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“ACTIVISM IN TIGHT CORNERS”: DECOLONISATION AND THE AFRICAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION MOVEMENT IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE, 1953–1979

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the African business association movement in Zimbabwe between 1953 and 1979. It argues that African traders took advantage of African nationalism together with colonial fears of decolonisation to contest colonial restrictions on African entrepreneurship.¹ This created an ambiguous position on decolonisation for African traders culminating in the formation of numerous business associations with the Zimbabwe African Business Union (ZABU) established in 1963 at the pinnacle of this process. With the thwarting of the nationalist movement after 1964, the African business association activity went into a hiatus emerging in 1973 as the moderate Rhodesia African Chamber of Commerce (RACC). A sister association to RACC known as the African Business Promotion Association (ABPA) emerged in 1978 to take advantage of decolonisation with the goal of winning economic space for Africans. By looking at these business associations, the study reimagines African nationalism during the critical junctures of the federation and Unilateral Declaration of Independence (hereafter UDI) periods. For example, the experiences of rural business associations like the Mt Darwin African Traders Association (hereafter Mt Darwin Association), and its leaders, in rallying African traders into forming a national business association point to the role of previously unknown individuals and associations outside of urban townships such as Highfield, the capital

1 Decolonisation is used here to refer to the movement towards majority rule in Zimbabwe between the federal period and the 1970s. For more on this process see, TL Scarnecchia, *Race and diplomacy in Zimbabwe: The cold war and decolonization, 1960-1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

of African politics in Zimbabwe. The article uses stories from the African-oriented press, the mainstream media and archival sources to reconstruct the experiences of African business associations during the period covered.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Business Association, Trade, Nationalism, Decolonisation, Racial Partnership, Southern Rhodesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

The article examines the activities of African business associations in colonial Zimbabwe between 1953 and 1979. It argues that African traders formed business associations to protest colonial impediments on African business and to participate in African nationalism.² The African business associations that appeared during the 1950s and 1960s coincided with what historian Michael West described as a nationalism moment.³ During the 1970s, on the other hand, African traders formed business associations against the backdrop of the liberation struggle and efforts by the colonial state to navigate decolonisation. The article argues that, while African business associations galvanised around specific grievances affecting their constituency, they also articulated a national message that resonated with the African politics of the time.

There has been a burgeoning interest in the historical study of African entrepreneurship.⁴ Drawing on the contemporary debate on entrepreneurship as a solution to Africa's development challenges, historians have demonstrated the historical continuities and changes between past and current African entrepreneurs.⁵ Among other things, this literature successfully questions the Eurocentrism on which the historiography and the developmental discourse on African entrepreneurship were premised. Importantly, this body of work has shone a light on the failure of cultural interpretations in understanding

2 See, TV Chambwe, *A history of African entrepreneurship in Southern Rhodesia* (PhD, University of the Free State, 2020).

3 M West, *The rise of an African middle class: colonial Zimbabwe, 1898-1965* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002); A Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 128-148.

4 SM Maliehe, *Commerce as politics: The two centuries of struggle for Basotho economic independence* (New York: Berghan, 2021); T Chambwe, *A history of African entrepreneurship in Southern Rhodesia*; ME Ochonou (ed.), *Entrepreneurship in Africa: A historical approach* (Indiana: Indiana University, 2018); C Chachange, *A capitalizing city: Dar es salaam and the emergence of an African entrepreneurial elite (C. 1862-2015)* (PhD, Harvard University, 2018); G Verhoef, *The history of business in Africa: Complex discontinuity to emerging markets* (Johannesburg: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

5 ME Ochonou, "Introduction: Toward African entrepreneurship and business history". In: ME Ochonou (ed.), *Entrepreneurship in Africa* (Indiana: Indiana University, 2018).

African businesses.⁶ For instance, the seminal work by the anthropologist Volker Wild focuses on the impact of cultural business practices on individual African entrepreneurs arguing that African traders were less interested in profit.⁷ Challenging this view, the economic historian Sean Maliehe, "critiques the dominant misconceptions attributed to African entrepreneurs that they perform poorly in business because they lack economic rational ethic (that is, they are not homo economicus)".⁸ Taking this cue, this article adds to our understanding of the history of African entrepreneurship in Africa and Zimbabwe by highlighting the activities of African business associations between 1953 and 1979.

While the literature on African entrepreneurship in colonial Africa shows how African traders were marginalised and the impediments that they faced, it is silent about the role played by African trader lobby groups to create space to trade in a restrictive colonial environment.⁹ The subject of African business associations receives cursory treatment in some of the canon works on African business history. For example, the historian John Illiffe's pioneering work on *The Emergence of African Capitalism* does not centre on this theme.¹⁰ Albeit, the subject has received some attention from some scholars such as Bruce Heilman and John Lucas who historicise the business association movement in the Nigerian and Tanzanian cities of Kano and Dar es Salaam respectively. They conclude that, "while these capitalist social movements have been reluctant advocates of a liberalisation of the entire political system, they have been forceful in articulating their demand that business be included in the policy process".¹¹ Similarly, Deborah Brautigam, Lise Rakner and Scott Taylor argue that business associations in post-colonial Africa have been hesitant to, "establish themselves as strong advocates of growth-oriented policies, even when policy changes would clearly advance their interests as a group".¹² In

6 See V Wild, *Profit not for profit's sake: History and business culture of African entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1997); LP Dana, "Basuto culture and entrepreneurship". In: LP Dana and RB Anderson (eds.), *International handbook of research on indigenous entrepreneurship* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2007).

7 Wild, *Profit not for profit's sake*; M West, "Pan-Africanism, capitalism and racial uplift: The rhetoric of African business formation in colonial Zimbabwe", *African Affairs* 92 (367), 1993, pp. 263-283.

8 S Maliehe, "The rise and fall of African indigenous entrepreneurs' economic solidarity in Lesotho, 1966-1975", *African Economic History* 45 (1), 2017, p. 116.

9 V Wild, "Black competition or white resentment? African retailers in Salisbury 1935-1953", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17 (2), 1991, pp. 177-190.

10 J Illiffe, *The emergence of African capitalism* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983), p. 3; 66.

11 B Heilman and J Lucas, "A social movement for African capitalism? A comparison of business associations in two African cities", *African Studies Review* 40 (2), 1997, p. 172.

12 D Brautigam et al., "Business associations and growth coalitions in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40 (4), 2002, p. 543.

contrast, this paper shows that business associations such as ZABU and the ABPA were bold about their involvement in national politics.

Recent studies on African entrepreneurship have tackled the subject of African business associations more explicitly. Examining African entrepreneurship in Tanzania, the economic historian Chambi Chachange notes the fragmented nature of the business association movement in Tanzania through associations such as the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture.¹³ In the study of business associations in Southern Africa, the respective works of historians Grietjie Verhoef, Ruth Southall, and Sean Maliehe stand out. Southall and Verhoef account for the business association movement in South Africa by looking at lobby groups such as the National African Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC) formed in 1964.¹⁴ Like NAFCOC, as the paper shows, ZABU had several affiliate regional and smaller business associations. The historian Sean Maliehe's study of the business association movement in Lesotho is extensive, arguing that, "to insert themselves in the economy, the majority of Basotho have historically formed associations, cooperatives and other voluntary self-organized economic groups".¹⁵ As this article shows, African ideas about business, expressed through several business associations, were complicated. They went beyond "culture" to include nationalist ideas during the 1960s. The business association movement also engaged in the debate on decolonisation during the 1970s with the goal of advancing the interests of African entrepreneurs.

Despite the involvement of African traders in nationalist activities during the colonial period the literature on African-organised groups is silent about African participation in politics through business associations. The critical works on African nationalism during the period covered by this article focus on African political parties and trade unions and neglect African business associations.¹⁶ Equally crucial, this literature centres on African celebrity figures and the key role of places such as Highfield, Harari and Bulawayo

13 Chachange, "A Capitalizing City", p. 280.

14 Verhoef, *The history of business in Africa*, p. 74; R Southall, "The African middle class in South Africa 1910-1994", *Economic History of Developing Regions* 29 (2), 2014, pp. 287-310.

15 See S Maliehe, "A history of the Lesotho chamber of commerce and industry, 1976-1993", *South African Historical Journal* 70 (4), 2018, pp. 674-688; Maliehe, "The rise and fall of African indigenous entrepreneurs", p. 112.

16 See, T Ranger, *Writing revolt: An engagement with African nationalism, 1957-67* (Harare: Weaver Press 2013); T Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe: Harari and Highfield, 1940 - 1964* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008); Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*; I Phimister, "Narratives of progress: Zimbabwean historiography and the end of history", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30 (1), 2012, pp. 27-34; B Marmon "Division to save the country is wisdom": The short life of

in the history of African nationalism. This article borrows from the historian Munyaradzi Munochiveyi to demonstrate that African entrepreneurs also spoke the language of nationalism just as forcefully.¹⁷ According to Munochiveyi, Zimbabwe's nationalist history should be re-inscribed with, "multiple, diverse, and complex historical subjects".¹⁸ This study adds to this multiplicity of views by focusing on African entrepreneur involvement in African nationalism through business associations.

By reimagining African entrepreneurs as participants in the nationalist struggle, this paper also takes a cue from the historian Allison Shutt's position on previously ostracised individuals like Jasper Savanhu, who, like African traders, had to articulate nationalism under "tight corners" in the context of the labour movement.¹⁹ Recently, the historian Brooks Marmon in his account of the history of the Zimbabwe National Party sought to, "problematize the dominant narrative of "Patriotic History" that privileged ZANU-PF's role in the liberation struggle until Zimbabwe descended into economic and political turmoil in the late 1990s".²⁰ Likewise, this article achieves the same goal by shining a light on the activities of African business associations such as the Mt Darwin Association, ZABU and the ABPA.

The historiography on African nationalism and decolonisation characterises African traders as either passive or collaborators of the colonial enterprise. An examination of the African business association movement shows a more nuanced view of the role played by African traders in decolonisation during the 1960s and 1970s. African business associations such as the Mt Darwin Association and ZABU briefly succeeded in unifying African traders across the country. While they sought accommodation with the colonial state by associating with colonial companies such as the African Loan and Development Company (ALDC), the article demonstrates that they also included in their ranks African nationalists and tapped into the 1960s nationalist excitement. During the 1970s, business associations such as the ABPA actively articulated the grievances of African traders and took advantage of the decolonial discourse of the 1970s to demand concessions from the colonial state.

the Zimbabwe national party and its lasting impact on Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, 1961-1963", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 53 (3), 2020, p. 366.

17 M Munochiveyi, "Becoming Zimbabwe from below: multiple narratives of Zimbabwean nationalism", *Critical African Studies* 4 (6), 2011, pp. 84-108.

18 Munochiveyi, "Becoming Zimbabwe from below", p. 103.

19 A Shutt, "Writing Jasper Savanhu's biography from his awkward self-narratives", *African Studies* 78 (2), 2019, pp. 220.

20 Marmon "Division to save the country is wisdom", p. 366. ZANU-PF stands for Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front and has been the ruling party in Zimbabwe since independence.

The article uses stories from *The African Businessman* as a lens into the activities of African business associations during the 1960s. Established by the African Newspapers, the publishers of *African Daily News*, *The African Businessman* was active between 1961 and 1963.²¹ *The African Businessman* was to African entrepreneurship what *The African Daily News* was to African nationalist politics. Edited by Elias Rusike, a veteran journalist in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, the paper commanded a wide readership among the African business community.²² The paper carried stories of the everyday experiences of African traders in Highfield, Harari, Bulawayo, and some African reserves such as Mt Darwin.²³ The newspaper gave generous space to African traders, and its editorials and letters to the editor commented on colonial policy on African entrepreneurship. The newspaper also holds the only record of the activities of the ALDC and the African business association movement of the 1960s. After 1963, it became a monthly, and its content became less political as the UDI regime moved to curb dissent within the media.²⁴ Because of the censoring of the paper after 1963 and its folding in 1969, the story of the African business association movement is no longer as detailed. For the 1970s, the article relies on several state-owned and African-oriented newspapers such as the *Rhodesia Herald* and the *African Times* respectively. Sensitive to the decolonisation discourse and the heightened liberation struggle, the *Rhodesia Herald* gave generous space to African traders and the business associations that they formed.

The article covers three broad themes. The first looks at the proto-African business association phase of the 1940s and 1950s and examines some of the earliest African business associations. The second interrogates the role played by the African Loan and Development Company to encourage the formation of business associations during the early 1960s. It also considers the interplay of the politics of racial partnership together with African nationalism in the formation of the first-ever national African business association, ZABU. The paper concludes by looking at the activities of the Rhodesia Chamber of Commerce and the African Business Promotion Association during a period of decolonisation in the 1970s.

21 S Dombo, "African newspapers limited and the growth of newspapers for Africans in Southern Rhodesia", *Media History*, 2016, pp. 1-25.

22 For more on Elias Rusike see, E Rusike, *The politics of the mass media: A personal experience* (Harare: Roblaw Publishers, 1990); S Dombo, *Private print media, the state and politics in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

23 Elias Rusike was one of the veteran journalists in Zimbabwe and went on to become a top editor of independent newspapers in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

24 Dombo, "African newspapers limited", p. 20.

2. PROTO-AFRICAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

While African business associations did not leave primary documents of their activities, such as letters and minutes of meetings, occasional mention of some of their activities appeared in African-oriented newspapers and government reports. *The Bantu Mirror* in 1944 reported Charles Mzingeli - a veteran trade unionist - encouraging African entrepreneurs to form a business association.²⁵ Articulating this need in a tone laden with nationalistic sentiment, Mzingeli opined, "African businessmen must be taught that running a business means serving a community, and must learn, too, to serve the community and themselves by collective buying if only they could form a sort of African Chamber of Commerce".²⁶ The first African business associations in Southern Rhodesia, however, were not national but reflected local interests. In 1956, *The African Daily News* reported on the activities of the Bulawayo African Chamber of Commerce, fronted by an African trader identified only as B Matewele. The business association, formed in 1942, was one of the longest-running organised groups for African entrepreneurs.²⁷

Although members of this business association had, "been able to fight and achieve quite a number of things for its members" and, "were pleased with the manner in which the work of the organisation was carried out in 1956", they still yearned for a form of national representation.²⁸ To that end, the Bulawayo African Chamber of Commerce met in 1959 to establish a wholesale business, the African General Traders.²⁹ At that meeting, it was revealed that the Bulawayo African Chamber of Commerce had extended an unsuccessful invitation to the "Salisbury Branch of the Chamber". Expressing their regret in the Salisbury branch's no-show, the Bulawayo traders felt, "disappointed by the attitude shown by the Salisbury branch of the Chamber in failing to meet the Bulawayo people after so many letters had been written to the secretary of the Salisbury branch without success".³⁰ The existence of this Salisbury business association is corroborated by the Salisbury Director of Native Affairs who notes that two business associations were formed in Salisbury in 1959. The Director of Native Affairs outlined the activities of the Salisbury African business associations reporting that "it is pertinent to note that two new organisations, the Salisbury and District African Traders

25 Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe*, p. 12.

26 "Black - marketing in the Salisbury African township", *The Bantu Mirror*, 1 January 1944.

27 "African chamber of commerce", *The African Businessman*, 20 May 1961.

28 "Bulawayo chamber of traders said to be doing well", *The African Daily News*, 19 December 1956.

29 "African chamber of commerce", *The African Businessman*, 20 May 1961.

30 "Bulawayo chamber of traders said to be doing well", *The African Daily News*, 19 December 1956.

Association and the Salisbury African Chamber of Commerce, came into being and subsequently amalgamated to become the Southern Rhodesia African Traders Association”.³¹ While there is no record of the activities of the Southern Rhodesia African Traders Association or the attempt of the Bulawayo Chamber of Traders to woo their Salisbury counterparts, these reports point to an early nationalistic sense among African traders in Southern Rhodesia.

By the end of the 1950s, the most active African business associations in Salisbury were the Highfield African Traders Association (Highfield Association) and the African Transport Operators Association. Among the Highfield Association’s members were some of the most prominent African entrepreneurs of the time, such as Aiden Mwamuka and Enock Mwayera.³² In keeping with the tradition at the time, the chairman of the Highfield Association was also a prominent African nationalist, Josiah Chinamano. Chinamano, together with his wife Ruth, were actively involved in the nationalist politics of the 1960s.³³ Another veteran nationalist and trade unionist, Charles Mzingeli, headed the Harari African Traders Association (Harari Association).³⁴ The Harari Association lobbied the Salisbury authorities and the colonial state for the right to freehold title to land and was concerned over hawkers taking business from licensed traders. The business association also demanded a relaxation of the shopping hours in the African townships.³⁵ In 1965, the Harari Association protested against “certain city bakeries supplying bread to unlicensed traders”.³⁶

A perusal of these concerns may point to mundane trader grievances divorced from the broader nationalist struggles of the day. However, by demanding title to business sites, the Harari Association directly challenged the colony’s skewed land ownership patterns, which affected all Africans. African traders in the urban townships urged the colonial state to reform legislation on shop hours, which required all traders to close shop at 6:30 in the evening. In agreement, the editorial of *The African Businessman* argued that “most residents come home at about 6:30 PM and need more than thirty

31 The National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), S/SA 6175: Annual Report of the Director of Native Administration for the Municipal Year 1 July 1956 to 30 June 1957.

32 “The Highfield traders association”, *The African Businessman*, 21 April 1961.

33 Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe*, pp. 118-119; pp. 148 - 149.

34 B Raftopoulos, “The labour movements in Zimbabwe 1945 - 1965”. In: B Raftopoulos and I Phimister (eds.), *Keep on knocking: A history of the labour movement in Zimbabwe, 1900-1997* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1997), p. 61.

35 “The Highfield traders association”, *The African Businessman*, 21 April 1961; “Highfield traders’ association meets: Hawkers main problem to fight”, *The African Businessman*, 12 October 1963.

36 “Editorial: A genuine case”, *The African Businessman*, February 1965.

minutes within which to purchase groceries".³⁷ Ruth Chinamano, the wife of Josiah Chinamano, who managed a general dealer store in Highfield, protested these restrictions, pointing out that they start selling, "at 5 pm. During the day, we do not do business. We should be allowed to sell things up to any time, as long as we can get customers to buy".³⁸ This was a direct nationalist challenge to the colonial state that surveilled African lives in the African townships.³⁹

Business associations such as the Highfield Association, the Harari Association, the Bulawayo African Chamber of Commerce, and the African Transport Operators Association were useful in articulating local and sector grievances by locating them within the broader nationalist struggles against the state and local authorities. To that end, beginning in 1961, African traders started calling for the formation of a national business association. The chairman of the Highfield Association, Chinamano, advocated for this approach. Linking the idea of a business association to the other African organised groups, Chinamano said,

Africans are not only workers now, many of them are (sic) employers. It is essential that they should be organised to protect their own interests as employers and businessmen. They should be protected against big dealers, wholesalers, local authorities, etc. etc.⁴⁰

However, not all African entrepreneurs saw the need for a national association for African traders. J. Onyimoh for example, urged African entrepreneurs to, "join European Chambers of Commerce and not found one of their own which would be limited by lack of experience and lack of funds".⁴¹ Onyimoh, through his African Secretarial Services, managed the books of some African businesses.

Onyimoh's pessimism did not deter other African entrepreneurs from forming business associations. For example, in October of 1961, the Marembo Funeral Services, Highfield Undertakers, and Ayawo Society Funeral Services merged to form the Zimbabwe African Funeral Services. West argues that African business associations were sectorial in their interests, and this seems to be the case for the Zimbabwe African Funeral Services.⁴² However, while

37 "Editorial: African businessmen", *The African Businessman*, 28 April 1961.

38 "Should shopping hours restriction be abolished in the African township?", *The African Businessman*, 30 December 1961.

39 See, K Chitofiri, *Urban protest, citizenship and the city: The history of residents' associations and African urban representation in colonial Harare, Zimbabwe* (PhD, University of the Free State, 2015), p. 175.

40 "National support for businessmen's organisation", *The African Businessman*, 8 July 1961.

41 "National support for businessmen's organisation", *The African Businessman*, 8 July 1961.

42 West, "African middle-class formation in colonial Zimbabwe", p. 292.

this was a merger of businesses as opposed to the amalgamation of business associations, the reasons for the merger articulated ideas in a currency that spoke to the need for African traders to unite. In a nationalistic tone, Marembo described the Zimbabwe African Funeral Services as “one firm” that was, “being run by Africans for Africans”.⁴³ Curiously, the name of the morgue was itself a nod to the contemporary debates on nationalism. African nationalists had begun to use the name Zimbabwe to refer to Southern Rhodesia! However, it was not until 1963 that African traders united into a national association. This development was partly in response to the activities of Colin Kirkpatrick’s ALDC.

3. THE ALDC AND THE ZIMBABWE AFRICAN BUSINESS UNION

Towards the end of 1961, the ALDC, a private firm, stepped up to provide financial assistance to African entrepreneurs, farmers, and cooperative societies.⁴⁴ The company started with a capital outlay of £100 000 with African traders being promised 50 per cent of the loans with the other half going to African farmers.⁴⁵ The brainchild of Colin Kirkpatrick, the ALDC was modelled along the colonial policy of racial partnership that advocated for partnership in business between whites and Africans.⁴⁶ Kirkpatrick arrived in Southern Rhodesia from Britain in 1948. He had an expansive career working with financial institutions and remained the ALDC’s chairperson throughout the firm’s existence.⁴⁷ The African directors of the credit firm hailed from among African Purchase Area farmers and African traders. For example, one of its African directors in 1961 was an African trader. In its brief existence, it included Africans such as the journalist and later nationalist Nathan Shamuyarira and entrepreneur Alden Mwamuka. During a well-publicised meeting of the Board of Directors, the ALDC stated that it focused on, “the provision of finance, various forms of loans, credits, guarantees to African businessmen, African farmers and African Cooperative Societies”.⁴⁸ The finance company charged an interest fee of 2 per cent.

43 West, “African middle-class formation in colonial Zimbabwe”, p. 292.

44 C Kirkpatrick, “The role of the African loan and development company in African agriculture”, *The Rhodesian Journal of Economics* 2 (2), 1968, p. 23.

45 “Finance company is non-political”, *The African Businessman*, 12 May 1962.

46 Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*, p. 123.

47 Kirkpatrick, “The role of the African loan and development company in African agriculture”, p. 23.

48 “More information”, *The African Businessman*, 13 January 1962.

The relationship between African traders and the ALDC led to the formation of many business associations eager to take advantage of the ALDC's funding. As a policy, the ALDC only funded traders that subscribed to a business association. One of the successful business associations to benefit from the scheme was the Mt Darwin African Traders Association (Mt Darwin Association). Mt Darwin traders used the close association between their business association and the ALDC to obtain credit. More importantly, this relationship culminated in the formation of ZABU at the beginning of 1963. Mt Darwin Association was formed in August of 1962 following a meeting between the small town's African entrepreneurs and officials from the ALDC.⁴⁹ Munyoro, the chairman of the Mt Darwin Association, was a vocal Mt Darwin trader and an advocate of a national business association for Africans. Because of the success of the Mt Darwin Association, African traders from all over the country developed an interest in imitating the methods of the association in their own areas.

Another factor that accounts for the formation of business associations across the country is that by the end of 1962, the ALDC was encouraging African traders to form associations to cushion against the risk of default. In that year, the ALDC was reporting that some of the traders that had received the credit firm's funding were failing to pay back the money.⁵⁰ Before this development, African traders had begun to coalesce around local business associations to collectively lobby for credit from the ALDC. Covering a meeting between Kirkpatrick and Mount Darwin African traders and farmers organised through the Native Commissioner's office, *The African Businessman* reported that,

Mr. Kirkpatrick, the Chairman of the Company, explained to the audience how the Company gives credit to individual traders and farmers. He gave an example of how they had helped the Gutu traders who had formed themselves into an association.⁵¹

Consequently, several business associations sprang up between 1962 and 1963 to get credit from the ALDC. Examples of such associations included the Lomagundi African Traders Association, Enkeldoorn and District Businessmen's Association, Wedza African Businessmen's Association, and the Charter Traders' Association, amongst others. As a result, the directors of the ALDC, who included Shamuyarira, went on a whirlwind of tours across the colony meeting representatives of local business associations,

49 "Conference of African traders and storekeepers will discuss a variety of business matters", *The African Businessman*, 23 February 1963.

50 "African loan and development company to help 4 600 African businessmen and farmers through co-operative societies", *The African Businessman*, 24 November 1962.

51 "ALDC holds meeting", *The African Businessman*, 25 August 1962.

and through their efforts, African traders in Lomagundi got £5 000 worth of loans from the ALDC.⁵² By May of 1964, Kirkpatrick reported in the ALDC's annual report that, "some 30 new associations were formed, of which 11 have received financial assistance from us".⁵³ As this article shows, these business associations were more than just tools for getting ALDC aid but reflected the political nationalism of the period.

Consequently, the Mt Darwin Association, together with stakeholders involved with African entrepreneurs such as the ALDC, the Institute of Adult Education, and the Rhodesian Institute of Management, organised a conference for African traders on 23 March 1963. *The African Businessmen* described the conference as, "probably the first of its kind to be held in Southern Rhodesia".⁵⁴ The planning around this conference set the tone for the formation of a national business association for Africans. The conference hoped to inculcate African traders with business skills to help grow their businesses and apply for loans from the ALDC.

The anticipated conference eventually happened in early March of 1963, with more than 300 African traders of various entrepreneurial persuasions in attendance from across Southern Rhodesia.⁵⁵ African traders at the conference took advantage of the ensemble of a large group of traders to form ZABU on the sidelines of discussing matters such as the grain trade, title deeds, and missionaries in competition with African traders in the African reserves.⁵⁶ The conference established an interim committee to draft the constitution of ZABU. The committee included prominent Africans involved in the nationalist movement in the 1960s such as Nathan Shamuyarira and Stanlake Samkange.⁵⁷ For example, Nathan Shamuyarira was a former editor of the *African Daily News* and ZANU's Secretary for Internal Affairs between 1968 and 1971 while Stanlake Samkange was the leader of the National Democratic Party in 1960.⁵⁸ The committee also included the chairman of the Mt Darwin Association, J Munyoro. Although funding for the conference came from European partners such as the ALDC, the Rhodesian Institute of Management, and the Institute of Adult Education at the University College

52 "African traders' association gets £5 000 loan from ALDC", *The African Businessman*, 6 July 1963.

53 "The African loan and development company limited", *The African Businessman*, May 1964.

54 "The African loan and development company limited", *The African Businessman*, May 1964.

55 "African businessmen meet in city: Zimbabwe African Businessmen's Union formed", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

56 "African businessmen meet in city: Zimbabwe African Businessmen's Union formed", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

57 See, West, *The rise of the African middle class*.

58 Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*, XXVIII; Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe*, pp. 96 - 97.

of Rhodesia and the fact that, "a number of European businessmen were present many of whom had come to advertise their goods", the nationalist feeling among African traders was high.⁵⁹ The presence of top African nationalists at this conference suggests the close relationship that existed between African traders and the African political questions of the day.

The debate over the nomenclature of the new organisation shows the connection between the business association movement and the nationalist politics of the 1960s. Shamuyarira proposed calling the movement the Zimbabwe African Traders and Transport Association, suggesting that, "the name should not include the name Southern Rhodesia, since he and many other people did not approve of that name".⁶⁰ Pointing out that Shamuyarira's proposal was a misnomer that did not capture the diversity of African entrepreneurship represented by the business association, Samkange proffered the name Zimbabwe African Businessmen Union.⁶¹ The preference for the name "Zimbabwe" over "Southern Rhodesia" shows how much African traders identified with the politics of the leading African political parties that used the term Zimbabwe as an identity marker. In fact, at ZABU's first meeting of the interim committee, Shamuyarira revealed how the name "Zimbabwe" had caused "ill feelings" among the business association's "well-wishers" who felt that the business association had become "a cover for a political organisation".⁶²

The experiences of ZABU and the Mt Darwin Association in 1963 show that the leadership of the African business association movement was also active in other places outside of Salisbury and Bulawayo. The literature on the African middle class and nationalism has tended to focus on Africans in Bulawayo and the Salisbury townships of Highfield and Harare. The respective works by Ranger and Scarnecchia, for instance, focus primarily on Bulawayo, Harare, and Highfield.⁶³ While the scholarly attention on these African townships is understandable, given that they were a hub of nationalist and middle-class activity, the focus is also a methodological problem. *The African Businessman* shows that the stewardship of the African business movement

59 "African businessmen meet in city: Zimbabwe African businessmen's union formed", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

60 "Caretaker committee of Z.A.B.U. elected: Shamuyarira is convenor", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

61 "Caretaker committee of Z.A.B.U. elected: Shamuyarira is convenor", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

62 "The Zimbabwe African businessmen's union interim committee meets - secretary reports", *The African Businessman*, 6 April 1963.

63 T Ranger, *Bulawayo burning: The social history of a Southern African city, 1893-1960* (London: James Currey, 2010); Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe*.

was in the hands of traders in Mt Darwin through their business association. In elevating the position of Munyoro and the Mt Darwin Association within the African business association movement and broader nationalist struggle, this paper takes a cue from Munochiveyi who notes that,

Because in much of the nationalist scholarship on Zimbabwe, metanarratives of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle lump people like Mutezo into the category of "the masses" (either as an undifferentiated rural peasantry or as urban workers), their anti-colonial politics and contribution to the Zimbabwean struggle are too often muted and/or subordinated to the roles played by elite nationalists.⁶⁴

The success of the Mt Darwin Association in steering the formation of ZABU, together with their success in getting loans from the ALDC, led to the formation of several trader's associations during 1963. In an interview with *The African Businessman*, a Msengezi businessman vowed to help establish a business association in his area pointing out that, "if the Mount Darwin Traders' Association has been able to organise such a big conference and be served so well by people in its area, why not with us in Msengezi?"⁶⁵ Following the success of the conference, Munyoro and some members of the Mt Darwin Association went across the country establishing ZABU affiliate associations. For example, in March, three officials of the Mt Darwin Association travelled to Chiweshe for a meeting with 50 traders from the area.⁶⁶ In April of 1963, Munyoro, who at the time had ascended to the position of secretary of ZABU, addressed African traders in Urungwe at Charles Clack Mission in Urungwe District.⁶⁷ At other tours, the Chairman of ZABU, Nathan Shamuyarira, was sometimes accompanied by Munyoro.⁶⁸ Through this tour of the colony's business areas, Munyoro, Shamuyarira, and the Mt Darwin Association helped establish several African trader associations in Chiweshe, Urungwe, Lomagundi, Sipolilo, Fort Victoria, Wedza, Makoni and Charter.

The literature on the African middle class during this period has shown that during the federal period, this class sought accommodation within the confines of the stated policy of racial partnership.⁶⁹ As such, the ideas around business and the methods of engaging the state expressed by ZABU and its affiliate associations reflect a blend of nationalism and cooperation with the

64 Munochiveyi, "Becoming Zimbabwe from below", p. 88.

65 "ZABU branch will be formed", *The African Businessman*, 23 March 1963.

66 "Chiweshe reserve Z.A.B.U meets: Munyoro appeals for unity among businessmen", *The African Businessman*, 30 March 1963.

67 "Mr Munyoro addresses Urungwe African traders: Urungwe association formed", *The African Businessman*, 13 April 1963.

68 "Fort Vic. businessmen meet: Shamuyarira appeals for unity among businessmen", *The African Businessman*, 4 May 1963.

69 Scarnecchia, *The urban roots of democracy and political violence in Zimbabwe*, p. 74.

state. The experiences of ZABU and its leaders, which included nationalists and entrepreneurs like Munyoro, show that the position of the African middle class during the federal period was complicated. The occasion that marked the formation of ZABU also involved interaction with white business interests as well as African nationalists.⁷⁰ These seeming contradictions characterised the activities and aims of the African business association movement in 1963. The talk given by Munyoro to African traders during his tour of the colony shows that ZABU aimed to project the African trader as a reliable ally of the state able to push the state's programmes.

Reflecting on the importance of businessmen to an audience of Chiweshe traders, Munyoro said African traders had the civic responsibility to curb unemployment and, "that a greater measure of cooperation could be achieved by chiefs, council leaders, teachers, and businessmen if the government worked its schemes through businessmen in the rural areas".⁷¹ At the African traders conference held in March, Munyoro expressed that, "the African businessmen community can be the focus of community development schemes". On the same occasion, he also talked of the "duty" of the African business movement, "to fight against the restrictions imposed by law on African traders. For example, the right to title deeds for business centres".⁷² This ambiguity within the African business movement reflected activism in "tight corners" among African traders that looked to win gains from the colonial state within a constrained business and political environment.⁷³

Importantly, the relationship between ZABU and the ALDC reflected this contradiction more succinctly. One of the aims of ZABU was, "to take full advantage of the existence of the African Loan and Development Company, the Rhodesian Institute of Management and the Institute of Adult Education at the University College".⁷⁴ Indeed, the need to get credit from the ALDC spurred the formation of many of the trader associations throughout Southern Rhodesia discussed in the preceding paragraphs. As has become clear, organisations like the ALDC operated within the confines of colonial policy that was not clear on the role of African entrepreneurs within the colonial economy. The leadership of the African business association movement also reflected the ambiguous position of ZABU. Apart from leading ZABU,

70 "African businessmen meet in city: Zimbabwe African businessmen's union formed", *The African Businessman*, 16 March 1963.

71 "Chiweshe reserve Z.A.B.U meets: Munyoro appeals for unity among businessmen", *The African Businessman*, 30 March 1963.

72 "Mr Munyoro's speech at Salisbury's African traders conference", *The African Businessman*, 30 March 1963.

73 Shutt, "Writing Jasper Savanhu's biography", p. 220.

74 "Mr Munyoro's speech at Salisbury's African traders conference", *The African Businessman*, 30 March 1963.

Shamuyarira also sat on the board of the ALDC. In addition to this, he was also a lecturer at the Institute of Adult Education at the University College of Rhodesia through which position he spearheaded the teaching of bookkeeping to African traders.

ZABU looked to use its unique and ambiguous position, discussed above, to seek concessions from the colonial state. At its first meeting, the African traders resolved to make “representations to the Prime Minister” that, “would be made personally to him on such matters as the Grain Marketing Board, title deeds, education”.⁷⁵ Samkange was also present at the meeting and pointed out that it was “appropriate” that the delegation to the Prime Minister include Colin Kirkpatrick, who had the right ear of Prime Minister Winston Field. As such, although the name and constitution of ZABU’s board looked to tap into African nationalism, its leaders still believed in working within the confines of the racial paternalism of the federal period. In addition to Kirkpatrick, the delegation to the Prime Minister also included Shamuyarira, Munyoro, Chinamano, Marembo, and Mandizvidza. At the meeting, which happened in May 1963, the letter read to Winston Field had many issues pertinent to African traders such as the question of title deeds, the right to trade anywhere, competition from missionaries in the African reserves and the monopoly of the United Bus Company in the transport trade. Field’s response was nothing more than unenthusiastic, promising, “to give a much-detailed reply to the points raised”.⁷⁶ The Prime Minister’s response to the ZABU delegation was symptomatic of the state’s attitude towards African entrepreneurship during the period covered by this paper.

Despite the impressive beginnings of ZABU, by 1964, the business association had all but collapsed. Signs of fracture were noticeable towards the end of 1963, and four distinct reasons account for the demise of Southern Rhodesia’s first national African business association. As the preceding paragraphs show, the leaders of ZABU occupied an ambiguous position within the business association movement. Shamuyarira and Samkange, for instance, who were part of the interim committee of ZABU, also sat on the board of the ALDC. Uncomfortable with his position, Shamuyarira decided to resign from the board of the credit firm, saying that, “his position has always been confusing” and that, “because of his political views, the company’s future would be hampered”.⁷⁷ He explained that his decision aimed at keeping

75 “The Zimbabwe African businessmen’s union interim committee meets - secretary reports”, *The African Businessman*, 6 April 1963.

76 “The Zimbabwe African businessmen’s union interim committee meets - secretary reports”, *The African Businessman*, 6 April 1963.

77 “Shamuyarira resigns from African loan and development company”, *The African Businessman*, 31 August 1963.

the integrity of ZABU's independence intact and that, "ZABU must be an independent organisation. ZABU and ALDC's dealings should be concerned of two sides - the giver and the receiver, and as such, no one can play both sides".⁷⁸ It is no coincidence, however, that Shamuyarira's decision to leave the ALDC happened together with the state's crackdown on the political leadership of the African nationalist movement of which Shamuyarira was a part. In many ways, Shamuyarira's resignation from the ALDC also marked an end to the honeymoon between the colonial state and elite Africans in Southern Rhodesia. West argues that a number of African nationalists had started to disassociate themselves from racial partnership noting that "in short, teatime had ended".⁷⁹

Equally important, the ALDC decided to stop funding African traders around the same time. As argued, African traders had supported the formation of ZABU, in part, on the predicate that the ALDC would offer credit to members of the business association. Consequently, when the ALDC decided to end its relationship with African traders, support for ZABU began to wane. With the state's crackdown on the political leadership of the colony's main African political parties, ZABU was left with a leadership crisis. As highlighted above, the African business association movement had tried to recruit its leadership from among the African nationalists.

Colonial officials such as Native Commissioners also began to deny ZABU's branches permission to conduct meetings, as happened in Wedza in August of 1963 when the Native Commissioner demanded, "to see the association's constitution before he could grant permission to hold the meeting".⁸⁰ In addition to this, ZABU became the victim of political infighting among its leaders. In October 1963, one of ZABU's affiliate business associations in Mahusekwa, through its leader S Marembo launched an attack against Shamuyarira. The Mahusekwa African Traders Association accused the leadership of ZABU of participating in the "nationalist split in the country".⁸¹ Marembo pointed out that since ZABU was nonpolitical, "its leaders should not have taken sides with those people who have broken away from the banned ZAPU".⁸² In response, Shamuyarira described Marembo's statement as "irresponsible and unrealistic".⁸³ Because of this fallout, Marembo and

78 "Shamuyarira resigns from African Loan and Development Company", *The African Businessman*, 31 August 1963.

79 West, *The rise of an African middle class*, p. 219.

80 "New Native Commissioner refused African traders meeting", *The African Businessman*, 17 August 1963.

81 "ZABA branch dissatisfied with leaders", *The African Businessman*, 2 November 1963.

82 "ZABA branch dissatisfied with leaders", *The African Businessman*, 2 November 1963.

83 "ZABA chairman replies to Marembo", *The African Businessman*, 9 November 1963.

Chinamano tendered their resignation from the ZABU committee.⁸⁴ While ZABU continued into 1964, its momentum had withered. In an apocalyptic header, *The African Businessman* asked whether ZABU was dead. In a clear sign that ZABU had suffered from the Rhodesian political crackdown, an African trader quipped that it was, “quite clear to the whole country of Southern Rhodesia that ZABU is not a political party or intends to be. What we want now is cooperation in this great country”.⁸⁵

4. AFRICAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS DURING UDI

With decolonisation gaining momentum during the 1970s, various constituencies within the Southern Rhodesia body politic began to angle for space in the expected post-colonial state.⁸⁶ For business, the panacea lay in giving African traders a share in the economy. Politically, the Rhodesian Front allied with moderate African nationalist movements to establish the abortive Internal Settlement of Zimbabwe Rhodesia during the last six months of 1979.⁸⁷ The liberation movements of ZANU and ZAPU, on the back of a successful armed conflict and enjoying the support of the Organisation of African Unity, the Frontline States, and the world at large, demanded complete independence under majority rule. On their part, African traders formed business associations that sought to take advantage of the decolonisation debate of the 1970s. The most prominent of these business associations were the Rhodesia African Chamber of Commerce (RACC), formed in 1973 and the African Business Promotion Association (ABPA), formed in 1978.

The formation of RACC reignited business association activity among African traders in Southern Rhodesia.⁸⁸ From the onset, RACC looked to avoid nationalist politics. Its name, which dropped the controversial term Zimbabwe, suggested an attempt at conforming to the UDI regime, unlike its predecessor ZABU, which openly invoked nationalist feelings. RACC recruited its leaders from within the business community such as Ben Muचेche and Solomon Tawengwa. These African traders also sat on the boards of the companies of white capital and top banks. Tawengwa, for instance, sat on the board of the powerful mining magnate Rio Tinto while Muचेche was a director in the Reserve Bank. Furthermore, both Tawengwa and Muचेche were on the boards of the Institute of Business and Financial Trust for Emergent

84 “Two resign from ZABA committee”, *The African Businessman*, 9 November 1963.

85 “Is ZABA dead September 1964”, *The African Businessman*, September 1964.

86 Scarnecchia, *Race and diplomacy in Zimbabwe*, p. 179.

87 Scarnecchia, *Race and diplomacy in Zimbabwe*, p. 179.

88 “Africans set up chamber of commerce”, *Rhodesia Herald*, 28 November 1973.

Businessmen Company.⁸⁹ The two institutions provided skills and funding to emerging African entrepreneurs.⁹⁰ Unlike the leaders of the defunct ZABU, the leadership of RACC was not part of conventional nationalist politics.

The unassuming appearance of RACC has led some commenters to dismiss African traders as collaborators of the colonial state. Unlike ZABU, which invoked nationalist sentiments through its name, RACC chose to "conform", as its subtler name suggests. Despite its outward appearance of conformity, a closer look at the activities of RACC reveals that it was able to challenge colonial policies that disadvantaged African traders. From its early days, RACC challenged both Community Development and the policies of the Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation much to the ire of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁹¹ The business association understood that the problems bedeviling African entrepreneurship in Southern Rhodesia stemmed from pieces of legislation such as the Land Tenure Act that denied Africans freehold.

RACC used every available occasion to insist that the business association was apolitical.⁹² However, the association's statements show an attempt to create space for African traders by taking advantage of the colonial fears of impending decolonisation.⁹³ In 1977, for example, leaders of RACC, such as Tawengwa, warned that Southern Rhodesia would head towards socialism if white capital did not "share the fruits of the system" with African traders.⁹⁴ At a seminar organised by the Institute of Business, Tawengwa criticised the Land Tenure Act, stating that, "free enterprise should be free enterprise and should not be mixed with racial thinking".⁹⁵ He also reiterated the message while speaking at a meeting of the Umtali branch of the Rhodesia Institute of Management. Tawengwa stroked these fears stating that,

The free enterprise system would not succeed in Rhodesia if the responsibility was left in the hands of a few white people. As a black businessman, I say that the business community has a responsibility now to take positive steps to ensure that we involve as many people (sic) in the free enterprise system.⁹⁶

89 "You can't go far without an overdraft", *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*, 23 November 1978.

90 T Nyamunda, "The state and black business development: The small enterprises development corporation and the politics of indigenisation and economic empowerment in Zimbabwe", *Historia* 61 (1), 2016, pp. 41- 65; Chambwe, "A history of African entrepreneurship in Southern Rhodesia, 1944 - 1979".

91 "Mussett attacks African trade chamber for snubbing chiefs", *Rhodesia Herald*, 29 May 1975.

92 "Businessmen to stay out of politics", *Rhodesia Herald*, 1977.

93 "African Businessmen seek bigger role", *Rhodesia Herald*, 19 July 1977.

94 "Share fruits of the system", *Rhodesia Herald*, April 1977.

95 "Involve Africans in free enterprise", *Rhodesia Herald*, 20 June 1977.

96 "Economy must aid masses", *Rhodesia Herald*, 30 November 1977.

RACC played an essential role in articulating African trader grievances during this period. Their methods looked to find accommodation within the boundaries of the colonial state. When the UDI regime came face to face with decolonisation, African business association leaders such as Tawengwa did not hesitate to use the state's vulnerability to demand greater inclusion and space within the Rhodesian economy.

A new African business association, the ABPA, emerged in mid-1978.⁹⁷ The emergence of the business association was, perhaps, encouraged by the signing of the Internal Settlement Agreement between Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front and Abel Muzorewa's United African National Congress together with other moderate African nationalists.⁹⁸ The business association had a membership of 4 500 African traders.⁹⁹ The ABPA, under the leadership of Tarisai Ziyambi, did not shy away from politics and sought to use decolonisation politics to its advantage. Ziyambi was for some time the "erstwhile representative of the Rev Ndabaningi Sithole's Zanu PF in Western Europe" signalling his sympathies and those of the ABPA with moderate African nationalists.¹⁰⁰ The ABPA's launch, held at the Jameson Hotel in Salisbury, was well subscribed, with attendants from representatives of white capital such as financial institutions, the Rhodesian National Farmers Union, and the Associated Chamber of Commerce of Rhodesia, among others.¹⁰¹ While appealing for funding from the corporate world at the launch, Ziyambi criticised the exclusion of Africans from participating in commerce, stating that,

It is this one-sided beneficial economic structure that has brought about discontent among and resentment by the black participants, who have lost no chance in exploiting it to the full, thereby creating political instability which is the root cause of our political problems.¹⁰²

Where RACC shied away from taking part in conventional politics, the ABPA was bolder. In August of 1978, the ABPA "invited" representatives of the main nationalist parties "to a meeting on the political situation in Rhodesia".¹⁰³ Later in 1979, the business association attempted to send a delegation to

97 "Black businessmen's organisation", *The British Broadcasting Corporation - Salisbury in English*, 16 00 GMT, 22 June 1978.

98 Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*, p. 169.

99 "Blacks to fight bank ruling", *The Rhodesia Financial Gazette*, 16 March 1979.

100 NAZ, MS/308/56/3, African development fund, 1978; "Black businessmen aim for big time", *NW*, 19 June 1978.

101 "Business promotion body formed", *Zimbabwe Times*, 22 June 1978.

102 "African business body appeals for funds", *Zimbabwe Times*, 23 June 1978.

103 "Parties to present views at meeting", *Rhodesia Herald*, 18 August 1978.

the constitutional talks in Lancaster slated for December of that year.¹⁰⁴ Its secretary, Pollant Mpofu, pointed out that the ABPA delegation, "would fight hard at talks to see that any future Government adopted a more pragmatic economic approach to ensure 'equal benefit of the national cake' by all the country's communities".¹⁰⁵ In the end, the ABPA contingent failed to make it to the talks because of disagreements within the association over their involvement in politics.¹⁰⁶ It was perhaps because of this that RACC attempted to distance itself from the ABPA.¹⁰⁷ It was probably because of its bold attitude towards politics together with white capital anxieties about decolonisation that the ABPA received a great deal of goodwill from big business.¹⁰⁸

Just like RACC, the ABPA pushed for the reform of legislation that disadvantaged African traders. The ABPA also pleaded with white businesses to include Africans as directors in some of Rhodesia's top firms. In addition, the ABPA is notable in its attempt to form an African Bank.¹⁰⁹ African traders had always felt the necessity of an exclusively African bank to tackle their pressing need for credit. However, November 1978 was the first time that Africans, through the ABPA, tried to form an African bank by applying to the Registrar of Banks.¹¹⁰ In apartheid, South Africa, African entrepreneurs were also trying to form an African bank. Apart from West Africa, little work exists on indigenous banks in the rest of colonial Africa. Southall's work on African entrepreneurship in apartheid South Africa stands out and shows that it was not until the late 70s that African traders established a bank through the efforts of the National African Federated Chambers of Commerce (NAFCOC).¹¹¹ In early 1979 there was talk that the Reserve Bank might not approve the ABPA's proposal at the behest of "some white businessmen".¹¹² The ABPA's public relations officer Naison Chitsama said some white businesspeople,

Are holding meetings to influence the Registrar of Banks not only to delay the registration of the ABPA bank, but also to obstruct its establishment on the grounds that it would not be in the interests of the white community to allow Africans to run a bank.¹¹³

104 "Black business sending team to conference", *Rhodesia Herald*, 28 August 1979.

105 "Black business sending team to conference", *Rhodesia Herald*, 28 August 1979.

106 "The African business promotion association", *Rhodesia Herald*, 29 August 1979.

107 "Businessmen seek war compensation", *Rhodesia Herald*, 14 October 1978.

108 "Association 'thinking big': Good reaction to new African business body", *Rhodesia Herald*, 29 June 1978.

109 "African bank is wanted", *National Observer*, 18 January 1979.

110 "African bank is wanted", *National Observer*, 18 January 1979.

111 Southall, "African capitalism in contemporary South Africa", p. 49.

112 Southall, "African capitalism in contemporary South Africa", p. 49.

113 Southall, "African capitalism in contemporary South Africa", p. 49.

Drawing on Afrikaner and African American examples, Chitsama defended the need for an African bank, saying that,

We are not asking for any favour. All we want is an opportunity to operate our own bank in terms of the Banking Act as has been done in other countries such as the United States and the Republic of South Africa where Negroes and Afrikaners respectively have established their own community bank.¹¹⁴

Nonetheless, in February of 1979, the Registrar of Banks rejected the ABPA's proposal to form a bank. In his rejection letter, the Registrar John Gurney argued that apart from meeting the prerequisite of the Banking Act, a prospective bank must have, "the ability to compete for deposits and customers with institutions which are already operating and maintain the services it plans to provide without prejudicing its solvency".¹¹⁵ The timing of the bank proposal tried to take advantage of the decolonisation discourse of the time. When their first attempt to launch a bank failed, the ABPA appealed to the Minister of Finance, hoping that an African Minister under the expected Internal Settlement of Zimbabwe Rhodesia would approve the African Bank.¹¹⁶ Commenting on the matter, the *Rhodesian Financial Gazette* noted the significance of decolonial politics at play saying that,

It could be a very tricky decision for the new Minister. It is almost certain that this portfolio will be handled by a black, and there could be considerable grassroots pressure on him to make a major decision to aspiring local businessmen in Zimbabwe Rhodesia.¹¹⁷

Mpofu, the ABPA's secretary invoked a postcolonial vision under African rule, maintaining that, "the biggest consumers and spenders of the future will be blacks, and under the new racial order brought about by majority rule there will have to be an evening out of Black and White salaries", and therefore an African bank was a necessity.¹¹⁸

When the Internal Settlement government took office in June of 1979, there was high optimism within the ABPA that their bank would now come to fruition. However, this did not happen, as the new Finance Minister under Zimbabwe Rhodesia rejected the ABPA's pitch to set up an African bank. The business association's secretary registered his disappointment with the United African National Council led Zimbabwe Rhodesia pointing out that,

114 Southall, "African capitalism in contemporary South Africa", p. 49.

115 "Blacks to fight bank ruling", *The Rhodesia Financial Gazette*, 16 March 1979.

116 "Blacks to fight bank ruling", *The Rhodesia Financial Gazette*, 16 March 1979.

117 "Blacks to fight bank ruling", *The Rhodesia Financial Gazette*, 16 March 1979.

118 "African bankers hit out", *Rhodesia Herald*, 17 March 1979.

The decision was a slap in the face of those who believe in the free enterprise system and proved the UANC-dominated administration was quite incapable of sweeping away both the political and economic anomalies of the Rhodesian Front for the benefit of the Africans.¹¹⁹

The experiences of the ABPA with the Smith/Muzorewa government reflect the challenges of the Internal Settlement as a decolonisation alternative. African moderates who included a good number of African traders had hoped that Zimbabwe Rhodesia would bring the much-needed change in their fortunes. In the end, the Internal Settlement regime was short-lived, lasting only six months.

5. CONCLUSION

The article traced how African traders negotiated a restrictive colonial environment by galvanising around business associations during a time of heightened nationalist activities. A historical understanding of African business associations such as the Mt Darwin Association, ZABU, RACC and the ABPA make several points about African nationalism, civic organisation and decolonisation during the time of the federation and the UDI. Firstly, a historicization of the African business association movement adds to the historiography of African entrepreneurship in colonial Africa by reconstructing a key piece in the history of African traders in colonial Zimbabwe. The article joins other studies that examine efforts at solidarity among African traders in countries such as South Africa, Lesotho, Tanzania and Nigeria.

It also contributes to the rich historiography on African nationalism by showing the ways in which African traders organised to participate in the decolonisation of Zimbabwe. In studies on African entrepreneurship in colonial Africa, African traders are seen as aloof to politics. This article, however, argued that African traders played a crucial role in Zimbabwe's "nationalist moment" through its proto-business associations formed during the 1950s culminating in the formation of the ZABU in 1963. Importantly, the paper decentred the narrative on African nationalism from places like Highfield, Harari and Bulawayo and celebrity politicians to previously unknown places and individuals like Mt Darwin rural African traders such as J Munyoro.

Operating in "tight corners", African traders, and the business associations they formed, accommodated the colonial state while at the same time forcefully making their demands. As the paper argued, African traders formed ZABU to take advantage of racial partnership and the loans that the ALDC provided. At the same time, ZABU also articulated the narrative

119 "African bankers hit out", *Rhodesia Herald*, 17 March 1979.

of African nationalism exemplified by its use of the name “Zimbabwe” and by including seasoned African politicians within its leadership. After the crackdown on African nationalist movements which led to the demise of ZABU, the Ben Mucheche-led RACC was cautious and rid itself of associations with African nationalism. Albeit they made concrete demands on the colonial state and challenged the colonial policy of Community Development. The ABPA, the article argued, took advantage of the state’s vulnerability under pressure to decolonise during the late 1970s to make demands that would advantage African traders.