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Over fifty years after illegally declaring independence from the United Kingdom, there remains much historical work to do on the settler society of Rhodesia. Though it generated a huge amount of commentary and analysis at the time (1965-1980) ‘white Rhodesia’ then dropped under the radar, only to resurface again in the last few decades. During this time, imperial historiography has changed profoundly and studies of phenomena like decolonisation have taken on a new salience. The peculiar case of Rhodesia provides an opportunity to interrogate the conventional wisdoms of decolonisation – both how to ‘do’ a history of it, and what ‘decolonisation’ itself is. Law’s study is a welcome addition to both the specific history of white Rhodesia and also much broader debates upon the end of Empire.

In the last few decades, the heterogeneous nature of white Rhodesian society has been firmly established. In this new climate the position of gender within white Rhodesian society remains relatively under-studied. Since the advent of ‘new’ imperial history many fruitful and revealing studies have emerged analysing the place of women in colonial societies but, as Law points out, white women are frustratingly absent from many political studies of white Rhodesian society. This lends a sense of urgency to the book as it works to address these significant and lamentable literary lacunae.

The ambition of the work is commendable and, for such a comparatively short book, a great deal of ground is covered. Law adroitly illustrates the profoundly-gendered nature of society in the ‘white man’s country’ of Rhodesia, going back to the early colonial period of the 1890s. She shows how settler women were integral in creating the Rhodesian nation, perpetuating and enforcing colonial notions of civilisation, race, and domesticity, ‘literally and metaphorically turn[ing] Rhodesian pioneers into settlers’ (p. 35). In this historical overview, Law is also careful to point out that alongside prominent upper and middle-class women like Ethel Tawse Jollie, a complicated character who was instrumental in keeping Rhodesia from joining with South Africa, there were women such as Daphne Anderson, whose life was characterised by the permeability of the social, cultural, and racial barriers that other white women worked so hard to maintain.

The bulk of the book is concerned with the role women played in ‘liberal’ politics in Rhodesia between 1950 and 1980. Over several chapters, Law not only illustrates the activities and struggles of white women in what might conventionally be considered as the ‘public sphere’, but also undertakes a deconstruction of white Rhodesian ‘liberal’ politics at a critical period in the country’s history. Through several in-depth case studies of the experiences of women such as Diana Mitchell, Eileen Haddon, and Miriam Staunton, Law teases out the peculiarieties of white Rhodesian liberalism, a movement not

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1 Here ‘Rhodesia’ refers to the country formally known as ‘Southern Rhodesia’, which became independent as Zimbabwe in 1980, as distinct from ‘Northern Rhodesia’, which became Zambia in 1964.
necessarily synonymous with liberalism as we would understand it today. Indeed, this is one of Law's central points, as she rightly encourages us to reconsider our understanding of the terms 'liberal', and political 'left' and 'right' as we apply it to the white Rhodesian example. She illustrates the 'struggle within the struggle' that took place as women like Diana Mitchell sought to advance the cause of gender, as well as racial, equality from the often circumscribed positions within these frequently misogynistic movements.

The main body of the work does an excellent job in further disaggregating white Rhodesia in the critical period of 1950-1980, and shows how the place of women in white society was hotly contested in the Rhodesian public sphere, not just in the activities of political parties but through the letters pages of The Rhodesia Herald, the country’s most popular daily newspaper and a fertile source of white Rhodesian opinion on a whole range of matters. She demonstrates the frequently contradictory positions held by women on gender, race, and class, further complicating our picture of gender in this period. Unfortunately, the focus upon 'liberal' oppositional politics precludes any detailed study of the positions, roles, and attitudes held by those women who supported, or were involved with, the ruling Rhodesian Front (RF) party, which would no doubt make a fascinating companion piece to this study.

Finally, the book ends with an extensive piece of oral history work, as Law interviews a wide range of women who lived in Rhodesia about their experiences and memories. Using this as a way to challenge notions of 'neat' decolonisations, she accurately shows the effect of time and events upon memory and historical understanding, showing how many of her white interviewees continued to subscribe to distinctly colonial worldviews decades after Rhodesia disappeared. In her conclusion she notes that these views provide a counterpoint to the liberalism of the women in previous chapters, conceding that 'women who subscribed to the various incarnations of white liberalism were a minority in settler society' (p. 165).

Law’s book makes a bold and essential contribution to the growing literature on white Rhodesia in the post-war period, as well as broader understandings of empire, decolonisation, and gender within settler societies. Furthermore, it ably demonstrates how we can use the oft-overlooked example of Rhodesia as a lens onto wider trends which stretched far beyond the borders of this small southern African settler society.