

Episode 63: Colonial Rhodesia

Summary

Our guest Jane was born in Zimbabwe when it was ruled by the British and called Rhodesia. In this conversation she talks about the time she spent in Rhodesia in her youth.

Transcript

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Today I'm speaking to my friend Jane about her home country, which is Zimbabwe. Umm, but of course, when you were there, it wasn't called that, was it?

Jane: No, when I lived there it was called Rhodesia.

Nick: And so, you were born and you grew up, uhh, living in Rhodesia?

Jane: Yeah.

Nick: And so it's in southern Africa, umm, and so it's ... does it have a similar kind of, uhh, colonial history to South Africa and Botswana and the other countries nearby?

Jane: Yeah, a little bit. It was, umm, colonised a bit later than South Africa by Cecil John Rhodes. That's where the name comes from - Rhodesia. Of course it was a - like most of the colonies - it was governed by Britain through a sort of local government and in the mid-sixties (1960s), the British government said it was about time that Rhodesia should have majority rule, which meant ... would have meant having black politicians, black government. And the white people didn't want that so they declared independence against Britain, or from Britain, which as far as I know¹ is the only place that ever did that in quite that form.

Nick: Yeah, it's really extraordinary. I mean, you were just telling me this before but that usually, of course, it's the local people, or the majority, who has to, uhh, rise

¹ as far as I know: I believe, to the best of my knowledge. In online use, it's often shortened to the acronym AFAIK.

up² against the colonial power. In this case the colonial power, Britain, was willing³ to give up the power but it was the local whites, umm, who didn't want to.

Jane: Yes.

Nick: And so they'd been there, I guess, for a few generations and were pretty comfortable with, uhh, with white rule.

Jane: Yes.

Nick: And so, and so, what happened then? The, uhh, British decided to pull out⁴ or the whites rebelled against the British?

Jane: Umm, yes, I'm not quite sure why Britain went along with it. I mean, there were a lot of talks. Umm, I was too young at the time to really follow the ins and outs⁵ of the political situation. Umm, but basically the white Rhodesians, you could say, won their case. Umm, it wasn't accepted in the world. There were sanctions⁶ against the Rhodesian government, umm, almost from all over. But in fact it ended up being a very good thing for the - in a sense - for the economy because it was forced to be more independent.

Nick: And so was this a kind of apartheid like South Africa?

Jane: Yes, it was, umm, a little bit like that. But where things were the law in South Africa, they were more like a socially acceptable or not acceptable thing in Rhodesia. In South Africa, for example, there were three classes, racial classes: there were whites, and blacks, and in the middle there was something called coloureds and Asians. And, for business purposes, the Japanese were classed as whites so that they could stay in the white hotels and do business, but every other Asian person was in the sort of second category. And in Rhodesia it wasn't quite that organised. It was also not illegal to have sex or marriage with somebody of a different race as it was in South Africa. But it was very socially looked down upon, of course. Umm, yeah, there was ... I grew up going to a music camp every year which was multi-racial and we slept in the same dormitories as people from all sorts of different backgrounds. Umm, there were quite a lot of, umm, quite a lot of Indian people at the time. I had Indian friends as well as black friends, partly through music, and partly through my parents. So, yeah, I didn't really fit into the white supremacist pattern.

² rise up (phrasal verb): challenge, protest

³ willing: prepared, ready. See also: Episodes 18 and 29.

⁴ pull out (phrasal verb): withdraw, leave

⁵ ins and outs: details

⁶ sanctions: trade penalties or withdrawal of trading rights imposed on a country

Nick: And so was your regular school segregated⁷?

Jane: My school was, yeah, because the only non-segregated schools were private and we couldn't afford a private school. But I taught at a private school later.

Nick: And so that's interesting that something like music, which I know has been a love of your life, uhh, was one of the things that helped you then integrate with the other people?

Jane: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Nick: And so ... so it wasn't a strict segregation then, but it was still always in the background I guess?

Jane: Yes, it followed, very much followed the pattern of South Africa without it being quite as extreme. And I have to admit there were kids at my school who wouldn't speak to me because they found it so shocking that I had black friends who had actually come to my house and eaten with us. You know, I mean, people ... you could have black people in your house because most people had black servants, but to sit down at a table with somebody of a different race was so shocking.

Nick: And so maybe that ... maybe there was a kind of a lack of unity then within the ruling whites, that there were some people like you who were willing to mix with the blacks and then other people who weren't. Maybe that was a factor as well.

Jane: Well that was certainly the case in South Africa as well, but they got put into prison or were deported⁸, basically. So ... but even my brother, you know, my brother, who's a bit older than me, he taught at a multi-racial school. And he was actually being followed by the police. He was being sort of observed for this kind of behaviour. And he ended up getting fed up⁹ with it. He just left and he never went back, not even for a visit.

Nick: And so you were saying that around this time, a lot of people started to leave or once the true independence and majority rule came, then a lot of the whites just left?

Jane: Well, a lot of white people left before that because they were fed up with the white supremacist government and they saw no ... it wasn't very clear what the solution was going to be. I mean, there were twenty-five blacks to one white in the country when I left in 1976. And I saw no peaceful way forward, I have to admit. I

⁷ segregated: divided, usually along racial lines

⁸ deported: forced to leave a country

⁹ fed up (phrasal verb): sick of, tired of

thought ... I left because I wanted to study music but I might have left anyway because I thought there was going to be a bloody revolution. And I would have had no way of blaming the people for reacting that way. But I didn't want to sort of stay and get killed for something I didn't believe in.

Nick: No, of course.

Jane: That was sort of my standpoint¹⁰ at the time. And then later in the seventies (1970s), there was ... there had actually been a war, a civil war, or a war of independence, which stayed mainly on the borders of the country, but, umm, yeah, people started actually speaking, the white government started speaking to the African leaders, and, you know, discussing things with Britain. And it became clear that a fairly peaceful solution was going to come and then in 1980 it happened. It started off very well.

Nick: And so then you have, that's - what? - fourteen years before the same thing happened in South Africa, so it was quite advanced in that way.

Jane: Yep.

Nick: And so you said you went back recently for the first time in all that time?

Jane: Yes, yes.

Nick: And so that must have been very emotional for you.

Jane: Yes it was. It was very exciting and very interesting. And I'd love to spend more time there. I dream about going back to live there but I'm not sure that that will ever happen.

Nick: Well, you never know, so maybe one day.

Jane: Yes.

Nick: But anyway, thank you very much for talking to us.

Jane: It's a pleasure.

¹⁰ standpoint: point of view, opinion

Comprehension Questions

1. According to Jane, what were the differences between South Africa and Rhodesia in terms of race relations?
2. Why did some of Jane's (white) school classmates refuse to speak to her?
3. Why did Jane leave Rhodesia?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. After Fidel Castro came to power, the United States imposed _____ on Cuba in the form of a trade embargo.
2. In Alabama, schools were still _____ until Wendy's mother's senior year of high school.
3. The line to get into the Vatican was so long that after waiting for two hours and hardly moving, eventually they got _____ and left. They returned early the next day.
4. For certain jobs, candidates need to be _____ to work at night or on weekends, even if they don't really want to.
5. If the government descends into tyranny, the people or the army will _____ and overthrow it.
6. The new CEO spent her first week on the job learning the _____ of the company as she tried to figure out how to make it profitable again.
7. He hurt his ankle in training and, as a result, he had to _____ of next week's tournament. He hopes to be back on court again in two weeks.
8. The Internet connection still isn't working, _____. I tried about 30 minutes ago and it wasn't back on then.
9. The politician changed his _____ on foreign policy so many times that eventually people stopped believing anything he said.
10. The authorities rounded up and _____ a group of illegal immigrants. They were sent back to their home country.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. What do you know about the modern history of Zimbabwe since majority rule and true independence came in 1980, after the period Jane spoke about?
2. Are there issues regarding race relations in your country? If so, can you describe them?
3. Are you surprised that Jane said she would love to return to live in Zimbabwe after being away for over 40 years? Why or why not?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. In apartheid South Africa, racism was codified by law, whereas in Rhodesia, a similar form of racism existed but not to the same legal extent.
2. Because she was friends with some black people and had invited them to her house for dinner.
3. She left to study music abroad but she thought that civil war was coming to Rhodesia, so she might have left anyway.

Exercises

1. sanctions
2. segregated
3. fed up
4. willing
5. rise up
6. ins and outs
7. pull out
8. as far as I know
9. standpoint
10. deported