

The Contributions of Joshua Nkomo to the Liberation of Zimbabwe

Eliakim M. Sibanda

INTRODUCTION

Joshua Nkomo was one of the dominant forces in the anti-colonial independence movements in colonial Zimbabwe between 1949 and 1980, and then a major political figure in independent Zimbabwe from 1980 until his death in 1999. Nkomo's fame survived his electoral defeat in 1980. Even those hostile to him conceded he possessed great abilities and a streak of genius, as evidenced by his contributions to the decolonization and building of Zimbabwe, which made him an enduring hero. When he was leader of ZAPU, Nkomo played a robust part in the rough-and-tumble of national politics of decolonization. His image as a nationalist had, however, a distorting effect which opened him to both positive and negative mythmaking. Interestingly, these negative myths of 1980–1987 were remarkably different from the great hero as he was generally perceived to be in the 1990s and posthumously. This chapter explores Nkomo's political life, paying particular attention to his contributions to the country's independence, and how it sharpened

E.M. Sibanda (✉)
University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Canada

the beginnings of an independent Zimbabwe. Specifically it focuses on his role as founder and leader of revolutionary movements and his international campaign for the liberation of Zimbabwe which contributed immensely to its independence. Because a lot has been written over the years on Nkomo's perceived weaknesses, this chapter will not repeat those foibles of his although some might criticize it as hagiography. Thus, in a way, this chapter must be understood against a broader tapestry of the African liberation and anti-colonial discourse.

EARLY TRADE UNIONISM AND LEADING THE SOUTHERN RHODESIA AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (SRANC): 1948–1959

Nkomo's decision to take on a position in 1947 as organizing secretary of the Rhodesian African Workers' Union launched him on a political path. Black politics until then had never articulately questioned and challenged white supremacy, contenting itself with petitions for better living conditions, neither were previous unions, such as the 1948 SRANC led by Reverend Thompson Samkange, very radical. The SRANC, the African Voice Association, and the Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union not only spoke actively against racial discrimination, but also seem to have accepted the inevitability of some form of white domination.

In 1948, Nkomo was employed by the Rhodesian Railways, a government department that was headquartered in the industrial city of Bulawayo (Nkomo 2001: 45). He was one of the first black Africans to be given a senior managerial office in the company, which was led entirely by whites and relegated blacks to the lower ranks. He worked as a welfare officer, attending to the working and living conditions of railway workers (Ranger 2010: 196). This position required him to be in constant contact with the grievances of the ordinary African worker. He also lived with them in the compounds in Bulawayo, where the conditions were squalid and unfavourable. Nkomo travelled often between Bulawayo and Lusaka on business, witnessed inequities in the distribution of jobs in colonial economic organizations.

In the same year, Nkomo was also elected president of the African Railway Employees Association (Scarnecchia 2008: 72). The association had been founded in 1946, when it organized a massive strike. It was

one of the earliest formidable workers' unions to emerge in Southern Rhodesia and was a political force in its own right. The 1946 strike had taken place while Nkomo was still in South Africa, however, so he did not yet realize the threat this institution was beginning to pose to white dominance of the railway industry. The association's strike was seen as first evidence of the 'waking up' of the African working class in opposition to colonial domination, and Nkomo had just become its leader (Bond et al. 2015: 123–124). Whether or not this was his intention, almost overnight Nkomo became the face of African working-class resistance to colonial injustice.

The African Railway Employees Association was forced to assume a political role in the late 1940s due to the Southern Rhodesian government's increasingly oppressive approach towards African workers. Though not illegal, workers' unions were resented by whites. In addition, the demands of the African workers had evolved from social welfare issues, such as better food rations, to more important issues, such as adequate accommodation and improved wages. This shift was important because it affected key state institutions such as the Native Affairs department. It was evident that the association was incubating the earliest forms of black insurgency against colonialism and was the most organized black movement of the time. Joshua Nkomo thus became the leader of the biggest black movement in Southern Rhodesia, and (in more ways than one) the development of the African Railway Employees Association presented him with the opportunity to incubate his future political career.

From being a union organizer, Nkomo became involved in the early 1950s with African political movements. When he got back from South Africa in 1948, he found a weak local SRANC, which a few revolutionaries, Clement Muchachi, Jerry Vera, Aaron Mazibisa, and Edward Ndlovu, were trying to strengthen. It was a regional political party based in Bulawayo, the second city of the country (Sellström 2003: 294). Its concerns only included local grievances, not pushing for constitutional and political changes, and Nkomo was elected its president in 1952. Evidently, the SRANC's members had been impressed by his ability to mobilize support and had witnessed his vibrant leadership of the African Railway Employees Association after becoming its president in 1948. He initially rejected the offer, but was convinced by friend and fellow politician, Eric Dumbutshena, to take up the task (Nkomo 2001: 82).

One of Nkomo's most important attributes was his talent both for sensitizing the workers to bigger issues and for mobilizing them against colonial rule. Under his leadership, the African Railway Employees Association evolved from a workers' union concerned only with work-related welfare to concern with broader issues demanding the Southern Rhodesian government's political attention. The calls for equality between whites and blacks spilled over from the workplace and industry into the political sphere. It was through the example set by the African Railway Workers Association that blacks began to demand suffrage and representation in decision-making bodies at both institutional and national levels.

No doubt in response to such a growing sentiment, in 1952, the white settler communities in Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland intensified their discussion to form a Federation in order to further consolidate and entrench their power. It was first necessary, however, to consult with Britain the colonizing power. Through Reverend Percy Ibbotson (a man Nkomo respected), Prime Minister Sir Godfrey Huggins invited Nkomo to be part of the Southern African delegation to the London Conference that was making preparations for this Federation. Before he responded, Nkomo consulted with his SRANC executive who after reluctantly agreed that Nkomo be part of the delegation, warning that he should reject the whole idea of the Federation. Through its connection with other African movements from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the SRANC executive was aware that their counterparts were vehemently opposed to the notion of the Federation, which they feared would concentrate power in white hands and unduly delay what they saw as inevitable independence.

The London Federation talks of 1952 proved that Nkomo was not only a respected African leader, but also a politically attentive one who listened to the voices of millions of aggrieved Africans. Initially, Huggins had chosen Nkomo on the basis that he was respected by fellow Africans and would make a good and submissive representative (Casey 2007: 93–95). Nkomo was also selected on the basis that the negotiations needed the nominal presence of an African leader. After the fact, there is some irony in Nkomo at time being viewed as a passive African leader who would not threaten the agenda of the Rhodesian government. Nkomo must have surprised his sponsors when he strongly spoke about the concerns of the Africans in national affairs and their widespread disapproval of the idea of Federation.

Despite African resistance, however, the Federation was imposed in 1953, and a negligible number of non-whites were invited to sit in parliament. After failing to win his party's support for his own candidacy, Nkomo ran for the African seat in Bulawayo, his home town, and lost. Despite his role in opposing the Federation, his participation in these elections (though unsuccessful) would be counted against him by his comrades in the early 1960s as one of the reasons they needed to break away from his party to form a new one that was less likely to collaborate with the colonial status quo.

Federation saw the intensification of nationalism on the part of Africans and added to the hardship that the black population was already enduring. For instance, in 1923, African voting rights were restricted by the imposition of financial property, as well as educational and ownership requirements. In 1930, their lands were expropriated through the introduction of the Land Apportionment Act, giving blacks, who were 95% of the population, less than two-thirds of the available land, and whites, who were 5%, a third, which also happened to include the best arable land. These laws were followed by the Industrial Conciliation Act (1934), which unfairly regulated the state of trade unions, wages and industrial workers, and the Native Land Husbandry Act (1951), which restricted the number of cattle blacks could own and abolished communal land ownership.

In response to these restrictive laws and the formation of the Federation, Africans became politically radicalized. By the mid-1950s, a new generation of activists had emerged that went beyond mere petitioning for better living conditions to demanding majority rule. These activists formed the Southern Rhodesia National Youth League under the leadership of James Chikerema, Edson Sithole, and George Nyandoro. The Youth League was later joined by Jason Z. Moyo, Lazarus Nkala, and Joseph Msika. This group was radical in its demands and severely criticized the 'tea time partnership' of interracial organizations. The group's greatest achievement was the boycott it organized in August 1956 to protest the hike in bus fares for blacks living in Salisbury. The Youth League suffered essentially from the same weakness from which the SRANC suffered; however, it too was regional, with no membership beyond Salisbury. The government responded to this protest by introducing the Unlawful Assemblies Act to try and suppress any future such opposition.

In August 1955, Nkomo became one of the founding members of the revived SRANC (first called the Southern Rhodesia Bantu Congress, in Bulawayo) and its president. As a somewhat elitist group itself, its main objective was to mitigate rather than eradicate African grievances. They resorted to delegations and petitions as a way of influencing the settler government to govern them better; however, they needed a leader who was both respectable and educated. Nkomo met both of those criteria: he had a university degree and was already widely known through his union activities at the Railways. With the introduction of the Unlawful Assemblies Act, Nkomo quickly became aware that the SRANC's elitist approach could not respond adequately to the hardships the government had imposed. The approach needed was a national one and so he resigned from the party.

On 12 September 1957, the African National Congress combined with the Youth League to form the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC), which gave the new organization a national character. The new party then decided to find skilful leadership that was already prominent, so Nkomo was elected the first president of the expanded SRANC. His arrival on the scene also marked a generational shift in the political landscape. This was a time of mass politics, a phenomenon unknown before, so much so that the formation of SRANC has been considered the beginning of mass African nationalist engagement. While its main goals were modest, it opposed racial laws contained in the constitution and demanded equal treatment.

Nkomo's desire for the SANC to become a mass party, encompassing both educated and uneducated Africans from both rural and urban areas, became a reality as the party dealt with issues causing discontent among all Africans. By early 1958, the weekly political meetings became huge mass rallies. Nkomo, whose addresses were more conversational, intimate, and charismatic, riveted large audiences. He drew comparisons with Lobengula and Nehanda, reminding people of resistance that had occurred half a century ago. His speeches buttressed the continuity of struggle, which resonated with his audiences. Consequently, he attracted massive followings all over the country, showing great empathy, a quality that is so crucial to any politician's success.

Nkomo played also a pivotal role in internationalizing the Southern Rhodesia political crisis through attendance at successive conferences, including the 1953 Constitutional Review Conference held in London (Nkomo 2001: 58). It was during these political trips that he

encountered various civic organizations, religious groups, civil rights movements, labour groups, and trade unions, all of which showed sympathy to the plight of the Africans (Nkomo 2001: 58). Although the SRANC was still a small political movement, Nkomo managed to broadcast the plight of the Africans to the Western world through various conferences and events in Britain. The current plight of the Africans was not much in the public eye; Nkomo enlightened the Western world about the harsh colonial privations that Africans experienced in their country.

Although Nkomo showed great leadership and strength, the SRANC proved not to be militant enough to deal with strongly established colonial institutions. This was witnessed in the 1956 Salisbury Bus Boycott in which urban dwellers, industrial workers, and the City Youth League staged a demonstration by boycotting state-run bus services on urban routes such as from Highfield to the central business district (Muzondidya 2005: 168). In this protest against the colonial administration, the SRANC failed to increase support among Africans. In addition, the SRANC failed to export the demonstrations to other towns and cities such as Bulawayo and Gwelo, where Africans were facing the same challenges. In his biography, Nkomo admitted that the SRANC failed to register itself as an effective political movement, leading to his resignation in 1956 and signalling his personal dissatisfaction with the organization (Nkomo 2001: 70).

International politics were also changing in a positive way for Nkomo and his party. Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country to get its independence from Britain in 1957; this resulted in a nationalist euphoria in most African countries, particularly those under British rule (Bourret 1960). An independent Ghana offered Nkomo's SRANC financial and political support. Through those improved relations, Nkomo attended Kwame Nkrumah's *All-African People's Conference* in Ghana, meeting with other nationalist leaders from across Africa. There Nkomo and others learned new techniques of agitation and subversion and adopted the doctrine of pan-Africanism, which he merged with his party's political agenda. As a pan-Africanist, he and his party were committed to the liberation and unity of Africans across the continent and the struggle for the total liberation of Africa (Sibanda 2005: 73).

By 1959, the SRANC, thanks to Nkomo, had become a known revolutionary movement. President Nassir of Egypt had offered financial support to the party as early as 1959 after making contact with Nkomo (Nkomo 2001: 78). Thus, Nkomo's role on the continental front made

the SRANC stronger and more widely known. In the eyes of some of his lieutenants and some liberal white supporters of the struggle at the time, his international travels were criticized as a jet-setting performance that epitomized his personal flaws; in reality, however, these trips gained the party invaluable political capital both regionally and internationally.

On 26 February 1959, the SRANC was banned by parliament under the newly passed Unlawful Organizations Act, effectively putting a stop to the nationalist movement for just under a year. Nkomo was travelling in Cairo at the time (Nkomo 2001: 78) and was not among the 500 arrested. He was able to establish a base in London in the interim and was chosen as president of the new, more radical New Democratic Party (NDP) upon his return to Rhodesia. It can thus be argued that it was through Nkomo's leadership that the SRANC became enough of a threat to the white supremacist regime in Southern Rhodesia that it, in self-defence, had to intervene to curtail its activities. As a result of the ban, Nkomo was forced into exile for 22 months away from home, fuelling further opposition to colonial rule and enhancing his public role in the struggle.

RETURN FROM EXILE AND LEADING THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) 1960–1961

The ban of the SRANC in 1959 was intended to derail the nationalists' agenda of political freedom and equality in Southern Rhodesia. The arrest of leaders such as James Chikerema and George Nyandoro was only part of the colonial government's strategy to thwart any nascent revolutionary plans. For Nkomo and other leaders, the ban of the SRANC meant a more aggressive political stance was required. It was Nkomo's desire to see an independent Zimbabwe that prompted the formation of a successive nationalist party, despite the prevailing hostile political climate.

Nkomo returned to Southern Rhodesia to embark on a more militant struggle for political independence amidst increased mass support. At Salisbury International Airport, he was met by 50,000 supporters, which signalled the beginning of more aggressive nationalism (Nkomo 2001: 93). Nkomo drew new support as the icon of revolutionary activity in the country, being both a nationalist and traditional leader (Ranger 1999b: 3–4). His role as president of the NDP became intimately

associated with the celebrated First Chimurenga wars of 1896–1897, which had resisted colonial encroachment. Nkomo received traditional semi-military paraphernalia from one of the spirit mediums who had fought in the First Chimurenga. This gesture cemented his status as a leader of liberation movements in the country (Nkomo 2001: 93). The praise name *Chibwechitedza* (a ‘Slippery Rock’) was also given to Nkomo in honour of his role in leading the nationalist movements on his return from exile. Nkomo’s return marked a renewed interest in the ongoing struggle and resuscitated the hopes of many nationalists who were incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps, thus giving him iconic status.

As president of the NDP, Nkomo was invited to resolve Rhodesia’s constitutional future at a British conference in Salisbury in 1961. There, Nkomo accepted a deal giving nationalists 15 of the 65 parliamentary seats, even though this franchise agreement would delay majority rule several decades. Though this deal upset many ZAPU members, including Mugabe, Nkomo was unable to renege on it once negotiations had been concluded and it became law in 1962. While the party increasingly disagreed on a number of issues including ideology and tactics, Nkomo’s method of constitutional negotiations was the only one that reached the international scene, including both the African Congress and the United Nations. Those that opposed him offered no clear and viable alternative and conceded that Nkomo was still popular within the country (Ranger 1963). The acceptance of the new constitution had a brighter side to it for the African population; it denied the whites any form of independence from Britain that excluded them, and introduced a bill of rights that nationalists were able to use to argue or appeal their cases.

Echoing what happened to SRANC, the NDP was banned in September 1961. ZAPU was formed by the banned NDP leaders on 17 December 1961, 10 days later (Sibanda 2005: 72). By this time, the party’s support had grown to include people of all classes in urban and rural areas. All this occurred under the presidency of Joshua Nkomo. The new movement was different from its predecessor because it was more consistent in its call for total independence as well as its strategy to win the country through military confrontation. To that end, it formed one of the earliest modern guerrilla armies in the country, the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). There was also a war council, which worked specifically towards the war cause.

Nkomo's direction for the reconstituted party did not change, however, and some nationalist leaders within the party became increasingly frustrated with a perceived lack of progress. As president of ZAPU, Nkomo was criticized for being indecisive and weak, while security laws still constricted nationalist activities. Nkomo wished to continue negotiations through constitutional means, however. He hoped majority rule could be reached through peaceful negotiations through the support of the international community. Nkomo believed that Britain eventually would be forced to intervene in Rhodesia, implementing majority rule for them. In order to make contacts abroad, Nkomo thus travelled often, leaving ZAPU without effective leadership at home. When ZAPU was banned in September 1962 and other leaders were arrested, Nkomo was once again out of reach, this time in Lusaka, and so avoided arrest, remaining abroad to establish a government in exile. Many nationalist leaders, disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of the international community, were starting to believe that Africans in Zimbabwe were the only ones who could bring about liberation for Zimbabwe. These factors, combined with personality clashes and the divisive role played by white liberals who supported the nationalists, led to a split among the nationalist leaders in 1963. Fifteen of them left ZAPU to form ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Union, under the leadership of Ndabaningi Sithole. The split led to unprecedented violence and hostility between ZAPU and ZANU supporters, no doubt to the delight of the white establishment.

At this point, both ZAPU and ZANU acknowledged that constitutional negotiations were not advancing their cause. Nkomo turned to the Soviet Union for support, and ZAPU became recognized as one of the 'authentic seven' black nationalist movements by the Organization of African Unity. ZAPU was given military and diplomatic support from the Soviet Union and was encouraged by other nationalist groups striving for independence in Africa.

When Nkomo returned to the country, he was sent to a desolate detainment camp at Gonakudzingwa and remained there for 10 years starting April 1964. While in exile, Nkomo had continued to lead ZAPU and maintained control over its Soviet-trained military wing, ZIPRA. Though recognizing the effectiveness of guerrilla warfare, Nkomo maintained his position preferring diplomacy to guerrilla warfare. This created increased suspicion and hostility from ZANU and its military component, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), who

relied heavily on guerrilla war tactics. Progress towards independence was impeded by ongoing clashes between the two groups.

Nkomo's role in the road to independence during this period thus was characterized by ongoing negotiations with the ruling Southern Rhodesian government. The white regime under Garfield Todd was willing to address the political imbalances in the colony, but without reducing the economic autonomy of the white minority. Nkomo negotiated with the Todd government on several occasions, but the two differed on the issue of majority rule and 'one man, one vote'. Despite these serious differences, Nkomo convinced the Todd government to adjust the constitution in order to pave the way for negotiations with the hope of making an easy political transition to majority rule. In terms of dealing with the constitutional impasse during this period, Nkomo gained considerable ground when the government agreed to suspend the constitution. As a result, in 1960, Nkomo issued a joint statement with Todd announcing the suspension of the Southern Rhodesian constitution (Ranger 1992: 72). This was a landmark step, as the constitution was the primary weapon used to systematically and effectively subject Africans to perpetual subordination. It had also been used to disenfranchise Africans through land clauses and the protection of white enterprise. Thus, Nkomo's role in suspending the constitution in 1960 was of cardinal importance on the road to independence because he had managed to also have suspended, the legislative apparatus that had haunted the African masses for decades during colonialism.

Nkomo's leadership capabilities had also been sharpened by the rough political environment in Southern Rhodesia as well as his exposure to international politics. Ranger vividly captures how the personality of Nkomo had, within a short period of time, developed a strong political stamina:

I have heard Joshua speak twice since his return from London - once at a meeting of 20, 000. He seems to have gained greatly in stature [...] I am glad Joshua came back at once so that he could take a firm grip on the situation here [...]. (Ranger 1992: 90)

Clearly, Nkomo's return from exile was a landmark political development in the colony, which led in turn to an improved political strategy. His return was a well-timed political move which ensured continuity of the quest for independence in Southern Rhodesia.

Furthermore, the 1961 demonstrations under the leadership of Nkomo signalled the dawn of an aggressive revolution, something that was to remain visible throughout the liberation struggle. Previously, Nkomo had pursued dialogue with the Rhodesian government as early as 1949 as well as in the constitutional review talks of the early 1950s. There was thus a clear shift between Nkomo's earlier dialogue approach and this new approach in the early 1960s under the NDP. Nkomo, as the president of the NDP, should be credited for driving the nationalist elements from a position of restraint, which had proved ineffective, into more direct opposition to colonial rule.

The beginning of Nkomo's militancy may be traced to the 29 of November 1961 when he convened a meeting with the agenda of crippling industry, the backbone of the colonial economy (Nkomo 2001: 118). At the meeting, Nkomo requested all the people present to take off their shoes, a symbolic act associated with preparation for a major task. The taking off of shoes signalled that Nkomo and his NDP were ready to destroy Rhodesian industry as part of their new strategy to weaken the government. This undoubtedly helped cultivated a much-needed militancy in the minds of ordinary Africans. Although it took a long time, the seeds of Nkomo's changed approach were to bear fruit throughout the liberation struggle, both in urban and in rural areas, as the masses cooperated to defeat the colonial government.

The ban of the party and restriction of its leaders is proof that Nkomo and his colleagues had achieved success in mobilizing Africans under a systematic political framework. The NDP had become the biggest political movement representing the plight of the Africans in the region. Among other achievements, Nkomo had opposed the government's oppressive land policies, had led demonstrations against the referendum, and had eloquently expressed the African voice to the Rhodesian government. Meanwhile, the ban of NDP did not deter Nkomo from working towards the political independence of Rhodesia. In fact, the end of the NDP placed Nkomo at the centre of the armed struggle within ZAPU party.

Nkomo's ability to withstand internal divisions in the NDP helped ensure continuation of the struggle for independence. These differences assumed varying forms at different times. Of particular importance in this case was internal opposition against Nkomo which emerged in the

backdrop of the 'Destroy Industry' campaign of 1961. Nkomo's greatest internal opposition came from trade unionists in the party who opposed the destruction of the colonial economy. Their basic argument was that the destruction of the colonial economy would have devastating ripple effects on the urban population that depended entirely on these institutions, as the colonial economy was comprised of agriculture, mining, and the manufacturing industry.

At the same time, Nkomo's acceptance of the 1961 constitution resulted in the widening of the political differences within the NDP. The proposed constitution between the British government, the Southern Rhodesian government, and Nkomo had set aside 15 seats for Africans in parliament out of 65 seats. This quota was seen as inadequate by many, considering the fact that the Africans who were to be given only 15 seats in parliament were the majority and comprised more than 80% of the entire population. In addition, the proposed arrangement had actually reduced the participation of Africans in overall decision-making instead of increasing it (Ranger 1992: 95). The results of these talks and the proposed constitution showed that Nkomo had failed to bargain for what the Africans really wanted: one man, one vote, and equal representation.

Michael Mawema, based in Salisbury, and Leopold Takawira in London then became the greatest of Nkomo's critics (Ranger 1992: 95). Writing on 15 February 1961, nationalist leader Maurice Nyagumbo expressed his disapproval of Nkomo's actions, arguing that 'the results of the constitutional talks were very disappointing. The franchise was raised instead of lowering it. Only 15 Africans in parliament out of 65 members' (Ranger 1992: 95). Although the proposed arrangement did not come to fruition, it is clear that Nkomo's alleged political blunder had divided the party. Those in prison, including Maurice Nyagumbo, were also seriously divided.

In the face of mounting internal opposition and attacks by the Rhodesian security forces, however, Nkomo was still able to maintain his strong command of the party structures. He organized a mediation conference in Accra, Ghana, where the nationalist leader met with Kwame Nkrumah, who commanded great influence among African liberation movements. Nkrumah's mediation was credited with stabilizing the party, but the role of Nkomo in settling the differences should not be overlooked.

NKOMO'S POLITICAL CAREER WITH THE ZIMBABWE AFRICAN PEOPLE'S UNION (ZAPU), 1961–1980

In 1962, ZAPU under Nkomo's leadership became the first nationalist party in the country to explicitly call for independence on a one man, one vote basis (Sibanda 2005: 72). During this period, the majority of Africans could not qualify to vote due to the oppressive nature of colonial governments which qualified voters on the basis of education and economic status. Only those who met a certain economic standard and formal education could qualify for suffrage. Because most Africans during this time had not attained the required level of economic status and education, they did qualify in the required economic class. Suffrage thus was clearly determined on racial basis. In effect, whites were indiscriminately given the right to vote regardless of their status, ability to pay taxes, or level of education. Thus, the founding of Nkomo's ZAPU interrupted this strongly established racist system.

By calling for independence through one man, one vote, Nkomo and ZAPU were forging political equality in the country; this became one of the major cornerstones of the struggle for independence. One man, one vote implied that Africans, Europeans, Asians, and those of mixed race needed to be viewed as equal. This call for equality was an important step in sensitizing other Africans who had been influenced to believe that they were politically, ideologically, and economically inferior to whites. The call for political equality awakened Africans to the possibility of democracy and majority rule, which became the motivation for the more militant demand for both political independence and the equality of races.

The calls for political equality were also important because they exposed the Southern Rhodesian government's constitutional and legal imbalances. The unequal treatment of Africans symbolized the citizen versus subject relations in which the African was only allowed to play a minor role in decision-making. The Southern Rhodesian constitution protected these imbalances and racial biases through the respective constitutional clauses meant to reduce the autonomy of Africans in decision-making and political activities of the colony. The stance by Nkomo and other leaders allowed Africans to view themselves as equal to their colonisers, motivating them to face the colonial government and demand their independence through military confrontation if negotiations failed.

This approach was important to ZAPU movement and to Africans in various ways. First, the call for independence on a one man, one vote

basis showed a common grievance of all Africans, resulting in the emergence of a common call, demanding equality and suffrage. Second, it was ideologically potent, providing the focus for negotiation or the justification for military confrontation. It became the major rallying point in various negotiations, including the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement that eventually resulted in independence in 1980. The demand for equality thus was of crucial importance in the much-awaited transition from white minority rule to majority rule by Africans.

Nkomo's tenure as the president of ZAPU also witnessed the internationalization of what came to be known as the Rhodesian crisis. Nkomo spent the first half of 1962 lobbying countries such as Cuba, Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia to support the war of independence (Sibanda 2005: 73). He negotiated with the British government, which had considerable influence in the political affairs of Southern Rhodesia. Nkomo also lobbied for support from other African leaders such as King Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who provided him with much-needed financial and moral support. He also established good relations with President of Egypt, Nasser, spending several weeks there, where he acquired financial and military support in preparation for a full-scale war against the colonial government. Support from these foreign governments pushed the colonial authorities to the negotiating table to work on a political transition, because the alternative was becoming more ominous. In the end, the Rhodesian government was forced to announce a ceasefire to pave way for the negotiations that culminated in the 1979 Lancaster talks and subsequent majority elections in 1980.

Nkomo's role in the internationalization of the Rhodesian war was more evident in the post-1975 period after Mozambique attained its independence. The geopolitics of the Southern African region became tense after the defeat of the Portuguese in Mozambique because the incoming FRELIMO government was sympathetic to the nationalist cause (Mzumara 2011: 359). Chigwedere (2003: 2), an historian, argued that this resulted in Britain and the USA pressuring Ian Smith to accept majority rule in Southern Rhodesia or risk the country's military takeover by a Communist black government. Thus, he conclude that due to the pressure exerted by Nkomo, other nationalists, and foreign governments, Ian Smith thus eventually accepted the idea of majority rule (Chigwedere 2003: 2).

It was not an idle threat, either. ZAPU began its first armament initiative in 1962 after Nkomo had acquired firearms from Egypt with the

help of President Nasser. The weapons were smuggled across borders through Tanzania and Zambia, and with the help of other nationalists like Joseph Msika, the weapons were destined for Southern Rhodesia with the hope of launching attacks against specific state institutions and government officials. Although the firearms were confiscated by the police before reaching Bulawayo, the mission served as a warning to the colonial government of what a failure in negotiations certainly would mean.

Throughout his career ZAPU, Nkomo managed to amass political support through his multi-racial approach. His party included people of different racial backgrounds—whites of European origin, those of mixed race mainly in Salisbury, and Asians, particularly Indians. ZAPU under Nkomo not only accommodated non-Africans in its structures, but also gave them leadership positions, illustrating that the struggle was not against the white race, but against a system of racial discrimination. Such figures included, for example, Judith Todd, daughter of former Rhodesian Prime Minister Sir Garfield Todd, who was eventually deported by the Ian Smith government for her role in the nationalist movement (Nkomo 2001: 68). On 15 June 1962, Terence Ranger, a white academic from the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was elected ZAPU's deputy district chairperson (Ranger 1992: 128). Ranger remained active in nationalist politics together with his wife, Shelagh. The ZAPU branch under the leadership of Steve Lombard at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) was dominated by whites, demonstrating that race was not a primary concern for Nkomo and other ZAPU nationalists. Marlborough, a white-dominated suburb in Salisbury, was under the leadership of Margaret Moore (Ranger 1992: 128). There was also a ZAPU branch in Acadia, an area comprised of mixed races.

Nkomo was also on the forefront of a campaign against racism in Southern Rhodesia. 'Citizens Against the Colour Bar' was most prominent in 1961, although it remained a part of the nationalist discourse up to the independence period (Ranger 1992: 83). In his biography, Nkomo writes: 'We did what we could to show that our fight was not a racial one, against the whites, but for all the people of the country. From white supporters outside, we received precious help' (Nkomo 2001: 137). Ranger observed that for Nkomo, however, the campaign against the colour bar was a step towards a greater goal—to swim with whites, not in pools but in parliament (Ranger 1992: 88). Thus, it can be argued

Nkomo popularized the notion of racial and for that matter, ethnic equality, thereby laying the foundations for militant mass nationalism in the colony that rose above race and ethnicity.

Continued militancy by ZAPU under Nkomo resulted in its ban by the government in 1962, followed by house arrests of its leaders, including Nkomo, who were restricted to their rural homes for 3 months. Nkomo made sure that the quest for freedom would not die by creating a temporary reprieve called the People's Caretaker Council (PCC) in 1962. The PCC was responsible for offering Africans political sanctuary at a time when nationalist activity was criminalized. Nkomo thus ensured continuity of the nationalist euphoria which had engulfed most parts of urban and rural Rhodesia.

Furthermore, Nkomo played a pivotal role as one of the nationalist leaders who took part in the formation of the Organisation of African Union (OAU) in Tanzania in 1963. Led by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Samora Machel of Mozambique, and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, it was the biggest body made up of independent countries and its main objective was to give support to the nationalist movements to achieve independence. The presence of Nkomo as the leader of the nationalist movement in Zimbabwe resulted in increased support from the OAU throughout the liberation struggle. ZAPU and later on ZANU became members of the OAU nationalist movements, receiving various forms of support throughout their struggles for independence. Thus, under Nkomo's presidency, ZAPU was successful in getting continental support and attention that was vital to the country's quest for independence.

The widening of internal differences in ZAPU resulted in Nkomo and his fellow nationalists suffering a major setback in the form of a split in 1963. The ZANU split undoubtedly undermined Nkomo's role in the struggle for independence, resulting in a loss of public confidence in his leadership. Scholars such as Sithole and Kriger have called it the 'mother of all splits' due to its magnitude and its impact on the nationalist cause (Zvogbo 2008: 115). Nkomo, however, managed to restructure the party by filling in the vacant posts, enabling new leaders such as Joseph Msika to assume influential positions. Nkomo was also able to identify and groom a new crop of leaders to continue with the fight for independence after the split. His efforts in the ZAPU did not go unnoticed as he was elected life president of the party at a meeting held on 10–11 August 1963 (Nkomo 2001: 120). These developments point

to his ability to maintain the relevance of the ZAPU party in the country's quest for independence and ZAPU prominent among other African nationalist movements in their common pursuit for freedom.

His efforts towards independence also had personal consequences, resulting in his arrest on 16 April 1964 with other nationalist leaders such as Joseph Msika, Ruth Chinamano, and Josiah Chinamano. Because they were deemed dangerous citizens by the colonial government (Crummey 1986: 377), they were sent to Gonakudzingwa Restriction Camp, located in a game park on the south-eastern tip of Zimbabwe near the Mozambican border. For the next 10 years, the Rhodesian government separated Nkomo from nationalist activity, but could not take away the political will that had enabled him to lead nationalist politics for decades (Crummey 1986: 377). The government eventually released Nkomo from prison in 1974, and he went into exile in Zambia.

Nkomo then embarked on an accelerated political exercise which saw the restructuring of ZAPU's military wing, the ZIPRA. From exile, he directed, coordinated, and led the liberation struggle as leader of the war council. The restructuring process took place after 1975 and intensified recruitment of war fighters from Southern Rhodesia to countries such as Egypt, Tanzania, and Zambia for military training. He arguably created one of the best trained and disciplined freedom armies consisting of both guerrilla and conventional units.

Between 1975 and 1979, Nkomo organized foreign military aid, acquiring both expertise and ammunition. ZIPRA force began to receive military training from Cuba and the Soviet Union (Nkomo 2001: 180). With the help of other ZAPU leaders, Nkomo was responsible for identifying potential military leaders and commanders for extensive military training in these countries. They returned and imparted their acquired military knowledge to new recruits.

The military expertise acquired from these countries helped ZIPRA engage the Rhodesian security forces in direct combat and acquainted ZIPRA leaders with modern tactics, weaponry, and strategies that undoubtedly helped the nationalist movement to win key battles throughout the war. ZAPU and the Soviet Union also agreed to send future nationalist leaders to Moscow to acquire education. Scholarships were targeted at youth activists, women, and trade unionists to study general military subjects and specialized guerrilla warfare (Shubin 2011).

It can therefore be argued that Nkomo, as leader of the ZAPU party and chairman of the ZIPRA war council, played a pivotal role in coordinating foreign military aid that eventually resulted in the incapacitation of the Rhodesian security forces. It is evident that without Nkomo and other nationalist leaders' efforts in acquiring external military support, the independence struggle in Zimbabwe would have taken longer. The fighting forced the government back to the negotiating table, which is what Nkomo had wanted from the beginning.

Nkomo was also responsible for directing the war from Zambia. He worked closely with the commanders who trained guerrillas at Wheatland Farm in Zambia which was in this case the headquarters of the ZIPRA base (Chigwedere 2003: 4). At one point, the ZIPRA base in Lusaka housed about 20,000 guerrillas who were undergoing military training in preparation to invade Rhodesia (Tamarkin 1990: 23). Through his role in overseeing the military operations, ZIPRA under Nkomo destabilized most parts of Rhodesia, particularly the Matabeleland region and north-western parts including the Zambezi area. Rhodesian government administration in such areas thus became crippled. Such significant losses on the battlefield were crucial in forcing Ian Smith's government to negotiate with the nationalists, leading to the 1979 Lancaster House Peace talks which resulted in the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980.

The period from 1975 to 1979 saw Nkomo participating in several rounds of negotiations in quest for a peaceful solution to the political crisis in Zimbabwe based, however, on one man, one vote. In 1975, Nkomo met with Ian Smith for negotiations on a transitional government. The talks were mediated by the Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda and took place secretly in Zambia (Mtisi et al. 2009: 148). Both Smith and Kaunda chose Nkomo as the right candidate for negotiations for two reasons. First, because it was perceived, he was a generally acceptable figure among Zimbabweans, also as a possibly leader of an independent black government. Second, Kaunda in particular saw Nkomo as an astute negotiator who would not betray his people by negotiating for nothing less than majority rule. To Kaunda, Nkomo had already shown good political negotiating skills throughout his career as the leader of SRANC, NDP, and now ZAPU. Although the talks broke down over the timing of the introduction of the majority rule, Nkomo was willing to compromise on some aspects in his quest for independence. One thing that he could not compromise on though was the need for political independence and equality on a one man, one vote basis.

The following year, Nkomo attended the Geneva conference where talks centred around the, again, the transitional government. This time, Robert Mugabe, Ndabaningi Sithole, and Abel Muzorewa were present. Although they spoke with one voice in as far as their demand for independence was concerned, they had serious differences regarding how independence was to be introduced. Throughout the talks though, Nkomo notably stood for one man, one vote, a position that represented the demands of especially millions of Africans in Rhodesia. Although some leaders had given into proportional representation which did not guarantee an African majority in parliament, Nkomo remained firm on his demand for a majority rule based on a one man one vote, and that was one of the reasons why the talks failed to bear fruit.

In 1978, Nkomo was one of the nationalist leaders who played a pivotal role in condemning the Zimbabwe–Rhodesia agreement signed between Abel Muzorewa and Ian Smith’s Rhodesian Front Party. Although the agreement between Muzorewa and Smith allowed Africans to enter into parliament, it did not ensure them the majority rule which they wanted. The suffrage system was not based on a one man, one vote system (Martin and Johnson 1981). In addition, the name Zimbabwe–Rhodesia implied that Rhodesian elitist and racist tendencies were to remain strongly entrenched in the new system. Thus, it became the responsibility of nationalist leaders such as Joshua Nkomo to reject the offer and continue with the struggle for total independence.

The Lancaster House Peace talks epitomized Nkomo’s role in the independence of Zimbabwe. The talks came as a result of ceasefire calls by Ian Smith’s Patriotic Front government in December 1979 and were brokered by Lord Carrington in London. Britain, the USA, and the African Frontline States were also part of the talks (Mtisi et al. 2009: 148). The major talking point of the conference was the manner in which power was to be handed over to the new black government. Nkomo and other nationalist leaders insisted on the one man, one vote system, Nkomo’s, constant refrain. The talks paved the way for the first majority election in 1980.

During the ceasefire period, Nkomo was the pillar of a united movement which was known as the Patriotic Front. The Patriotic Front consisted of the two major African nationalist movements, ZANU under the leadership of Mugabe and ZAPU under Nkomo. It came into existence after concerted efforts from both local and frontline leaders who desired to see a united black government under one political body.

As the leader of ZAPU, Nkomo was part of this arrangement and was very clear in his desire for unity among all African nationalist movements. Despite Nkomo's efforts towards the cause of a Patriotic Front, Mugabe launched an election manifesto soon after the Lancaster House Agreement expressing his clear disregard for both Nkomo and ZAPU, thus making the Patriotic Front's dream a failure (Asante 2015: 317). Even though the Patriotic Front failed to contest the 1980 elections as a united entity, Nkomo remained pro-unity in postcolonial Zimbabwe even after what he termed the greatest betrayal of his life (Nkomo 2001: 201). Nkomo's dream of one man, one vote finally came to fruition in March 1980 when majority elections were held. Although Nkomo's party won 20 seats against ZANU's 57 seats, he had played a pivotal role in ensuring a majority for Africans in parliament (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 126). Africans dominated more than 75% of parliament seats with Nkomo's ZAPU in control of 24% of the total (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 126).

CONCLUSION

A closer look at the life of Joshua Nkomo from 1949 to 1980 reveals that his life revolved entirely around his quest to see an independent Zimbabwe. Through his domestic leadership and his role in involving the international community in the struggle for liberation, he made the independence of Zimbabwe achievable. Through alliances initiated by Nkomo, the struggle for independence became internationalized, resulting in an inflow of much-needed military, technical, and financial support from foreign countries. Because of these alliances, Zimbabwe was able to pave the way for majority rule that became the basis of African politics in independent Zimbabwe. As a nation-builder, Nkomo demonstrated that there was no 'contradiction between being a cultural leader and being a nationalist', being a nationalist and being a nonracist, being cultural, without being chauvinistic, being adamant on principles without being repulsive. All these traits are part of his legacy with which he bequeathed Zimbabwe in particular, and in general all those engaged in fighting imperial and colonial legacies that deny agency and independence to their people.

Nkomo's role in dialogue with the Rhodesian government from the 1950s to 1979s makes it clear that he was a strong believer in negotiations, and only used the armed struggle as a last resort. Without the

contributions of Joshua Nkomo, Zimbabwe's independence would have taken a completely different and likely more troublesome course. Undoubtedly, the memory of Nkomo's contributions to the decolonization of Zimbabwe, as father of Zimbabwean nationalism, astute and untiring negotiator, nationalist and subsequently in the postcolonial Zimbabwe, statesman, will forever be part of our history. That is what perhaps Eddison Zvogbo, a onetime Minister of Justice, when he positively reflected on Nkomo's legacy a few days after his death. He stated, 'It is true that all of us die, but some truly don't die. It will never be possible for Joshua Nkomo's name to vanish from our history. Josh will never die' (Zvogbo 1999). The words of Zvogbo are definitely echoed by many today in Zimbabwe as they reflect on Nkomo's lasting contribution to the independence of their country.

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