

## The Simultaneity of Past and Present in Ian Douglas Smith's *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (1997)

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### ABSTRACT

This article proposes a reading of white Zimbabwean narratives that takes cognisance of how the Rhodesian past and the Zimbabwean present inhabit shared time and place. This reading suggests that white Zimbabwean narratives are characterised by simultaneity. In these texts it can be seen that the (Rhodesian) past and the (Zimbabwean) present appear incommensurate but nevertheless coeval. Using Ian Smith's *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (hereafter referred to as *The Great Betrayal*), I argue that in Zimbabwe, like in other former colonies, the colonial past exists alongside the post-colonial present despite persistent calls by the new post-colonial governments for former colonisers to forget. In Smith's *The Great Betrayal*, the past inhabits the present in three forms: as an endurance of the founding principles of British Empire; as an indictment of the Zimbabwean present; and as a strategic emplacement of white Rhodesians within a new Zimbabwe.

### KEYWORDS

Simultaneity; white Zimbabwean; autobiography; Rhodesia

### Introduction

Hegemonic political and critical accounts, as will be shown, suggest that uses of the Rhodesian past in white discourses undermine white claims to belonging to Zimbabwe. Indeed, some white narratives exhibit a deep-seated fixation with Rhodesian sensibilities, rendering them an awkward fit in a more strictly defined Zimbabwean literature. This article does not intend to pursue such observations and arguments. Instead, I propose a reading of white Zimbabwean narratives that takes cognisance of how the Rhodesian past and the Zimbabwean present inhabit shared time and place. This reading suggests that white Zimbabwean narratives are characterised by simultaneity—'the recognition of difference within the "same" moment of time' (Bastian 152). In these texts it can be seen that the (Rhodesian) past and the (Zimbabwean) present appear incommensurate but nevertheless coeval.

Smith's life narrative is an unapologetic remembrance of Rhodesia that nevertheless concedes the existence of a Zimbabwean present that retains remnants from both Rhodesia and Britain before it. While acknowledging that Rhodesia 'had gone' (Smith *The Great Betrayal* 361), Smith perceives the role whites can play in Zimbabwe within