

Liberation Beyond the Nation: An Introduction

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The articles in this special issue were first presented in April 2019 at a conference titled 'Liberation Beyond the Nation: Comparisons, Interactions and Methodologies', organised by the editors at the University of the Western Cape.¹ The organisers sought to build on recent innovations and to break new ground in the study of the liberation movements that have been central to the making of the modern history of southern Africa. The twenty papers presented at the conference provided compelling evidence that novel ways of thinking about and approaching the interlinked histories of these movements can produce significant shifts in our understandings of their history and their legacies.

Over the last decade, researchers have challenged the centrality of the 'nation' to the histories of 'national' liberation movements. This in part occurred due to earlier efforts to reframe our understanding of the histories of southern African liberation through the twin frameworks of decolonisation and the global Cold War. These approaches focused attention on the influence of geo-political dynamics and superpower patronage on liberation movements, though they tended to emphasise realist explanations of political change and to assume that ideologies flowed from the East or West to the South, their meanings largely intact or assumed.² More recent work has emphasised the transnational dynamics of liberation movement politicians, fighters and supporters alongside networks of international solidarity. These approaches have sought to break down assumed hierarchies among actors and to emphasise the quotidian aspects of global South linkages and interactions in general, and the negotiated and multi-directional exchanges between global, regional and local actors in southern African locations in particular.³

The achievements of earlier histories in mapping some (but by no means all) of the military, strategic, political and economic aspects of struggle history has enabled a more open-ended consideration of the social and cultural histories of liberation movements, and a new focus on entanglements, fractures and encounters that bring into view identities and motivations that do not easily fit a nationalist mould or indeed a story of liberation. Not least,

¹ We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Centre for Humanities Research and the Department of History at UWC for hosting us and to the *Journal of Southern African Studies* for generously funding the conference.

² Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Pretoria, and the struggle for southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003); O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005); Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot 'Cold War'* (London, Pluto Press, 2008); Sue Onslow (ed.), *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation* (London, Routledge, 2009).

³ Some of this new work has been published in special issues of this journal. See Hilary Sapire, 'Liberation movements, Exile and International Solidarity', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 2 (2009), pp. 271-86; Luise White and Miles Larmer, 'Introduction: Mobile Soldiers and the Un-national liberation of southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 6, (2014), pp. 1271-1274; and Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Blessing-Miles Tendi, 'The Transnational Histories of Southern African Liberation Movements: An Introduction', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 1-12 (now also published as *Transnational Histories of Southern Africa's Liberation Movements* (London, Routledge, 2020), with an afterword by Hilary Sapire). Other recent contributions focusing on southern Africa include Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders and Helder Adegas Fonseca (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960-1990* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019).

owing to growing disillusionment with the achievements of political liberation, the fragile hegemony of a victor's history has begun to give way to a more considered engagement with the experience of 'losers' and not easily 'usable' stories – the liberation movements that did not come to power, the dissidents who were silenced, the practices and cultural productions that spoke of 'un-national' agendas, those who fought on the 'wrong' side of history, and categories of people such as refugees or labour migrants who did not adopt identities considered pertinent to liberation. In these stories, we can see how Southern Africa's uneasy relationship with its past liberation struggles is constantly revealed in and remade by attempts to centre that past in present political configurations. These tensions have equally shaped the questions that new generations of the region's scholars have asked, and how they have answered those questions.

Before turning to the papers collected here in more depth it is worth pointing out that many of their insights have come through methodological innovation and the diversification of sources, both hallmarks of recent work on the cultural and quotidian histories of liberation struggles, and a necessary part of pushing forward questions that go beyond a canon concerned with liberating the nation. It is notable, for example, that five of the papers draw on deep engagements with the life narratives of rank and file veterans of all sides of liberation wars, from black soldiers fighting in South Africa's army who had once been members of Angolan liberation movements, to Soviet advisers and specialists in Angola, to ex-combatants of the armies of FRELIMO, ZAPU, and SWAPO. These individuals were often sidelined if not silenced by dominant narratives, or may have found themselves squeezed narrowly into pre-cast liberation movement historiographies. Here these narratives are used to explore questions not of war and nationalism but of military culture, food, political identities, ideology and memory. They allow us to see how daily struggles and interactions were given meaning through cultural expression, imagination, and ideas that have retained a powerful emotional and political valence over decades. Such stories are the result of lengthy processes of relationship-building by researchers and sometimes serendipitous political shifts, and they carry a poignant, urgent edge owing to the thinning ranks of this elderly cohort.

Many of the papers draw on a combination of interviews and archival sources, often bringing to light new sources and new kinds of archives. Some of these are texts found in state archives, notably the detailed records of state intelligence and defence agencies, here given new readings that challenge the dominant accounts of both states and liberation movements. Some are photographic and sound archives, used to tell stories unrecorded in texts, but which powerfully shaped representations, ideas and communities that escaped the control of either liberation movements or their host countries. The private archives of individuals are also crucial in a number of the papers, and again allow authors to go beyond what is captured in state and movement narratives, picking up on the lives and fates of individuals and whole groups who fell outside officially sanctioned stories through biography and 'micro-history'. One of the reasons liberation struggle history has remained siloed in the nation is the limits that language has put on researchers' ability to access sources from elsewhere: two authors here make use of Chinese and Soviet language sources, some in official archives and others in personal collections. These enable otherwise difficult to access

facets of liberation struggles' transnational lives to be brought into wider conversations and to be parsed rather than taken for granted.⁴

Finally, several authors engage in observation and participant observation of recent, performative efforts to memorialise the liberation struggle dead. These engagements offer a view of the tremendous complexity involved in state and other attempts to manage memory, and the intensely political contests that continue to take place over such efforts.

Regional and International Interactions

Southern Africa's liberation history played out in a context of Western European political change, the global Cold War and the early post-colonial history of much of Africa. The range of international and regional interactions between and among colonial powers, liberation movements, regional hosts and their superpower supporters, while providing fertile territory for previous researchers, has not always captured the nature and consequences of those interactions among movements' leaders, soldiers and civilian supporters.

In his keynote address to the 2019 conference, **Jean-Michel Mabeko-Tali** explained how the ideological unity that was so strikingly displayed in the period of the armed struggle among the MPLA, Frelimo and other Soviet-aligned movements in Portugal's colonies resulted from personal and intellectual encounters among mid-twentieth century Lusophone African students in metropolitan universities, an environment that was both distinctly Portuguese and reminiscent of equivalent anti-colonial milieux in London and Paris.⁵

Although the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was a significant influence on the likes of Mário de Andrade (later the MPLA's first president) and Joaquim Chissano (later Frelimo and Mozambican president), the refusal of these emergent leaders to subordinate their liberation to the wider global ideological struggle sparked fertile debates about the relationship between race, class and nation. Notwithstanding the repressive colonial system, the 1950s and early 1960s was a period in which this generation of leaders drew on an extraordinary range of emancipatory thought, from Sartre to Senghor, Césaire to Mao, to interpret their repression and chart a path to liberation. Given the later tendency to claim political purity and denounce ideological deviation among both aspirant and governing liberation movements, Mabeko-Tali provides a powerful insight into formative debates within these movements but also the enduring tensions that would play out, for example regarding the question of non-racialism, following the 1974 revolution and the conflicts of 1974-75.⁶

The Marxist-Maoist division between Angolan and other liberation movements is a central theme in **Yuzhou Jodie Sun**'s article, which charts the unique intellectual and

⁴ Work on transnational liberation struggle and solidarity histories is beginning to make use of Central European archives, demonstrating among other things the great range of views within the 'East'. See, e.g. Natalia Telepneva, 'Mediators of Liberation: Eastern-Bloc Officials, Mozambican Diplomacy and the Origins of Soviet Support for Frelimo, 1958-1965', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 67-82, and Milorad Lazic, 'Comrades in Arms: Yugoslav military aid to liberation movements of Angola and Mozambique, 1961-1976', in Dallywater et al., *Southern African Liberation Movements*, pp. 151-80.

⁵ Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2015); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Inter-War Paris and the Seeds of Third-World Nationalism* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶ See Lara Pawson, *In the Name of the People: Angola's Forgotten Massacre* (London, IB Tauris, 2014) and Jean-Michel Mabeko-Tali, *O MPLA perante si próprio* (Lisboa, Mercado de Letras, 2018).

political trajectory of another of Mabeko-Tali's pioneering leaders, Viriato da Cruz. Cruz, one of the founders of the MPLA, increasingly associated himself with Maoism at a time when the hardening Sino-Soviet split forced liberation movements to choose between the two socialist superpowers. Inspired by the political ideas and poetry of Mao, Cruz visited China in 1966 and remained in exile there until his death in 1973. While his resulting estrangement from the Soviet-aligned MPLA left him isolated from the political struggle for Angolan independence, Cruz's observations on Maoist theory and practice during a tumultuous period of Chinese history provide a unique African insight into the possibilities and difficulties of liberation in the global South. Sun's innovative use of both Chinese state archives and Cruz's private correspondence provide insight into the unpredictable trajectories of liberation-era African intellectuals, which need not be reduced to their role in specific movements.

Equally important interactions within the southern African region shaped the outcomes of other sets of liberation movement actors. **Christian Williams'** documentation of the lives of exiled Namibian political refugees continues to helpfully problematise the tendency to view exiles solely as members and supporters of liberation movements such as the MPLA and SWAPO. His analysis of ex-SWAPO dissidents and their precarious existence in Zambia in the late 1970s and 1980s reveals that refugees in southern Africa, as elsewhere, were able in highly constrained conditions to assert their political rights and relocate themselves outside refugee camps.⁷ While Zambia is well known to have been a nexus of liberation movement debates, activities and conflicts, here its camps and its towns are shown to have also been home to dissidents who, with the help of western church support, were able to access aid, asylum and scholarships. Church records – in this case of the German Pastor Siegfried Groth, a key figure in sustaining this set of around 200 dissident refugees – provide a vital source for understanding the precarious mobility of this group. Williams' article, in situating these refugees in the increasingly crisis-ridden Zambia of the mid-to-late 1980s, helps to integrate regional liberation history into the internal history of host countries such as Zambia and Tanzania, which were significantly affected by their role as hosts.⁸

Another set of intra-regional dynamics and exchanges are explored by **Lennart Bolliger and Will Gordon**, whose focus is on the Angolan guerrillas who became the ground troops of South Africa's regional and internal defence of Apartheid. While the transfer of defeated FNLA forces to South African control has been documented by Bolliger and others, the experience of former MPLA troops – those aligned with Daniel Chipenda and who had been particularly successful in the Eastern Front in the late 1960s but who broke from the MPLA on the eve of the Portuguese revolution in early 1974– shows the unpredictable nature

⁷ Key works on refugees include Liisa H. Malkki, 'National Geographic: The routing of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees', *Cultural Anthropology* 7, 1 (1992), pp. 24-44, and Gaim Kibreab, 'Pulling the Wool over the Eyes of the Strangers: Refugee deceit and trickery in institutionalized settings', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, 1 (2004), pp. 1-26. For Zambia see Oliver Bakewell, 'Repatriation and Self-settled Refugees in Zambia: Bringing Solutions to the Wrong Problems', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 13, 4 (2000), pp. 356-373.

⁸ An important recent study of the powerful impact of hosts and refugees on one another in the context of liberation struggles is Joanna Tague, *Displaced Mozambicans in Postcolonial Tanzania: Refugee Power, Mobility, Education and Rural Development* (London, Routledge, 2019), reviewed by Michael Panzer in this issue.

of ostensibly ideological allegiances.⁹ Building on recent literature that rejects any simplistic notion of such auxiliary or repurposed troops as ‘mercenaries’, Bolliger and Gordon demonstrate the limited options facing these troops following the defeat of the FNLA. Through interviews with former members of what became 32 Battalion, they show that the painful experience of exile was not reserved for the ‘heroes’ of the liberation war, but was equally experienced by this group who appeared to fight first for ‘liberation’ and then for ‘Apartheid’, both terms that failed entirely to encompass the complexity of these soldiers’ motivations and experiences.

It is not only African soldiers whose complex allegiances, experience and motivations have been silenced and simplified by hegemonic histories. As **Kristina Pikovskaia**’s study of the Soviet Union’s military intervention in Angola shows, the secrecy of this major operation stands in sharp contrast to the well known and widely celebrated Cuban presence during the same period. Through similarly extensive interviews with veterans as those of Bolliger and Gordon, Pikovskaia provides important insights into the hardships, politics, and racial dynamics of a war which, in terms of the quotidian experiences of those who fought it, remains little explored. As Pikovskaia shows, the inability of Soviet veterans to publicly discuss and explain their experiences in Angola until recently rendered their experiences poorly recognised and rewarded compared to veterans of the Afghanistan war. Their comparatively recent organisation in veteran associations has enabled them to tell stories about their experiences, including to Pikovskaia herself. As she argues, their storytelling is shaped as much by present-day dynamics in Russia as by the past. Their collective narratives and their new found associational life enabled them to make claims on a country which had chosen to forget them, as well as to assert the value and values of internationalism to a Russian society and polity in which they had been rendered virtually incomprehensible.¹⁰

Cultural Production and the Senses

Pikovskaia’s work alerts us to the centrality of military culture in understanding the underlying dynamics of liberation movements. The exploration of military practices and imaginaries, of the sensory and affective life of guerrillas in the camp and the bush, has rarely been attempted and provides a wealth of new insights into liberation movements that belie their characterisation simply as ideological or realist struggles.

Through their interviews with ZIPRA veterans and use of MK memoirs, **Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor** historicise the ubiquitous but hitherto unconsidered toyi-toyi drill, locating its origins in the training of Zimbabwean (and other southern African) recruits by the FLN in Algeria in the mid-1960s.¹¹ The toyi-toyi, as a bodily performance and in the form of the chants and songs that accompanied it, travelled south with ZAPU’s

⁹ See also Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa: Fighting their way home* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Compare to the ‘MaGermans’ studied by Marcia Schenck, ‘Socialist Solidarities and their Afterlives: Histories and Memories of Angolan and Mozambican Migrants in the German Democratic Republic, 1975-2015’, PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2017.

¹¹ On 1960s Algiers as a thriving centre for liberation movements, see Elaine Mokhtefi, *Alger, capitale de la révolution: De Fanon aux Black Panthers* (Paris, La Fabrique, 2019) and Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016).

guerrillas to training camps in Tanzania and Zambia in the 1970s, taking on new languages, lyrics and meanings as the struggle unfolded through distinct generations of recruits. For ZAPU, the toyi-toyi was associated above all with fitness, discipline and a militarised masculinity that ensured battlefield survival and political loyalty. They energetically taught it to MK cadres who trained and fought with ZIPRA in the late 1970s, in a little considered moment of intense exchange among liberation movements.¹² In MK memoirs, the toyi-toyi is depicted differently than in these ZIPRA narratives. Most dramatically, some cast it as the source of an authoritarian, macho physicality that they blamed for harsh abuses in MK's Angolan camps. MK cadres' adoption of the toyi-toyi nonetheless made it a pre-eminent symbol of the South African township struggle and created a legacy that, as the authors argue, continues to find new meanings in contemporary political and social movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The life of ZAPU's camps in Zambia is also captured in the photographs of Zenzo Nkobi, the subject of **Patricia Hayes'** article. She notes early tensions over the circulation of images of the armed struggle in Zambia, when having a visible, active armed wing was necessary to garner international support and raise morale at home, but was prohibited by the host government and might dangerously alert the enemy. This early indicator of tensions among the multiple interpretations and interpreters of struggle imagery played out in Nkobi's photography in the late 1970s. Nkobi was the official photographer for ZAPU president Joshua Nkomo and his images of camp life captured the cultural performances that were put on for visitors as well as political relations and military scenes. The tendency of Nkobi's images to escape their ostensible framing is mirrored in Nkobi's own life and work: trained in the GDR and employed to give visual legitimacy to ZAPU's propaganda efforts in typically socialist realist style, his photographs capture, intentionally or not, aspects of camp dynamics – the problems of discipline amid boredom while awaiting training or deployment, generational and gendered relations and tensions, and the consumption of alcohol, among other things. In exploring the afterlives of Nkobi's photos and their problematic preservation and reproduction, Hayes alerts us to the ways in which the history they portray is, like the narratives of interviewees, continually reproduced in new forms over time.

The sensory qualities of 'camp life', here referring to military bases inside northern Mozambique, in the form of food and cooking are the focus of **Jonna Katto's** study of ex-FRELIMO combatants in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The transition from village to camp life meant the abandonment of regular harvests and the need to prepare food in insecure and mobile contexts. The gendered nature of food preparation was disrupted, and the preparation of canned and preserved food donated by the Eastern Bloc and China brought new experiences but also difficulties. Hunger drove guerrillas to find food in the bush, an experience that could easily be romanticised as part of the guerrilla struggle but which, Katto's respondents reveal, was a dangerous process of putting to use existing knowledge and acquiring new understanding. As well as revealing new dimensions to the material existence of Frelimo veterans, Katto makes brilliant use of food as a metaphor for the hopes and expectations generated by the struggle for future self-mastery. This struggle was given a

¹² See Hugh Macmillan, "'Past History Has Not Been Forgotten': The ANC/ZAPU Alliance – the Second Phase, 1978-1980", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 179-94.

bitter aftertaste by those who have governed Mozambique since independence and who have often eaten well at the expense of these former fighters.

An equally ambiguous analysis of the culture of liberation is provided by **Maria Suriano**, who finds a ‘convivial transnational solidarity’ in the music of Tanzanian nightclubs frequented by musicians who arrived with South Africa’s liberation movements. Liberation songs that drew on South African influences as well as on musical forms such as (Congolese) rumba provided a basis for sociability between exiled liberation fighters and host communities, a ‘small p’ pan-Africanism that both drew on and went beyond the Tanzanian state’s promotion of a regional solidarity. Through a case study of the band Afro70, Suriano charts both the capacity and the limits of such instances of solidarity as Tanzania’s importance to the regional liberation struggle waned. It would be fascinating to consider more widely how the musical conviviality of liberation movements themselves varied between rural and urban settings, military and civilian contexts, and the degree to which it was influenced by changing local, regional and global musical forms and discourses of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Temporalities and Legacies

A central concern of the historiography of liberation struggles is the uses to which these histories are put in the present and the ways in which the present shapes how the past is known, encountered and performed.¹³ Both liberation movement and colonial narratives can be overweening in the framing of particular events as well as ‘the struggle’ as a whole. As we have seen, many of the papers in this collection address these questions through life narrative and storytelling, recording how not only the past but the future is narrated in the present. Several of the papers address these questions in other ways too, both through reconstructing events at the heart of official narratives and through exploring the ‘memorial complex’ in the present.

Paolo Israel’s article offers a meticulous reconstruction of the foundational event in FRELIMO’s story of liberation, the Mueda massacre of 16 June 1960, through contemporaneous reports of daily developments found in the Portuguese intelligence archives. This event, Israel argues, has been ‘buried’ or rendered illegible by Portuguese suppression and FRELIMO’s heroic narratives of the event, reiterated and developed over decades and in many mediums.¹⁴ Israel gives the story a radically new set of meanings by locating its origin in a letter requesting the collective return from Tanzania to northern Mozambique of Makonde migrants, a request later amplified by leaders of migrant organisations. Told from the perspective of colonial officials who struggled to piece together

¹³ The literature on this topic is voluminous. For work on the understudied MPLA, see especially Christine Messiant, “‘Chez nous, même le passé est imprévisible’: L’expérience d’une recherche sur le nationalisme angolais, et particulièrement le MPLA: sources, critique, besoins actuels de la recherche”, in *Angola postcolonial 2. Sociologie politique d’une oléocratie* (Paris, Éditions Karthala, 2009), pp. 153-202 and Jon Schubert, ‘2002, Year Zero: History as anti-politics in the ‘New Angola’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 4 (2015), pp. 835-52. For a range of historical and ethnographic approaches, see R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London, Zed Books, 1998) and L. Witz, G. Minkley, and C. Rassool, *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2017), as well as the extensive citations and discussion in Samuel Longford’s article herein.

¹⁴ See Paolo Israel, ‘Mueda Massacre: The Musical Archive’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 6 (2017), pp. 1157-79.

a sense of what was at stake in these requests from a host of fragmentary sources and informants, who panicked and misread and formulated contradictory theories, Israel shows that this episode as a whole is exemplary of a kind of late colonial uncertainty. This uncertainty is located in the dramatic transformations promised by rumours of independence across the region, which fed criticism of injustice and abuse, and influenced a series of unpredictable steps that led to the massacre. Rereading the Mueda massacre as anything but the inevitable act of nationalist heroism that FRELIMO would go on to narrate does not remove the radical political imagination of the Makonde migrant leaders at the heart of the story. Rather, it returns the story to them and by so doing offers us a reimagination of a very different legacy of liberation.

Israel's rereading of the colonial archive renders liberation legacies differently in the present by reconstructing a past event. The articles by **Njabulo Chipangura** and Samuel Longford take as their focus recent, highly theatrical, efforts to memorialise liberation struggle dead in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Both offer new views on a rich literature concerned with the post-colonial 'memorial complex'. Chipangura's article brings a highly unusual perspective – that of an actively engaged participant in the research he undertook. As an archaeologist then working for the parastatal National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) he was tasked to take part in the process by which the remains of a large number of ZANLA guerrillas were exhumed and reburied in 2013 in eastern Zimbabwe. The exhumations took place in a moment of high political tension, in the run up to a national election in which the ruling ZANU(PF) and war veterans aligned to it sought to deploy the war dead. Chipangura narrates his up-close experience of the daily conflicts over the treatment and uses of these remains through the processes of exhumation, identification, display and reburial. He recounts how the archaeological expertise and techniques of the NMMZ were brushed aside in favour of the identification of grave sites and their occupants by spirit mediums allied to the veterans' organisation. Spirituality, he argues, was used to constitute a highly partisan public spectacle in which the identities and number of war dead were obfuscated and exaggerated in aid of bolstering ZANU(PF)'s claims to legitimacy and to make direct attacks on the opposition. These efforts were, however, only partially successful: the NMMZ archaeologists considered the veterans' exhumation practices a disservice to the dead, while members of the public, school children, and people who may have been relatives of the named dead were only variably convinced by the veterans' performances.

The divisive fashioning of human remains as 'campaigning vehicle' in Zimbabwe plays out differently in **Samuel Longford's** article on the memorialisation of MK veteran Chris Hani in South Africa. Longford's focus is on an annual state-led ceremony that marks Hani's assassination in which he is cast as a martyr essential to both South Africa's freedom and ANC rule, his violent death in effect a founding moment for the new nation. Longford contends that the government's memorialisation invokes a linear notion of time – state time – that focuses on heroes, organisations and the nation, and seeks to instil a particular kind of governmentality that would depoliticise through seeking 'closure'. This stands in contrast to 'trauma time', which retains space in the present for revisiting the past for new ends, thereby refusing closure, and locating – notably in the performative aspects of memorialisation – a challenge to the state's attempt to fix history in one mode. The Hani memorial thus becomes

a space and moment for contesting not affirming history. It creates uncertainty through the production of alternate narratives and forms of memorialisation, in part rooted in younger generations' experience of patriarchy, racism and inequality in South Africa, and in part as a deeply personal invocation of loss by Hani's own daughter.

Chipangura and Longford's studies of memorialisation remind us, to misquote Faulkner, that liberation histories are never dead, and certainly not past. More than a quarter century since South Africa's 'miracle' election of 1994 supposedly ended the story of the region's tumultuous and traumatic experience of armed liberation, contestations over the memory and representation of 'the struggle' – who sacrificed, who won and lost, who was liberated and what was achieved – remain central to political discourse and dispute across southern Africa, albeit in diverse and complex ways.

Original historical approaches and methodologies that build on newly accessed archives and oral, aural and visual sources are, as this special issue demonstrates, enabling the region's scholars to better understand the daily experiences and complex outcomes of liberation movements. This search for understanding is equally driven by the urgent questions – about race, memory, freedom, justice and inequality – currently being asked by the young southern Africans who will write its future histories.