

Josiah Brownell (2011), *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race*, London: I.B. Tauris, ISBN 978 1 84885 475 8, 256 pp.

Josiah Brownell's book is an account of the collapse of Rhodesia from the perspective of population demographics and the politics of race. Developed from his doctoral thesis, the book is divided into seven chapters generally focusing on the population numbers game. This numbers game was principally defined by demographic imbalances whereby whites were undesirably (for the colonial state) in the minority against the backdrop of a neo-Malthusian African population "explosion" (46). The story is an interesting contribution to the literature on Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and the liberation war from a demography perspective. From the outset, the author argues that parallel to the visible military struggle was "the hidden war of numbers".

Using archives in Britain, the United States of America and South Africa, Brownell constructs his narrative based principally on the primary sources of the Rhodesian army association, along with oral history archives, newspapers, and the Ian Smith papers. He utilises official colonial political discourse, informed by policy debates as well as findings from commissions and committees, such as the Sadie report of 1967 and the Committee on Population Problems of 1972. Central to his argument is the problematic contention that it is "quite obviously true that had whites in Rhodesia been able to establish themselves as a majority of the Rhodesian population, Britain would have granted dominion status to the settler state" (9). The sources consulted reflect something of an official top-down approach, thus presenting a further conceptual methodological challenge to a history that largely characterises whites as a homogeneous mass in Rhodesia during UDI (1965–1979).

Brownell's contribution to demographic history in colonial Zimbabwe develops interesting insights into population issues hitherto only vaguely sketched by earlier scholarship. The war of numbers was triggered; it emerges through the "shocking" findings of the 1962 and later the 1969 census, which "spurred the state to focus its energies on addressing these racial population imbalances" (25). In censuses before 1962, Africans had never been enumerated. The book captures developments that Brownell correctly and convincingly attributes to the increasingly popular global attention to population issues. The study of demography became largely informed by Warren Thompson, and later by Frank Notenstein's Demographic Transition Theory (DTT) and the neo-Malthusian anxieties that characterised the 1970s.

Within Rhodesia, demographic structures were defined by racial spaces and numbers, with the characteristically unstable “island” of “shifting and shuffling” whites having advanced, colonial officials asserted, into the equilibrium of “Stage Four” of the DTT; in fact, Rhodesia faced a net loss in the white population because of the largely transient nature of white Rhodesians. Explaining the net population loss to emigration using Albert Hirshman’s theory of “exit, voice, and loyalty”, Brownell argues that there was limited loyalty to the Rhodesian state, especially among many new white immigrants. He depicts these immigrants as mostly “good-time Charlies”, who were attracted to the country for the temporary benefits to be derived. When these new white immigrants came into conflict with the UDI state, their failure or inability to voice their discontent, disapproval and other grievances left them with almost no other option but to exit, whether voluntarily or forcibly (deportation). Conversely, the “sea” of the black population was considered to be in “Stage Two” (growth) of the DTT characterised by high fertility and low mortality rates, which were responsible for the explosion. Ultimately, this increased pressure on the state to increase spending on education, health, housing and employment opportunities, all of which “exerted weight on the spatial and theoretical divisions of the territory” (52): There was great fear of Malthusian predictions becoming a reality. Brownell contrasts the above perception of the Rhodesian state against the “African agency” represented by the nationalist leaders. The latter articulated a contrasting reality citing resource inequity and misdistribution, rather than the expanding African population, as the problem.

Brownell’s work contributes an important analysis of the issues arising out of the 1962 and 1969 censuses and the consequent reaction of the Rhodesian state to the demographic situation. However, this narrative is set against factual, methodological and conceptual limitations. Brownell depicts Rhodesia as a postcolonial state. This inaccuracy arises out of the misconceptions over the meaning ascribed to the UDI. The unilateral declaration was never recognised, and the Rhodesian state did not have a legal entitlement to independence. Instead, Rhodesia was seen as a rebellious colony until the independence settlement at Lancaster House that precluded majority rule. In spite of brief and remote references to the complexities within different segments of colonial populations, Brownell also portrays Rhodesian society in terms of rigid binaries: homogeneous, privileged whites versus masses of underprivileged blacks. These errors feed into his theoretical conceptions of how the Rhodesian communities articulated their interests.

The colonial state, for Brownell, became concerned with the demographic imbalances only after the “shocking” census findings. The state never doubted that Africans were always significantly populous in relation to

whites throughout the colonial period. Brownell's perception that it was only in the 1960s that a rigorous campaign to attract white immigrants began is inaccurate. This had always been the policy, especially given the fears that Brownell himself captures when he references Godfrey Huggins' speech on an "island of white" in the "sea of black", epitomising the desire of the colonial state to "balance" the demographic structure. More importantly, however, it was an expression of racialised political, economic and socially segregative interests. Brownell further depicts the Reserves as remote, exclusively African places far beyond the reach and control of the colonial state. The only reason Brownell assumes that administrators were ignorant is because they had undertaken no enumeration exercises before 1962. In fact, there was a Department of Native Affairs through which commissioners and other state functionaries represented the state and, to some extent, the Africans themselves. As such, the developments in the African areas were within the relative proximity of the gaze of the colonial state and under its control.

A reading of the works of scholars such as Giovanni Arrighi, Charles van Onselen and others shows that the labour shortages that affected the colonial economy in the period before the 1940s implied that state priorities focused more on harnessing workers than on collecting population figures. It was only with the interaction of changing global dynamics characterised by decolonisation and complex domestic developments toward the collapse of Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953–1963) that the political economy significantly transformed. Given the consolidation that had taken place in the colonial economic landscape by the 1960s, the settler state was reaching the limits of settler accumulation. Africans were increasingly expressing their discontent with the colonial setup, seeking initially reform and ultimately revolution.

Brownell's narrative of the collapse of Rhodesia is conceptually premised upon two parallel wars: the visible liberation struggle and the hidden war of numbers. The outbreak of the war of numbers almost coincides with the outbreak of the liberation war. The author presupposes that had the white settlers formed a significant or even dominant segment of society, they would have stood a better chance of "defending" the Rhodesian state. Although the author was imaginative in testing the possibilities of alternate circumstances, "if-only" approaches are always fraught with uncertainties. Anchored on this premise, the body of material and discourse used was presented in a way that justified his hypothesis. Consequently, Brownell accuses the actors of the guerrilla war and scholars focusing on colonial white history – such as Alois Mlambo, Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, Martin Meredith and others – of having collective amnesia, and reminds them that there was a hidden war of numbers. Arguably, he overstates his

point by portraying population dynamics during the UDI period as a war of numbers. No doubt, racial demographic imbalances were critical, but they did not actually constitute a war.

*The Collapse of Rhodesia* suffers from methodological limitations. First, Brownell erroneously dismisses the literature on white colonial experiences, accusing it of offering an insufficient explanation of the settler situation. He thus elevates his own study, which captures the defining constant problem of settler society as the demographic imbalance. Second, the select sources he consulted reflect an official, top-down undertone, which he uses to generalise population issues. Tapes (whose contents are unclear) from the Oral History Archives at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol (closed in 2008) are imposed as representing the voices of people in Rhodesian society. Insofar as Brownell attempts to assess what increasingly constitutes Rhodesian identity, this particular aspect has already been captured by Godwin and Hancock, whom he does not sufficiently credit. The numbers game itself has already been examined from different angles and to varying degrees by other scholars, such as Mlambo. Moreover, although he uses sources from the United States, Britain and South Africa, he neglects to consult Zimbabwe's own citizens regarding their historical experiences. Instead, he not only speaks on their behalf, but also reminds them of a "collectively forgotten" aspect of their past, the hidden war of numbers (19).

For all its methodological and conceptual shortcomings, Brownell's book could serve as a provocative look at the importance of demographic issues on the political, economic and social landscape of any given country. He correctly notes that there is a relative shortage of works on population history, which is just as important as other, purely political, economic or social analyses of history. As such, it provides a refreshing look at the liberation war from a different perspective. It invites engagement with existing histories on the liberation war and thus stimulates debate on prevailing orthodoxies. In terms of its contribution to knowledge, Brownell's book is a good read. However, contrary to the author's claims, it does not provide useful revisions or updates of existing studies on the area.

■ Tinashe Nyamunda