grew. We got the support of Sweden. They gave us money and we bought a farm in Zambia where we were training our comrades. We got weapons from China, Yugoslavia and other countries. When we started the North-East Rhodesia (now Mashonaland Central) campaign, that's when we really started getting lots of support.”

From the list of countries that offered support, it was clear that the Zambian government did not worry much about the support from Scandinavian countries such as Sweden as well as the eastern bloc of China, Russia and Yugoslavia. This helped Zambia immensely since the financial burden was being carried out but some of the developed economies hence the Zambian economy was less burdened.

On top of financial support, the fact that the Zambian government could not equip the guerrillas meant that they had to look up to other countries and Russia and China were known for supplying war equipment. Russia preferred PF-ZAPU and the equipment was state of the art while ZANU-PF got war equipment from China. The guerrillas also got training from China and Russia while other countries such as Romania, North Korea, Yugoslavia, Libya and Tanzania play a big role in training and equipping the Zimbabwean guerrillas.

Zambia however, according to Hall, R. (1964) remained the one most effective country to launch the war from because of its proximity and friendliness of its president. All these guerrillas, no matter where they met, would therefore meet in Zambia first before launching the war into Zimbabwe, hence the key role played by Zambia as a transit and rear base for guerrillas until the 1875 friction that saw ZANU-PF moving its headquarters to the newly independent Mozambique while ZAPU remained in Zambia and Botswana.

#### 4.4 Friction with Kaunda

Like in any other friendship, the friendship between the Zimbabwean guerrillas and the Zambian government became sour in 1975 when the ZANU chairman Herbert Chitepo was killed in a car bomb in Lusaka. Most of the chronologies published so far indicate that the Zimbabwean comrades from the ZANU camp were so bitter about the way the Zambian government handled Chitepo's death to the extent that they believed to a certain extent that the Zambian government itself had a hand in the killing of the war master mind and intelligent leader.

Said Simbi Mubako, one of the ZANU-PF based in Zambia at the time of the war as quoted in the Sunday Mail:

“They killed Chitepo and the Zambian government said Dare reChimurenga, high command, you are all arrested. Why? Because you have killed your chairman. This Dare reChimurenga had become a thorn in the flesh for the colonial regime. They put up leaflets saying if anyone assists and we arrest any member of Dare, we will give you US\$10 000. They finally came to the conclusion that it is Chitepo who is the brains behind the whole thing. They did everything possible. Have you seen the book, See You in November. What's in that book is exactly what they did. They planned here at Park Lane, here in Harare. They said we must kill Chitepo, if we kill him, we would have killed the evolution, unfortunately for them this was not the case. They almost killed the revolution because when Chitepo was killed, members of Dare were arrested.”

The Sunday Mail published stories seem to show a high level of bitterness when it comes to this incident given that the ZANU guerrillas were being persecuted by the Zambian government for killing their chairman at a time

when they felt having been robbed of their icon and think tank of the war.

The bitterness could be seen in Kumbirai Kangai's account of the day's event when Herbert Chitepo died in that car bomb explosion. He said

"We asked each other what we were supposed to do. We decided to go to President Kaunda's office to tell him what had happened. We drove there and sat for hours. He didn't attend to us. He never talked to us. So we went back to the house. A day later we were all arrested by the Zambian government. We spent 22 months in prison. ZANU party, we were not in good books with the Zambian authorities"

As a result, the ZANU element of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle began to distrust Kaunda and the Zambian government, especially given that no members of the high command from ZAPU were arrested for anything. In fact, Kaunda began to support the ZAPU wing of the liberation struggle at the expense of the ZANU wing.

#### 4.5 Financial difficulties

According to Martin, M. (2005) the help given to liberation movements by the Zambia government had to be limited especially on the financial aspect as Zambia, being a land locked country had difficulties in accessing the sea ports for arms shipping and other transit necessities for the liberation movements. The Organisation of African Unity created the Liberation Committee but it was not long before it ran into financial problems.

According to Rortberg, R.I. (1967):

"It was not long after formation that the Liberation Committee ran into financial trouble. Member states of the OAU had been willing to talk the talk when it came to the liberation of Africa, but the trouble came when it was time for them to put their hands in their pockets. By August 1965, nearly half the member states had not contributed their assessed contribution of £ 14,000."

As a result, the kind of support that Zambia could give to Zimbabwean liberation fighters became limited because Zambia alone could not shoulder all the financial support that they needed. Realizing that support was minimal, Kaunda responded by coming up with his own policy in which he would choose to support only one liberation movement in Zimbabwe instead of both. He chose Joshua Nkomo's PF-ZAPU instead of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF. The latter was livid with this choice but they could do nothing except to move bases to Samora Machel of Mozambique who had gained independence in 1975. Thus although other countries reneged from their Liberation Committee funding commitments, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique remained up to date with their finances.

#### 4.6 Strain on Zambia's International relations

Although Zambia had a good relationship with other countries within organizations such as the United Nations, OAU and the Commonwealth, these relationships began to wane for both political and financial reasons. For examples, according to Tarmanik, M. (1992), relations with the Commonwealth were good at independence; Kaunda enjoyed good relations with the Secretariat in London, especially with its Secretary General, Arnold Smith. Smith supported the Commonwealth, describing it as a tool that 'can help spread independence' in Africa. It was however on the issue of Rhodesia that proved to be a strain on Zambia and its outside friends. Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda would pressure the Commonwealth and other international organizations to take more action against Rhodesia Prime Minister Ian Smith and his apartheid partners in South Africa. However, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Romania remained resolute in their help to Zambian support on the Zimbabwean cause. According to Laverty, A. (2007) Sweden would always consult with the Zambian government when providing the much needed humanitarian assistance to liberation movements in Zambia. This is where the Zambian government was blamed by the ZANU-PF leadership as Kaunda would always recommend that most of the financial and humanitarian support be channeled to Joshua Nkomo's PF-ZAPU instead of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF.

Kumbiarai Kangai, who was instrumental throughout the war of liberation on 12 November 2012, was quoted in the Sunday Mail liberation publication as having said that:

"Aaahhh, there is a lot that I can say, suffice to say we were not in good books with the Zambian government. The revolutionary path we had taken was irreversible and we said we will all die to liberate our country. They (the enemy) killed Chitepo and the Zambian government said Dare reChimurenga, high command, you are all arrested. Why? Because you have killed your chairman."

Kaunda's frustration and growing animosity towards ZANU was no secret. Kaunda blamed virtually every member of ZANU's High Command over the death of Chitepo and dismissed the suggested Rhodesian or South African involvement. Kaunda also expelled all ZANU men from Zambia, and threw his weight behind ZAPU. Thus the ZANU-PF camp of the liberation movements based in Zambia were convinced that the Zambian government was instrumental in the lack of financial and material support given to other liberation

movements such as PF-ZAPU by other countries especially the financially stable Russia whose heavy artillery and modern army equipment ZANU-PF could only dream of.

#### 4.7 Rhodesian Attacks into Zambia

Zambia suffered at the hands of Rhodesian military attacks into its territory which according to Laverty, A. (2007) were to two pronged approach in which firstly the targeted the bases and camps of Zimbabwean guerrillas as well as strategic economic targets such as the railway lines, bridges and roads making it difficult for Zambia to operate properly. By its own admission, the Zimbabwean government actually went on to build what they called a Liberation Centre in Zambia in commemoration to the damage done by the Rhodesian forces on Zambian soil.

Guerrilla rebellions at each other would also cost Zambia's efforts such as a rebellion at a SWAPO camp in western Zambia which according to Laverty, A. (2007) had led to dozens of arrests both at the Mboroma camp and in Lusaka. The two camps, which had more than 1,000 guerrilla soldiers, had also been attracting attacks by South African forces. Kaunda also responded to Rhodesian incursions into Zambia by introducing curfews and blackouts in major cities. Zambian forces on the border were in frequent gun battles with Rhodesian forces, but successes were limited.

According to Robert, A. (1976) after several high profile attacks on ZAPU bases in Zambia, the sheer size and scale of the training camp network now in existence in Zambia was coming apparent.

Laverty, A (2007) wrote:

In 1978 the Rhodesians launched Operation Gatling, a coordinated attack on the largest bases in Zambia, such as Freedom Camp just north of Lusaka and Mkushi Camp an hour north-east of Lusaka. Over 400 people are believed to have been killed in the combined attacks which saw Rhodesian forces brought in by helicopter and razing both camps to the ground.

It is understood that Zambia would complained that the camps in Zambia were consisted of refugees although photographic evidence showed a large military presence and arms dumps at a number of camps. It was also understood that Nkomo's ZAPU, using Russia artillery, had been having some success in shooting down Rhodesian aircraft in Rhodesia, and for that reason Zambians were questioning why Kaunda did not offer the same form of defence against these attacks. Kaunda did not want to retaliate for fear of worse attacks from Rhodesia.

#### 5 Conclusion

Zambia's role to the liberation movements in Zimbabwe remains unquestionable but the situation Zambian independence was born into made it difficult for Zambia to take a clear cut position with regards to liberation movements in Southern Africa at a time when all the other surrounding countries except Malawi were liberated. Kaunda and Zambia's role can therefore be said to be the champion of pan-African approaches as the Zambian founding father remained resolute and committed to total eradication of all form of colonialism especially in Southern Africa. But he remained with a dent when it comes to his personal choices for military support as on two occasions he supported the losing party. In Zimbabwe he chose Nkomo ahead of Mugabe and was proved wrong on Independence in 1980. He had also lost the plot in Angola where he had supported Jonas Savimbi of UNITA party but the MPLA triumphed at independence. As he faced a lot of military attacks from the superior Rhodesian forces and the South African forces, Kaunda then began to engage the two colonial powers without the knowledge of the guerrilla movements he backed and as a result, when the guerrilla movements got wind of the discussion behind the scenes, could not wholly trust Kaunda. As a result, the war chronicles as published by the Sunday Mail newspaper in Zimbabwe beginning in 2012 up to date seem to dispel the myth that Kaunda wholly brought Zimbabwean independence. In fact, the chronicles stop short of labeling Kaunda a traitor as indicated by Kumbiarai Kangai who believed Kaunda could have done better in his choices during his time.

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