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Youth Dreams, State Repression and Military Mobility: Tracing the Origins of ZAPU's Liberation Army

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In early 1960s Southern Rhodesia, a secretive underground of male nationalist youth envisioned a revolutionary army and pressed their political leaders to act. How they came to do so is a dramatic and largely neglected story of youthful political imagination, state violence and transnational military mobility, told in memoir and oral history. Many of the nationalist youth of this moment had first forged dreams of freedom as students in rural mission schools where they encountered astonishing stories of revolution and African independence. They concluded that educated, young leaders could transform the world and they energetically experimented with means of doing so before themselves joining the nationalist youth in townships. There they were confronted with a violent, intransigent settler state that forced them to reimagine routes to freedom. Evading this state produced the 'militarised mobilities' that took these young men into circuits of internationalist solidarity where they began to imagine the making of an army and the waging of war. Unusually among nascent liberation armies, they left Rhodesia as part of tightly organised nationalist youth networks intent on receiving military training and returned to these same networks as saboteurs and soldiers. Although their vision of warfare was not realised in these early years, it was the harsh lessons, personal relationships and eclectic revolutionary dreams of this moment that laid the foundations for the Zimbabwe African People's Union's liberation army.

Keywords: youth; nationalism; sabotage; students; soldiers; guerrilla war; revolutionary dreams; ZAPU; ZPRA; liberation army; Zimbabwe

Introduction

The idea of freedom embraced by the young men who would constitute Zimbabwe's nationalist youth in the early 1960s built on a long history of regional mobility and political connection that was newly and uniquely electrified in this moment of African decolonisation and world revolution. It would produce an unusual first generation of liberation army soldiers, drawn almost to a man from the nationalist youth. This is an extraordinary and largely untold story. It was in Southern Rhodesia's rural mission schools that these future

soldiers began to engage with the kind of 'worldmaking' visions usually associated with political leaders and university students.[1] They were entranced by the manifestation in print and talk of 'inconceivable' things: the Suez crisis, the Soviet launch of Sputnik, Ghana's independence, the Cuban revolution, the Algerian war. Stories about these events in schools and townships were used to conjure up a particular vision of freedom – modern, revolutionary and rooted in a pragmatically oriented, eclectic set of ideas. Freedom could be obtained by 'joining politics', understood as the secretive, violent means by which the young and educated might act on an unjust world. Just as these ideas took form, however, a powerful settler state laid violent siege to them. These young men responded by demanding guns and by moving into exile; they entered a militarised form of mobility that took them to the 'hubs' of internationalist solidarity, where they were taught the skills of saboteurs and then soldiers.[2] The tight personal ties and shared experiences and politics of this distinctive cohort allowed them to drive these processes and to collectively imagine the making of an army.

In telling this story, I draw on research undertaken with JoAnn McGregor as part of a larger collaborative project on the making of southern African liberation armies. In the course of writing a history of the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), we have interviewed many dozens of veterans. Our accounts are biased towards the political hub of Bulawayo where ZAPU's veterans are now concentrated, and towards the many thousands of young people who joined the escalating war in the second half of the 1970s. The founding generation of soldiers was, by contrast, a tiny group and the winnowing effects of war and old age mean there are few survivors. The history of this first generation relies more heavily on memoir and on interviews recorded in earlier years, often by journalists.[3] Because these stories were produced at different times and for different purposes they are highly varied. They are not expressions of a centrally controlled 'liberation script' or 'patriotic history', common among veterans of liberation movements in power, and nor do they constitute a coherent 'counter-history'; they have only been very unevenly disciplined by ZAPU or by Zimbabwe's ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU[PF]).[4] These stories are instead contradictory and idiosyncratic, at times rigidly partisan and at others fluidly engaged in veteran debates about the war and its legacies. They nonetheless often share touch points in a narrative arc that

1 See, for example, A. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019), and compare to E. Burton, 'Frontline Citizens: Liberation Movements, Transnational Solidarity, and the Making of Anti-Imperialist Citizenship in Tanzania', *International Review of Social History*, 69, S32 (2024), pp. 197–225, on non-elite 'worldmaking'.

2 On hubs, see E. Burton, 'Hubs of Decolonization: African Liberation Movements and "Eastern" Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam', in L. Dallywater, C. Saunders and H.A. Fonseca (eds), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960–1990* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 25–56.

3 For a brief discussion of memoir, see J. Alexander, 'ZPRA Memoir', Global Soldiers in the Cold War project (hosted at the University of Oxford and the University of Sussex), available at https://global-soldiers.web.ox.ac.uk/zpra-memoir, retrieved 30 March 2026. Another rich source is the veteran interviews published in Zimbabwe's state media, notably the *Sunday News* and *Sunday Mail*. These are part of a ZANU(PF) project to heroise the liberation struggle but often tell complex, far from heroic stories. This source is complemented by a large set of interviews with ZPRA veterans undertaken by Zenzele Ndebele of the independent media organisation CITE Zimbabwe, some of which are available on YouTube, Facebook and at https://cite.org.zw, retrieved 30 March 2026. The CITE interviews used in this article are transcriptions in the author's possession. Interesting comparisons can be made to Frelimo memoir: see J.P. Borges Coelho, 'Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes', *Kronos*, 39, 1 (2013), p. 29, and C. Darch and D. Hedges, 'Liberation and Biographical Narrative in Mozambican Historiography: The Struggle in Cabo Delgado, 1962–1974', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47, 4 (2021), pp. 605–25.

4 For key contributions to literature on 'liberation scripts', see Borges Coelho, 'Politics and Contemporary History', and T. Ranger, 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 2 (2004), pp. 215–34.

tells a largely unknown story of how schoolchildren remade themselves as nationalist youth and then revolutionary soldiers in the early 1960s.[5]

Before turning to the accounts of this foundational cohort of soldiers, we consider why this history has been neglected.

Blind Spots and the Origins of Nationalist Violence

The rise of Zimbabwe's nationalist movement and the armed struggle that followed are the subject of numerous accounts. These are dense, absorbing histories, but they share a number of blind spots regarding the connections among youth imagination, state repression and the transnational making of an army, obscuring what is an unusual story among southern African liberation movements.

The literature on 'open' mass nationalism – the period from 1957 to 1964 – is extraordinarily rich. Ngwabi Bhebe's early overview offers an invaluable analysis.[6] Scholars such as Terence Ranger and Timothy Scarnecchia have traced the shifting foundations of nationalism through the lens of urban history.[7] Michael West has documented the expansion of a black middle class in the 1950s, and the movement of its most luminary members into the nationalist leadership.[8] But these accounts do not seek to address the sabotage campaigns of the early 1960s in any detail, and where they are addressed the violence of nationalist (and other) youth is often linked primarily to a 'sell-out' politics driven by partisan intolerance and violent masculinity or to a 'hooligan' element.[9] Sell-out politics and social difference are centrally important to the story of nationalist youth (and to nationalism writ large), but to reduce their story in this way discounts and obscures both their political ideas and their transnational trajectories.

Histories of Zimbabwe's liberation war have different blind spots. It is common for war histories to jump over the 1960s, with only brief mention made of incidents that were canonised – at times arbitrarily – as 'firsts'.[10] Accounts written from a Rhodesian viewpoint catalogue armed actions in the 1960s, but their focus is on the success of counter-measures and little attention is paid to nationalist strategy.[11] In all these accounts, the insurgent efforts of the 1960s are coded as failures, at best providing a tragic-heroic pathway to rebirth in the 1970s, but not an account of the foundation of armies. This military story is also absent from the rural social histories and ethnographies of the liberation war, which take little interest in

5 For a more detailed discussion of our veteran oral histories, see J. Alexander and J. McGregor, '*Adelante!*: Military Imaginaries, the Cold War, and Southern Africa's Liberation Armies', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 62, 3 (2020), pp. 625–6.

6 N. Bhebe, 'The National Struggle, 1957–62', in C. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890–1990* (Harare, College Press, 1989), pp. 50–115.

7 T.O. Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning: The Social History of a Southern African City 1893–1960* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2010); T. Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots of Democracy and Political Violence in Zimbabwe: Harare and Highfield, 1940–1964* (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2008).

8 M.O. West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe, 1898–1965* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002).

9 The former view is developed in Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots*, Chapters 4–6. Ranger's *Bulawayo Burning* ends in 1960 with a discussion of the social roots of urban rioting. He distinguishes between party-led activity and gang and 'hooligan' violence, for example, see p. 233. Although he touches on subsequent developments, he does not explore the transnational elements of youth sabotage and training.

10 For a ZANU narrative, see D. Martin and P. Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (London, Faber, 1981), pp. xv, 9–10. K. Maxey, *The Fight for Zimbabwe: The Armed Conflict in Southern Rhodesia since UDI* (London, Rex Collings, 1975), p. 54, sees ZAPU's pre-1966 activity as 'contingency plans'. Dumiso Dabengwa's 'ZIPRA in the Zimbabwe War of National Liberation', in N. Bhebe and T.O. Ranger (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation Army* (London, James Currey, 1995), p. 27, deals only briefly with the infiltration of armed units from 1965.

11 For example, H. Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War: Counter-Insurgency and Guerrilla Warfare in Rhodesia, 1962–1980* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1989), and J.R.T. Woods, *Zambezi Valley Insurgency: Early Rhodesian Bush War Operations* (Warwick, Helion, 2019).

the transnational journeys of soldiers.[12] New work in the mid 1990s started to shift the focus,[13] and ground-breaking research has since been published by Ngwabi Bhebe and Gerald Mazarire.[14] Their research entered into transnational history while maintaining a foundation in Zimbabwe, paid close attention to the developments of the 1960s and – exceptionally – compared ZAPU and ZANU.[15]

Blind spots notwithstanding, these histories have effectively set the domestic stage from which sabotage would emerge as political strategy. As elsewhere in the region, it flowed from the frustration of nationalists' non-violent protest and constitutional politics. In Southern Rhodesia, nationalist parties were formed and repeatedly banned from 1957 to 1964, each iteration bringing with it lethal state violence and mass arrests. Although this is known as the 'open' period of nationalism, it is a misleading label. The sequence led from the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC) to the National Democratic Party (NDP) to ZAPU. In August 1963, a group of ZAPU leaders broke away to form ZANU while the already banned ZAPU formed a front organisation, the People's Caretaker Council (PCC). This escalating repression produced a particularly pointed anger as it crushed the high hopes of the 1950s, when African access to education and better jobs had notably expanded and the mantra of inter-racial 'partnership' had promised a meritocratic route to citizenship. The final disillusionment of the black middle class and its move into nationalist politics dates to the NDP's formation in 1960,[16] but partnership had already lost its lustre for workers, while violent rural resistance had spread to the extent that the government feared a loss of its very ability to maintain order.[17]

Less closely explored in the studies of the turn to violence is its interaction with 'international nationalism'.[18] Southern Rhodesia's nationalists built on their already strong links to South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and to the Congress movements formed across the Central African Federation (CAF), which tied Nyasaland and Southern and Northern Rhodesia together. From the late 1950s, nationalist leaders of all these countries expanded links with each other and built diplomatic relations in newly independent African countries and in the burgeoning pan-Africanist and internationalist organisations and hubs sympathetic to liberation movements. These connections offered resources and ideas and established institutional and personal relationships through which access to support was – competitively and precariously –

12 For example, in the groundbreaking 1980s rural studies, D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (London, James Currey, 1985), and T.O. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (London, James Currey, 1985).

13 Most importantly, Bhebe and Ranger, *Soldiers*.

14 N. Bhebe, *The ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1999); N. Bhebe and G. Mazarire, 'Zimbabwe's War of Liberation', in A.J. Temu and J. das N. Tembe (eds), *Southern African Liberation Struggles 1960–1994* (Dar es Salaam, Mkuki na Nyota, 2014), vol. 5, pp. 3–138; G. Mazarire, 'ZANU's External Networks 1963–1979: An Appraisal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 83–106.

15 Compare to the account of ZANU's military in B.-M. Tendi, 'Transnationalism, Contingency and Loyalty in African Liberation Armies: The Case of ZANU's 1974–1975 Nhari Mutiny', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 143–59.

16 Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots*, pp. 69–114; West, *The Rise*, pp. 216–23; T.O. Ranger, *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe, 1920–63* (London, James Currey, 1995), epilogue.

17 On rural violence, see J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe, 1893–2003* (Oxford, James Currey, 2006), Chapter 2; Bhebe, 'The National Struggle', pp. 96–8.

18 See J. Lunn's early study, *International Nationalism: The Extra-Territorial Relations of Southern Rhodesian African Nationalists* (New York, Routledge, 1967).

mediated.[19] ZAPU's key hub – Lusaka – has not, however, received the same attention as others and, for Zimbabwean nationalists, it differed from all other hubs in that it hosted a substantial Zimbabwean population, which allowed a popular internationalism to flourish in the townships of Lusaka, across Zimbabwean-owned farms and in Zambian mining centres.[20]

ZAPU's installation in Lusaka is usually dated to February 1964 when, in anticipation of the detention of its leaders in Rhodesia, senior members of the party were delegated to establish a national executive in exile. But ZAPU and its predecessors were already well known to Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP) and were well rooted in the large Zimbabwean community of workers, farmers, civil servants and businessmen established under the CAF. Just as Zimbabweans had long joined the ANC in South Africa, they had joined UNIP in Zambia. UNIP had welcomed them and it had facilitated their passage in search of military training since at least 1961 – the key to their 'militarised mobility', as we shall see.[21]

Almost all the young men who would make up Zimbabwe's first cohort of trained soldiers would come from the networks of nationalist party youth born of this unique moment and would spend time in the nascent hub of Lusaka. Many already knew each other from their rural homes, schools and workplaces, or from prisons and police stations, and almost all were intent on acquiring military training. In this, they differed from their contemporaries who arrived in the South West African People's Organisation's (SWAPO's) camps in Tanganyika, or the South African contingents who were spirited away to north African and Soviet training sites via Dar es Salaam. In these cases, students, urban activists, teenage herd boys with little or no schooling, contract workers, teachers and others mingled; some had left home in search of – or been promised – jobs and scholarships, and felt deceived or coerced into a military role.[22] Their diverse views and backgrounds offer a contrast to the shared politics and deliberate journeys described in the narratives of ZAPU's future soldiers of this early era.

The Making of the Nationalist Youth

The first cohorts of nationalist youth to undergo military training did not locate the beginnings of their political stories in their formal membership of the sequence of nationalist

19 As a large literature has explored, internationalist solidarity sat side by side with competition and division, within and between liberation movements, among Pan-Africanists, within the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU's) Liberation Committee, among Eastern bloc and other socialist backers, and across the Sino-Soviet divide. See Burton, 'Hubs'; J. Brennan, 'Tanzania and the OAU's African Liberation Committee, 1963–1973', ms, 2022; N. Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961–1975* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2022); and Mazarire, 'ZANU's External Networks'.

20 But see H. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963–1994* (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2013), and C. Chongo, 'A "Hub of decolonisation": Lusaka, Liberation Movements and the Struggle for Black Majority Rule in Southern Africa, 1960–1980', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 135 (2024), pp. 101–30.

21 Zimbabwean movements in Zambia are little recorded, but the early support of UNIP and the Northern Rhodesian ANC (NRANC) for the South African ANC is noted in G. Houston, 'Military Bases and Camps of the Liberation Movement, 1961–1990', report prepared for Amathole District Municipality, 1 August 2013, pp. 13–17. Chongo, 'A Hub', p. 105, notes ZAPU's presence in 1963 and its support by UNIP and the NRANC then, but not before.

22 On the ANC's early recruits, see Houston, 'Military Bases and Camps'; A. Lissoni, 'Maguerrilla Nnete: Military Socialisation and Masculinities in the Life Stories of MK's Real Guerrillas', ms, 2023; S. Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960–1970', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004), pp. 411–78, and on SWAPO, C. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO's Exile Camps* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), Chapter 3.

parties that took root in the late 1950s. They located them in the lessons of their rural childhoods and emphasised how they had reimagined their mission school education as a route to revolutionary action. When they left their rural homes to seek work in urban areas, the dreams of freedom inculcated in them in their schools made them both intolerant of the stifling racism and exploitation of Rhodesia's workplaces and intent on taking action. Their response was to 'join politics'. Elements of this narrative echo across first-generation soldier accounts and underline the importance of the expanding horizons not just of nationalist leaders and university students, but also of these teenagers, who discovered a world transformed and imagined it transformable in ways directly relevant to their lives.

The life stories of these future soldiers, recounted in memoir and oral history, have a recognisable form. They almost all start with tales of a rural childhood in which martial, political and masculine lessons were learned, establishing the roots of a militarist teleology. Older generations are often credited with imparting stories of migration and settlement and narrating the hardships of European conquest. They warned specifically of the twin dangers of African disunity and superior European weaponry.[23] Almost every account describes the bitter legacy of violent state evictions from land and the forced destocking of cattle, one or both of which affected African families across Rhodesia during the childhoods of these men. These stories of dispossession were often punctuated by bitter accounts of witnessing male elders' humiliating treatment at the hands of white officials, leaving children to absorb lessons in 'colonial cruelty'.[24] In the late 1950s, as their parents' generation entered into a confrontational nationalist politics, these accounts evolved into stories of rough arrests that wrenched away breadwinners, fathers and uncles.

Stories of an older generation's emasculation and of injustice sat side by side with accounts of the making of boys' masculinity. The travails of herding livestock feature centrally, balanced between descriptions of a pastoral idyll, the terrors of wild animals and menacing adults, and the relations among herd boys as they engaged in boxing, stick fighting, shooting catapults, competing for the attention of girls, and bullying. These interactions prepared boys for a 'hard' world and established masculine norms.[25] In his memoir, Cleopas Mhlabi describes being knocked unconscious while fleeing older children and then his terrifying entombment in an ant bear hole. He wrote that his grandfather had subsequently warned him, 'YOU MUST NEVER allow yourself to die the death of a shameless coward who dies in flight with his back turned towards the enemy'.[26] Tshinga Dube emphasised that herd boys did not have 'cry baby characters'. For him, '[f]ighting was always a symbol of manhood right from the days we herded cattle as young boys'. He grasped that the arduous, lonely tasks his father set for him were not punishment but preparation: 'he knew from his own experience that one day I would be a man. That I would face the world on my own'.[27]

These stories stressed the importance of endurance, the necessity of suppressing emotions, and the manly imperative of facing danger, youthful lessons that made sense of soldiers' later lives and reinforced an established, patriarchal order. But that was not all: the narratives of this cohort moved on to schools and here they described an upending of social and political hierarchies. As is often noted, late colonial education was dangerously double-edged. Intended as a means to discipline the young into a colonial nation-making project, it

23 For example, T.J. Dube, *Tshinga Dube: Quiet Flows the Zambezi* (Bulawayo, Amagugu Publishers, 2019), pp. 29–31; J.M. Mpofu, *My Life in the Struggle for the Liberation of Zimbabwe* (Bloomington, AuthorHouse, 2014), pp. 2–4.
24 Dube, *Tshinga*, pp. 39–40, for example, and examples below.
25 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 6–8.
26 C.M. Mhlabi, *The Path of Thorns*, unpublished pamphlet, pp. 10–11.
27 Dube, *Tshinga*, pp. 29, 42–4.

also provided space for political ideas and cosmopolitan community.[28] In earlier decades, scholars have explored how Southern Rhodesia's African students developed a confrontational politics in schools and how they and their parents had demanded academic education, understanding its essential role in social mobility.[29] The purposes schoolchildren believed education should serve in the moment of decolonisation shifted, however. Writing about university students in Congo, Pedro Monaville has argued for the 'singularity' of this moment, in which 'political imaginaries branched off towards distant horizons'.[30] Such horizons materialised in Rhodesia's largely rural primary and secondary schools too, where glimpses of new futures reshaped and radicalised social and political ambitions.[31]

Some future soldiers' stories about education forthrightly linked it to avoiding the grim life of labour associated with the uneducated. Cleopas Mhlabi records a salutary case.[32] Caught playing truant from his primary school in Luveve – because his teacher was 'light-handed … with her stick' – Mhlabi's mother took him to a railway siding. There they sat until a trolley came along the tracks, pushed by five black men with a 'white foreman in a wide sun hat screwed to its seat'. Suddenly, a goods train appeared from the opposite direction. The black men scrambled to remove the trolley from the path of the fast-approaching train. It was a terrifying sight. Mhlabi's mother deployed it as object lesson: '"do you know that all those wretched men were once small boys like you who thought they were very clever and often dodged school saying they were afraid of their teachers' cane sticks", she said coolly and added, "[l]ook at them now! How stupid and helpless they really are!"' Mhlabi applied himself to his studies thereafter and went on to the formidable Anglican St Augustine's secondary school on Rhodesia's eastern border.

If education was a route out of a 'stupid and helpless' life, it could also offer a thrilling pathway to a newly available modern status. As a child in the rural backwater of Nkayi, Joshua Mpofu daydreamed of attending school. He described the expansion of London Missionary Society (LMS) primary schools in the mid 1950s, along with the arrival of black teachers, as an 'age of enlightenment' and – in a phrase reflecting his later journeys – a 'mini cultural revolution'. His older brother became a teacher and modelled for him a new and appealing form of authority, dress and ritual – most spectacularly a white wedding – that distinguished him from their father's generation. The forests of Nkayi, likened to a paradise in his days as a herd boy, now marked Mpofu as, in his words, 'uncivilised', and his lack of schooling attracted insults from other children.[33]

As in many accounts, Mpofu understood that education marked new identities and hierarchies of status and wealth.[34] But his rural schooling did much more than that. When his father agreed to fund his education, he records the great excitement he felt when he encountered the 'fountain of information' that was the Zinyangeni primary school geography teacher Albert Malikongwa. Mpofu recounted a striking moment:

28 See S. Hynd, 'Small Warriors? Children and Youth in Colonial Insurgencies and Counterinsurgency, ca. 1945–1960', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 62, 4, 2020, pp. 684–713, R. Waller, 'Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47, 1, 2006, pp. 77–92; P. Monaville, *Students of the World: Global 1968 and Decolonization in the Congo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2022), Chapter 3.

29 C. Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans' Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918–1940* (Oxford, James Currey, 2002), Chapter 1.

30 Monaville, *Students*, p. xi.

31 See discussion of imaginary futures as a mode of resistance in D. Egerman, 'Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Futures of History', *American Historical Review*, 117, 15, 2012, pp. 1402–10, and C.J. Lee, 'Introduction: Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung', in C.J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 26–7.

32 For this account, see Mhlabi, *The Path*, pp. 18–19.

33 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 10–12.

34 See also Dube, *Tshinga*, pp. 27–8.

'[o]n the western part of the map of Africa there was a country called the Gold Coast, a British Colony, but during the first half of 1957, Mr Malikongwa instructed us to change the name to "Ghana" on our map because the country had become an independent African state'.[35] This momentous change was linked to others: 'similar freedom movements were striving to achieve the same goal in the rest of the colonies in Africa, including our country'. Schoolroom stories of Kwame Nkrumah sat alongside accounts of Jomo Kenyatta, Chief Albert Luthuli and the SRANC leaders Joshua Nkomo and James Chikerema. Mr Malikongwa put photographs of Ghana's flag and leader on the classroom wall, giving his students 'a dose of excitement and hope'.[36] For the young Joshua Mpofu, Dr Nkrumah's standing as a 'man of letters' inspired him to redouble his efforts at education now not as a marker of 'civilisation' but 'as a tool for attaining our freedom'.[37] Joshua's schoolmate, Clark Mpofu, similarly recalled being greatly affected by their teacher's explanation that Ghana's

> independence meant the country was now ruled by blacks. That sent a shock wave inside me, I itched to see our country also follow that same route because we were all aware of how the whites were ill-treating our parents. During those days, a white person, be it an adult or small child, induced fear in us … . They made us look like we were lesser human beings. So the independence in the Gold Coast struck me.[38]

In secondary schools, news of Ghana's independence sparked action. Tshinga Dube studied at the Seventh Day Adventist Solusi Mission outside Bulawayo. Here, teachers and students were drawn from eastern and southern Africa, the USA, Canada and elsewhere. Dube had heard stories of the formation of the SRANC and of the larger-than-life Joshua Nkomo, 'renowned for being a holder of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree'.[39] For him, the independence of Ghana, where 'black people were running their own government', seemed 'inconceivable'.[40] He wanted to know more. Dube and his classmates read South African and international magazines – *Drum*, *Parade* and *Time* – in Bulawayo and in the school library and searched for stories about South Africa's ANC. Dube singled out Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo as exemplars of 'Africa's Intelligentsia' and followed closely Chief Albert Luthuli's treason trial – Luthuli had been born at Solusi and Dube took him to heart.[41]

Dube and his friends began organising school protests – his first 'stone throwing ambushes' – and learned the importance of secretive organisation to avoid punishment.[42] They adopted the fashionable fur hats of 'premature nationalists' and heard from East African students about Mau Mau, Algeria and Nasser.[43] Dube catalogued his teachers' views. A white South African defended apartheid, but his English teacher, the Zambian Philemon Kopolo, delivered 'Pan-African populist utterances': '[h]e religiously followed Dr Nkrumah's writings and routinely made pinpoint recitations from a compilation titled, "Africa Shall be Free"'.[44] Kopolo's friend, Mr Masuku, was 'very much pro the nationalists'

35 Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 16.
36 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16, 32.
37 *Ibid*., p. 16.
38 C. Mpofu, 'Why We Needed the Guns', *Sunday Mail*, Harare, 21 October 2018.
39 Dube, *Tshinga*, p. 50.
40 *Ibid*., p. 51.
41 *Ibid*., pp. 53–4.
42 *Ibid*., p. 52.
43 *Ibid*.
44 *Ibid*., p. 55.

consciousness' while the Canadian Florence Moleen 'was more of a liberal opinion bearer'. An American teacher remained 'aloof'.[45] Dube began to attend NDP meetings on trips to Bulawayo and then hatched an extraordinary plan with two schoolfriends in late 1961: they would travel overland to Ghana to see it for themselves. His friends lost their nerve en route, but Dube says he made it to Lubumbashi, then in the midst of a growing conflict, before being turned back by concerned Seventh Day Adventist missionaries. He returned to Zambia, where he found work, and joined the NDP's successor, ZAPU.[46] His next trip was to the USSR.

In the accounts of these future soldiers, this sense of a world transformed and so transformable sparked a hunger to know more – to read, to question teachers, to hear from political leaders. As in Dube's case, students often looked to their teachers, among whom were many nationalists of an older generation, for explanations of world-changing events. In 1957, George Silundika's students at Empandeni mission heard of the Soviet launch of Sputnik and demanded a lecture. Silundika obliged, attracting the attention of the Special Branch, who 'whisked him away' for interrogation.[47] Silundika would travel to Moscow less than four years later as secretary general of the NDP.[48] In 1956, Dumiso Dabengwa, himself the son of schoolteachers, was a student at the Methodist Thekwane secondary school. He read the South African *Drum* and *Zonk* magazines and the state-run *Rhodesian Herald* and Bulawayo *Chronicle*, and engaged in political debates with his teachers and other students, among whom were many future nationalists. Dabengwa recalled the excitement caused by the Suez crisis: 'we celebrated the victory of the Egyptians. We were certain it signalled the collapse of the British Empire'.[49] When Joshua Nkomo visited the school as SRANC president in 1957, Dabengwa remembers him counselling the students to 'study hard' so their 'skills and knowledge' might serve the nation. Prefiguring the pressure that nationalist youth would place on their leaders, Dabengwa wondered whether he should have asked Nkomo if 'the ANC should stop pleading with the settlers and act like the Egyptians. Maybe this is the only language the British can understand'.[50] Roma Nyathi attended the same talk and recalled his feeling of vindication when Nkomo spoke about evictions and destocking: 'then I said my seeing of these problems is correct, then from there I became interested in politics'.[51] Nyathi conferred with his classmates Philani Ndebele and Dabengwa, and 'agreed that after secondary school we have to join politics'.[52]

Joshua Mpofu provides a detailed account of politics at another influential mission secondary school – the LMS Inyathi school in Bubi District, north of Bulawayo. Inyathi educated an extraordinary set of future nationalists and soldiers.[53] Mpofu, who graduated in 1961, described Inyathi as 'a truly cosmopolitan institution' in which he became aware of himself as black, pan-African and nationalist. Students came from across central Africa. Among them was the future Malawian nationalist Aleke Banda, a 'motivating firebrand'.[54] When the Congress movements were banned across the Federation in 1959, Banda was

45 *Ibid*.
46 *Ibid*., p. 57–8.
47 P. Nyathi, *Lest We Forget: George Silundika*, unpublished pamphlet, 2013, p. 13.
48 RGANI Archive, Moscow, No. 372, SKSSAA to the Central Committee of the CPSU, briefing paper on the National Democratic Party of Southern Rhodesia, signed A. Sukhanov, 11/12/61. My thanks to Daria Zelenova for this source.
49 For this account, see O. Gjerstad (recorder and ed.), *The Organizer: Story of Temba Moyo* (Richmond, LSM Press, 1974), p. 43. This is the edited text of an interview with Dumiso Dabengwa under a pseudonym.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.
51 Interview with Roma Nyathi by J. Alexander, J. McGregor and Z. Moyo, Bulawayo, 10 January 2022.
52 *Ibid*.
53 See P. Nyathi and M. Clarke (eds), *A Cradle of the Revolution: Voices from Inyathi School Matabeleland, Zimbabwe 1914–1980* (Bulawayo, Amagugu Publishers, 2018).
54 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 17–18. See J. McCracken, 'Aleke Banda (1939–2010)', in *A Cradle*, pp. 30–34.

arrested and deported. Inyathi students were 'visibly shaken and petrified', but for Mpofu this action 'ignited a new fire in my mind' that displaced whites from their position as sources of 'enlightenment'. They had shown themselves unwilling to extend their 'civil liberties' to Africans. His conclusion that no amount of education would result in 'better treatment and respect' from whites was echoed by other students, mirroring the wider rejection of multi-racial 'partnership' in this moment.[55]

Joshua Mpofu's epiphany sparked a search for constitutional political models and 'how-to' guides to resistance as he and his fellow students sought ways to act in the world. To satisfy their 'hunger' for knowledge, they organised trips to Bulawayo to gather newspapers and magazines, including *Drum*, *Parade* and the African-edited *African Daily News* and *Bantu Mirror*.[56] In early 1959, Mpofu read about the ousting of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba and was heartened to see that the 'youthful' Fidel Castro was a lawyer and Che Guevara a medical doctor – young, educated men were to the revolutionary fore.[57] He read Nkrumah's biography and he and his schoolmates read about Mau Mau, Nasser, the Chinese struggle against Japanese occupation and the 1917 victory of the Bolsheviks, but it was ultimately in Algeria that Mpofu found a compelling model – the 'clandestine preparation' of the National Liberation Front's 'underground cells', which had somehow survived the arrests of the movement's leaders.[58] Mpofu imagined them as an 'invisible force' and the students of Inyathi went about forming their own version, the Invisible Black Stones, a name inspired – according to Mpofu's classmate J.Z. Mzilethi – by John Buchan's World War I spy novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.[59] Its members came from across the CAF. In the realm of the visible, the students organised a 'model parliament' and their own 'imaginary state', turning the school into a 'practising ground for real political battles'.[60] They also built contacts with journalists and the nationalist leader Jason Z. Moyo in Bulawayo, as well as with the rural nationalists of neighbouring Nkayi district (some of them Inyathi graduates) who were already engaged in a violent battle with the state.[61] In 1960, the students condemned the Sharpeville shootings in South Africa and celebrated the *Zhii* riots in Bulawayo, an urban conflagration sparked by the arrest of NDP leaders.[62] When Mpofu graduated in 1961, he considered that the 'inseparable twin engines of progress' were education and political consciousness.[63]

These accounts give a feel for the heady ideas that shaped the political worlds of these schoolboys, giving them an expansive sense of possibility that allowed them to link imagination with action – or at least with its anticipation. Mau Mau, Sputnik, Suez, Ghana, Cuba, China and Algeria entered their discussions via speeches, media, books, teachers and classmates. These new worlds allowed them to imagine remaking their own. They retained a faith in a Rhodesian idea of progress and specifically in education, but now cast it as 'a tool for attaining freedom' detached from a colonial civilisational agenda: this was modernity not as white wedding but as revolution. They imagined clandestine action and guerrilla war in Algeria and Cuba years before ZAPU sent recruits for training to these countries; they were inspired by the educated and often youthful status of revolutionary leaders in different

55 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 19–20; compare to Dabengwa's views in Gjerstad, *The Organizer*, p. 34.
56 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 32–3.
57 *Ibid*., pp. 20–1.
58 *Ibid*., pp. 22–4.
59 *Ibid*., pp. 24–5. On Mzilethi, see Nyathi and Clarke, *A Cradle*, p. 133.
60 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 27, 31.
61 *Ibid*., pp. 26, 32. On Nkayi's early nationalists, see J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford, James Currey, 2000), pp. 102–7.
62 See Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning*, Chapter 7.
63 Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 32.

corners of the world and saw them as a model of action that they might emulate. So, armed with ideas, this cohort of future soldiers travelled to town in search of work, following a well-beaten path for Rhodesia's young men, but doing so with a differently calibrated set of ambitions. It was largely in urban areas that they first joined the youth wings of nationalist parties, contending both with an older generation of nationalists – many of whom they already knew well – and with other young men who did not share their educational experience.

Nationalist Youth and Urban Politics

The route to joining the nationalist youth took many forms, but it often built on the search for freedom sparked in schools and captured in Roma Nyathi's urgent desire to 'join politics'. 'Politics' in Nyathi's sense became a means to claim autonomy and to escape the stultifying, humiliating world of racially segregated labour, housing and mobility. Inevitably it diverted these young men from the more respectable career paths of many of their peers and often it delivered them into danger and hardship.

Sometimes the search for work was short-circuited by anger over repression. Clark Mpofu went from his LMS primary school to Bulawayo. His uncle was detained when the SRANC was banned in early 1959: '[t]he arrest and detention touched me because we were close. My dislike for the colonial government increased'.[64] Mpofu was drawn in by the excitement of the *Zhii* riots and was 'fired up' by the speeches of Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe – just returned from Ghana – and Sally Heyfron, the Ghanaian woman Mugabe would marry, and who embodied for Mpofu the country 'that had gained independence and was my inspiration'.[65] The sheer excitement of nationalist rallies drew in many youth. Thomas Ngwenya had determinedly invested in his education and landed a job as a clerk at the International Hardware Company, but he was drawn to NDP meetings at Stanley Hall, Makokoba township's political heart, where the hero of his rural home, J.Z. Moyo, animated political life. He began to 'throw stones at the regime's cars' and soon gave up his career to join politics.[66]

For others, these factors mixed with experiences of racial discrimination at all ends of the job market. After graduating from Thekwane mission, Dumiso Dabengwa's parents could not afford to send him to university (he had been accepted in Lesotho), so he signed up for correspondence courses and sought work. His account of his childhood had traced a growing consciousness of racial inequity as he observed the better conditions white missionaries enjoyed and witnessed the disrespect shown by white children to his father.[67] Dabengwa's first job was as a teacher, filling a last-minute vacancy at Cyrene mission. He ostensibly taught a music class but, he says, at the behest of his students (among whom was the man who would end the war as ZAPU's commander in chief, Lookout Masuku) he converted it into a secret political discussion group. Dabengwa moved to Bulawayo, where he took a job in Barclay's bank and was angered by the higher salaries – more than double his own – paid to less qualified white colleagues.[68] In frustration, he devoted his time to politics, organising

64 Mpofu, 'Why We Needed the Guns'.
65 *Ibid*. Also see C.G. Msipa, *In Pursuit of Freedom and Justice: A Memoir* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2015), pp. 27–8.
66 Thomas Ngwenya in 'Lest We Forget: Veteran Bosso Administrator, Pioneer Freedom Fighter', *Sunday News*, Bulawayo, 26 February 2017.
67 Gjerstad, *The Organizer*, pp. 20–1. Also see Dube, *Tshinga*, p. 33, 50.
68 South African History Archive (hereafter SAHA), AL3265_Dumiso Dabengwa_20110707, interview with Dumiso Dabengwa by Mary Ndlovu, Bulawayo, 7 July 2011.

township youth in 1960 who, like him, felt they had 'no prospects' despite 'a good education'. They concluded that, 'it was necessary to try to end this system'.[69]

A number of the first generation of soldiers similarly gave up respectable teaching jobs in search of the autonomy required to 'join politics'. Dabengwa's one-time Thekwane classmate Roma Nyathi worked as a government teacher in Luveve township, but chafed at the state ban instituted in 1959 on teachers' political activity.[70] He quit and took a job as a shunter on the railway and, with a former schoolmate, became a founder member of the Njube NDP youth branch in 1960; after a move to Salisbury, he joined the Highfield youth.[71] Misheck Velaphi Ncube trained as a teacher but chose the relative freedom of work as a bookkeeper for a Bulawayo businessman, an ally of Joshua Nkomo. Already an experienced practitioner of rural protest and sabotage, Ncube 'used to eavesdrop' on their conversations and soon gave up his career in order to join politics.[72]

Nicholas Nkomo stood at the other end of the employment hierarchy from the teacher and white-collar clerk but he made a similar move. He had learned about Joshua Nkomo at his rural school in Kezi: '[t]his got into my blood because Joshua Nkomo came from my area'.[73] In 1959, police had come to his aunt's home and 'bundled' his SRANC uncle into a car; Nicholas Nkomo had 'wept at the sight'. In 1962, at the age of 17, he got a job as a 'garden boy' in Bulawayo, working for a Mr Oak. He found it intolerable, from the pay and hours to the tin can in which he was given tea, to Mr Oak's eight-year-old son whom he was told to address as '"Pikinini Boss" – Small Master … . I wondered how I was expected to pay so much respect to their child when sometimes the brat spat at me and called me names although I was much older than he'. Nkomo described this breach in the social order as 'traumatic'. He quit and vowed never to endure such humiliations again: 'I longed for the day when we Africans would be the rulers over the whites'. Joining youth politics was his route to freedom.

In the stories of these future soldiers, becoming a nationalist youth offered a means of freeing themselves from the humiliations they had witnessed in their parents' lives and now faced themselves. Many drew on the revolutionary visions of freedom they had developed in schools and determined that politics was the route through which they could change not the workplace but the world. They built on their social connections and shared experiences in rural communities, among kin, in schools, at work and in townships, drawing on their youthful bravado and cleverness and defining a new purpose for their education. The intimate connections among nationalist youth were the social stuff on which they would build underground networks amid rising repression, and which would help to cushion the costs of their search for freedom: the loss of a respectable life – family, home and career – and bodily safety.

Militarising Mobility

If literature on this first generation of soldiers has neglected their visions of freedom, it has equally obscured how central to their path – and the remaking of youthful dreams – was their confrontation with the repressive arms of the Rhodesian state. State violence spurred the making of an underground and pushed nationalist youth out of Rhodesia. The youth oscillated between the 'surface' and the 'shadow' as nationalist parties were banned and

69 Gjerstad, *The Organizer*, pp. 53–4.
70 See West, *The Rise*, p. 51. The ban was much evaded. See Msipa, *In Pursuit*, Chapters 2 and 3.
71 Interview, Nyathi; V.R.M. Nyathi, *Autobiography: Vunguza Roma Mdluli Nyathi*, ms, 2024, Chapter 1.
72 P. Nyathi, 'Cde Velaphi Ncube's Unheralded Journey', *Sunday Mail*, 12 May 2019.
73 For this paragraph, see N. Nkomo, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil: The Autobiography of Nicholas Nkomo,* ms, 1996, pp. 2–3.

relaunched. Their networks stretched over national borders, building on nascent solidarity and internationalism, and facilitating their military training. Movement across the region had long been a part of political and economic life in southern Africa: now it was put to new purpose as youth returned as saboteurs, arms smugglers, recruiters and finally soldiers. This militarised mobility laid the foundations of ZAPU's army.

In the narratives of this first generation of soldiers, the nationalist youth underground often built on schoolboy imaginations of secretive organisation. They dwelt on their pride in the mastery of disguises, safe houses, invisible ink and passwords.[74] Dumiso Dabengwa described forming 'shadow structures' in Bulawayo in anticipation of ZAPU's ban. His 'underground' life involved moving among houses, adopting disguises, carrying out secret tasks and maintaining contacts for 'surface activities'.[75] Bulawayo's townships hosted an array of underground youth networks such as the Red Army action group and the Thuthisa gang.[76] Joshua Mpofu linked the formation of the Formidables to his schoolday readings about Algeria, in which an underground awaited the arrival of armed men. The Formidables linked 'surface' office holders in the youth and main party wings to secret cells; these cells became 'self-acting' in the absence of detained or exiled senior leaders.[77] Mpofu says that the underground established a secret women's organisation too, alongside a network of businessmen and taxi, truck and bus owners who were essential to the transport, smuggling and hiding of people and arms.[78] Some underground youth leaders held jobs and owned cars, allowing them cover and mobility on the 'surface'; some 'surface' leaders played 'invisible' roles. A number of accounts note the skills of Thenjiwe Lesabe, a teacher and one of a small group of 'elite black women' who led Christian women's organisations engaged in 'homecraft' and 'upliftment'.[79] Mpofu argues that women were effective in the surveillance and recruitment of black policemen – outside the Special Branch, there were many nationalist sympathisers among them.[80]

The celebration of trickery and cleverness in accounts of the underground extend to stories of confronting state violence, but these accounts add a reckoning with cruelty and a focus on loyalty defined by an uncomplaining acceptance of sacrifice. Torture became a central means through which the Special Branch uncovered sabotage and smuggling networks.[81] Accounts of police violence are common in future soldiers' stories of the early 1960s. Nicholas Nkomo identified a black detective named Mkhetwa, 'a tall, slim and very cruel colonial-paid boy' as his tormentor. Mkhetwa appears in several accounts as a 'savage' interrogator.[82] In a detailed account of his own experience of torture, Joshua Mpofu names Mkhetwa and three other black detectives:

> The torture started in the form of beating with claps and fists and kicking. Then they resorted to suffocating me with my shirt which they pulled over my head, twisted and tied above the head, threatening to finish me off if I did not talk. They pushed me to the ground and forced me to balance on my hands and toes to keep the rest of the body suspended more or less like a suspended bridge and ordered me to do a push-up exercise. On this occasion,

74 On spycraft, see interview with Batandi Mpofu by J. Alexander and B. Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 5 February 2009; Nyathi, 'Cde Velaphi'.
75 Gjerstad, *The Organizer*, pp. 71–2, and see Chapter 6.
76 Nkomo, *Between the Hammer*, p. 5.
77 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 95, 100, and Chapters 9 and 10.
78 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 88–9. Also see Moffat Hadebe's account in 'Our Mission Was to Kill the White Magistrate, Roberts', *Sunday News*, 1 August 2021.
79 West, *The Rise*, pp. 76, 79; Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 96.
80 See Mpofu, *My Life*; interview, Batandi Mpofu.
81 Maxey, *The Fight*, p. 50, makes this point in reference to the later 1960s, but the use of torture was systematic earlier. See Ellert's euphemistic description of torture in *The Rhodesian Front War*, p. 7.
82 Nkomo, *Between the Hammer*, p. 5. Also, for example, Moffat Hadebe in 'Our Target was Zidube Ranch', *Sunday News*, 25 July 2021.

> they placed their lit cigarettes under and burned my abdomen when I went down due to tiredness. I tried to roll away from their 'fire' but they pushed me down and pressed me to stay directly above the amber-like cigarettes. They did this repeatedly until I was utterly exhausted.[83]

This continued for four days until a white officer appeared. He was wearing 'a milky white shirt and a navy-blue blazer on a grey pair of trousers befitting a proud school inspector'. Mpofu understood that he was not there to administer violence but to catch him out through interrogation, 'with carefully worded repetition of questions from different angles or rephrasing them like a prosecutor's cross examination'.

Mpofu says he did not incriminate himself owing to the 'brilliant guidelines' of his senior in the Bulawayo youth, Ethan Dube, already a survivor of Special Branch torture, who had stressed to Joshua the importance of making 'precise and concise statements'.[84] Nationalist youth described how they tried to contain the fallout of interrogations by confessing to lesser crimes, implicating people outside the country and holding out for as long as possible.[85] The latter strategy invoked a heroic, self-sacrificial bravery. Cleopas Mhlabi described his experience of '[y]outh training', in which emphasis was placed on 'the principle of "Being Ready to Die Alone" to avoid squealing and selling out to the enemy in the event of being picked up by the Special Branch'.[86] Such bravery was not always sustainable and the rapid provision of legal representation was also crucial to mitigating the effects of interrogation. Many of Bulawayo's nationalist youth refer to the work of the lawyer Leo Baron. His legal clerk was Philani Ndebele, senior NDP youth and one-time Thekwane schoolmate of Dabengwa, Roma Nyathi and others. Information flowed through him; Baron offered speedy representation and counselled clients on their options.[87]

A key youth strategy in the early 1960s was 'export'. In this cohort of future soldiers' accounts, exporting – meaning crossing into Zambia – was cast as a direct response to police violence. It was orchestrated by nationalist youth operating within or in concert with 'invisible' and above-ground structures. It targeted youth in danger of arrest, for example when other members of their underground cell had been picked up. The 'semi-surface' Thenjiwe Lesabe played a key role in organising hideouts in the houses of contacts who were not otherwise involved in sabotage work and transport on rural buses on which bus drivers and conductors could be asked, in code, to deliver 'a bag of maize meal or such like parcel', as well as with owners and drivers of private vehicles, taxis, lorries and even government ambulances and public works vehicles.[88] Stories about imminent arrests, laying low and awaiting a chance to flee under the direction of nationalist youth leaders, are commonplace among this generation of soldiers.[89] Before the break-up of the CAF at the end of 1963, youth could be got out by train or vehicle through the open border of Zambia; subsequently, crossing the Bechuanaland border to Francistown and on to the Kazungula crossing point to Zambia was the key route.[90]

The journeys of NDP youth Philani Ndebele and Roma Nyathi in 1961 provide a striking example of the interaction of the machinery of export, youthful political imagination and the opportunities of this historical juncture. They knew each other from Thekwane school and as

83 For this account of interrogation, see Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 106–7.
84 *Ibid*.
85 For example, Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 133.
86 Mhlabi, *The Path*, p. 26.
87 See interview, Nyathi; Nyathi, *Autobiography*, pp. 3–4.
88 Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 132. Also, interview, Nyathi, and Nyathi, *Autobiography*.
89 For example, interview with Griffith Mthandazo Maduma by Mark Ndlovu (Mafela Trust), Gwanda, 25–6 February 1995; Mhlabi, *The Path*, pp. 26–7; Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 131–3.
90 Compare to Houston, 'Military Bases and Camps', pp. 13–17, on the South African ANC's movements.

township youth. Ndebele's work for Leo Baron had made him 'visible' while Nyathi was charged under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act of 1960 for his 'fiery speeches'. Nyathi says Leo Baron told him, 'if you want to stay in jail you can rot in jail, but if you want to help the country you better quit and see what you can do out there'.[91] He crossed into Zambia, following the advice of the underground to get off the train at Victoria Falls and take a taxi over the border to Livingstone ('taxis were never stopped at the border'). He went straight to a Mr Sipalo at the UNIP offices in Lusaka and told him he intended travelling to Dar es Salaam. Sipalo verified his credentials with Bulawayo NDP officials and told him that Philani Ndebele had just passed through, headed to Tanganyika. A UNIP member took Nyathi to the bus station:

> The bus driver was very helpful. I discovered that he had facilitated safe passage to Tanzania for many Zimbabweans. When we were about to arrive at the border between Zambia and Tanzania he told me to alight from the bus, and to follow a safe path which would take me across the border. He then continued ahead and waited for me at a bus stop in Tanzania.[92]

Nyathi caught up with Ndebele in Dar es Salaam and an extraordinary saga ensued. Much in the spirit of the schoolboy Tshinga Dube, the two men decided to make a tour of East African countries to assess their struggles for independence and the needs of development. Confident in their nationalist standing, they contacted the Tanganyika African National Union and applied for travel documents from the Indian High Commission, which duly checked their NDP credentials.[93] They used their savings to travel to Kenya, where they met Tom Mboya and discussed Mau Mau before moving on to Uganda, where they called on Milton Obote and 'discussed how they organised their own people'.[94] An unplanned excursion into Somalia led to their arrest and abrupt return to Mombasa by boat. When they returned to Dar es Salaam at the end of 1961, the NDP had negotiated scholarships for them. Ndebele went to Czechoslovakia while Nyathi spent the next five years in Moscow and Kyiv, learning Russian and undertaking a degree in Economics and Economic Planning, alongside students from the South African ANC and many others from across Africa and elsewhere. When he returned to Lusaka in 1967, he was appointed the first Chief Political Commissar of ZAPU's armed wing.[95]

State repression drove cross-border flight. It also led nationalist youth to demand a move from sabotage to war and brought them into nascent international sites of military training.

From Nationalist Youth to Soldier

In the early 1960s, external military training enabled the move from 'throwing stones at the regime's cars' to imagining and organising war alongside other liberation movements. The nationalist youth drove the demand for guns and training: their experience of sabotage, secret organisation and state violence had convinced many of them that the Rhodesian state would only respond to arms and they pressed an at times reluctant older generation of

91 For this paragraph, see Nyathi, *Autobiography*, p. 5.
92 *Ibid*.
93 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6. Brennan, 'Tanzania', p. 21, and Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile', p. 44–5, note the Indian High Commission role.
94 Interview, Nyathi.
95 *Ibid*.

nationalist leaders to enable them to act. A few dozen nationalist youth would soon train in some of the very places that had inspired their schoolboy dreams. This was an improvised, amateurish process narrated in uneven tones as both picaresque adventure and the source of devastating loss.

The early rounds of youth journeys can be roughly patched together amid the divided and turbulent set of internationalist solidarities that mediated military mobilities. The first sabotage training was in Ghana, probably in 1961; a second group of five or six ZAPU men had three months of sabotage training in Ghana in early 1963, before it became the exclusive province of ZANU.[96] The first instance recognised by ZAPU veterans as military training proper was of 12 men who did 'commando training' in Egypt in 1962, a connection facilitated by Joshua Nkomo's good relations with Egypt, and a mark of Cairo's rise as an African hub.[97] Another group of 13 ZAPU youth, recruited from across the country, trained in China from early 1963, returning towards the end of the year. Following the Sino-Soviet split, only ZANU trained in China while ZAPU embraced the USSR.[98] In mid 1964, 12 youth – the first of many groups – left Zambia to train in the Soviet Union. Their return at the end of that year set the stage for a new phase of military organisation and a dramatic expansion in the sites and scale of training in Algeria and Cuba.

The first cohort of future soldiers recounted pushing the nationalist leaders to enable them to escalate violence, drawing on their own models of revolutionary action and experience of repression. Roma Nyathi remembered a deep sense of urgency following the NDP's rejection of the constitutional proposals of 1961. He says the NDP youth 'pressurised the elders to find a way how we can engage in armed struggle'; he remembered 'all the youth' being inspired by Algeria.[99] Nyathi was familiar with Algerian and other struggles from his Thekwane schooldays; others encountered them in discussion with youth leaders. Cleopas Mhlabi vividly recalled the political liturgy into which he was inducted by the Thekwane graduates Dumiso Dabengwa, Ethan Dube and Philani Ndebele when he joined the Luveve youth:

> They told me that the people of Zimbabwe and their Party were not different from Che Guevara and Fidel Castro of Latin America, Ahmed Ben Bella and Dedan Kimathi of Africa, Mao Tse Tung, Kim Il Sung, Ho Chi Minh and General Giap of Asia, Vladimir Lenin, Zhukov[,] Dubcek and Marshall Tito of Europe. The same blood that flows or flowed in these people's veins is the same blood that pulsates in the veins of Zimbabwean youth.[100]

96 Bhebe and Mazarire, 'Zimbabwe's War', p. 27, and D. Dabengwa, 'Relations between ZAPU and the USSR, 1960s–1970s: A Personal View', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1, 2017, p. 216, says the NDP sent the first trainees to Ghana in 1961. On ZANU, see Bhebe, *ZAPU and ZANU*, pp. 29–30.

97 This group probably left for Egypt in early 1962 and were back in Tanganyika towards the end of the year. It probably included Misheck Velaphi Ncube, Bobylock Manyonga, David Mpongo Khumalo, Kennias Mlalazi, Mupfukacha (Solomon) Mabika, Felix 'Rice' Santana, Lloyd Gundu, Alfred Mutasa, Matthew Malowa, Dennis Mapani, Amon Ndukwana Ncube and Njodzi Machichori: interview with Misheck Velaphi Ncube by J. Alexander, B. Ngwenya and P. Nyathi, Bulawayo, 27 February 2009; Nyathi, 'Cde Velaphi'; Mazarire, 'ZANU's External Networks', p. 88.

98 This group of 13 youth travelled in two contingents but returned together after ZAPU's split in August 1963. Clark Mpofu in '13 of You Can Free Zimbabwe', *Sunday Mail*, 28 October 2018, says he and six others – Gordon Butshe, Mbhejelwa Moyo, James Chatagwa, Charles Dauramanzi, Lloyd Gundu and Felix 'Rice' Santana (Santana and Gundu had already trained in Egypt) – travelled to Beijing in early 1963 and were joined there in April by six others, led by Luke Mhlanga and including John Maluzo Ndlovu, Stone Philip Nkomanza, Benson Maphosa, Johnson Ndebele and John Mondiya Ndlovu. Other names appear elsewhere, for example, see John Maluzo Ndlovu in 'The Freedom Fighter Who Dodged the Rhodesian Hangman's Noose', *Sunday News*, 16 June 2019, for Douglas Mudukuti and Amen Chikwakwata; Hadebe in 'Our Target Was Zidube Ranch', for Israel Maduma. This may be due to some combination of using war names in place of real names, simple confusion, or the existence of other trainees.

99 Interview, Nyathi.

100 Mhlabi, *The Path*, p. 23.

In Mhlabi's account, it was the launch of ZAPU at the end of 1961 (in place of the banned NDP) that brought nationalist youth to the fore. He described how they demanded that 'the Party should give us enough power to decide the fate of our destiny'. Plans for a youth congress were under way when ZAPU was itself banned. Senior leaders were detained and the ZAPU youth 'transformed our theories into action right in the midst of the cruel enemy: it is in Bulawayo not Algiers that I learnt how to handle plastic explosives such as dynamite and gelignite!' When Mhlabi did arrive in Algiers a few years later, he brought a wealth of experience with him.[101]

Youth pressure on their leaders to act was mediated through intimate township connections. We can see this in the life of the nationalist youth in Makokoba township, home to ZAPU leader J.Z. Moyo, a central political mentor for youth in this early period.[102] We have encountered several of the youths in question already. They included one-time Zinyangeni schoolmates Clark Mpofu and Joshua Mpofu, along with Shadreck Nkomo, Ethan Dube and Gordon Butshe (the latter two both graduates of Thekwane).[103] Clark Mpofu borrowed books from J.Z. Moyo on Mau Mau and took part in petrol bombing following the NDP's rejection of the 1961 constitution.[104] 'I was on fire', he remembered, 'I felt the urge for arson and destruction to show my dislike for white oppression'. He says that he, Gordon Butshe and Shadreck Nkomo approached J.Z. Moyo, 'requesting the use of guns. He was reluctant at first but later convinced the National Executive Committee of Zapu to consider helping us get training in the use of explosives'.[105] Clark Mpofu and three other youths (Elias Nguguma, Amen Chikwakwata and John Mondiya Ndlovu) were sent to Salisbury disguised as a church outing by Thenjiwe Lesabe. Mpofu remembers signalling his status with an upside-down newspaper to the young historian Terence Ranger and exchanging the password 'J.Z. Moyo'. As he put it, 'these liberal whites at the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland understood our cause'. Mpofu says Ranger delivered his group of young men for a week's training in making explosives.[106]

Nationalist youth also drove the move into international spheres and alliances in Zambia, creating a ground-level internationalism that brought nationalists and liberation movements into each other's paths, camps, houses, training and political projects. We have already seen how the UNIP offices guided exported youth in 1961. These ties were strengthened in 1962. The teenage John Maluzo Ndlovu, fresh from a nine-month prison sentence owing to his involvement in rural sabotage, was exported in early 1962 by Sikhwili Moyo and took up residence in a ZAPU house in the Lusaka township of Materu. He and other ZAPU youth joined their UNIP counterparts to attack UNIP's nationalist competitors, ANC-Nkumbula.[107] When Cleopas Mhlabi was exported in 1962, he arrived at UNIP's Lusaka offices with an introductory note from youth leaders Akim Ndlovu, Adam Ngwenya and Ethan Dube, and worked in UNIP security and with UNIP youth, 'even sharing with them on organizational

101 *Ibid*., pp. 23–25.
102 See Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 240, on J.Z. Moyo's recruitment of and relationship to youth.
103 Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 67.
104 C. Mpofu, 'Reminiscing the Zhii Era', *Sunday News*, 7 February 2016.
105 Mpofu, 'Why We Needed the Guns'.
106 See *ibid*. Ranger was unlikely to have knowingly involved himself in sabotage activities, though several of the 'liberal whites' at the University did: see T.O. Ranger, *Writing Revolt: An Engagement with African Nationalism 1957–67* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2013), pp. 164–5.
107 Interview with John Maluzo Ndlovu by J. Alexander and B. Ngwenya, Entumbane, 7 February 2009, and interview with Maluzo, The Breakfast Club, CITE, Bulawayo, November 2021 (see note 3); Phineas Tapona, an exported Makokoba youth, also describes UNIP and ZAPU working 'hand in glove' and having 'skirmishes' with ANC-Nkumbula. Interview with Phineas Tapona by Mark Ndlovu (Mafela Trust), Bulawayo, 12 December 1994. Sly Masuku describes moving to Zambia with his father in 1963 and joining the UNIP youth league, before he was recruited by ZAPU and left for training in the USSR. Interview with Silayi 'Sly' Masuku by J. Alexander and Z. Nkomo, Dromoland, Inyati, 9 August 2010.

tactics'.[108] Dumiso Dabengwa had served a prison sentence in the aftermath of the *Zhii* riots. After his release in April 1962 one of his first tasks was to move 33 South African ANC recruits – headed for Tanganyika – through Southern Rhodesia to Zambia.[109] In December 1962, Clark Mpofu's group of four youths, already trained in sabotage in Salisbury, were escorted by the Egypt-trained Kennias Mlalazi to Zambia, where they received 'further training' from an ANC cadre – a 'Cde Makiwane' – over Christmas.[110] As Clark explained: '[r]egional movements were working closely together; that is, the ANC of South Africa and Swapo of Namibia and so on. We were trained with other countries' in 'the bush'.[111]

When these young men returned home, they produced a dense set of exchanges that began to 'militarise' youth imagination and action. In 1962, the handful of men trained in Ghana took up roles organising sabotage. Dumiso Dabengwa praised Findo Mpofu for co-ordinating sabotage operations in the 'western region' that year.[112] Some of the 12 men trained in Egypt in 1962 worked closely with the Ghana-trained men and with nationalist youth, bringing skills, resources and bravado. They started to see themselves as soldiers, if not an army. Misheck Velaphi Ncube said his Egyptian training had included 'engineering sabotage', 'commando training' and hand-to-hand combat.[113] By the time his group returned from Cairo to Dar es Salaam, Joshua Nkomo had undertaken the first act of gun-running along the same route, on an Air France flight. The weapons included two dozen semi-automatic assault rifles, ammunition and grenades.[114]

Newly trained men focused on arms smuggling and caching. Joshua Nkomo had earlier recruited Abraham Nkiwane, an older graduate of Thekwane mission and one-time schoolteacher who had moved to Northern Rhodesia to seek his fortune in the 1950s. By 1961, he held a full-time post in UNIP's Lusaka offices.[115] After ZAPU was banned, Nkiwane recalls being summoned to a meeting with Kenneth Kaunda and Joshua Nkomo, who asked him to support 'ZAPU cadres who were to do some missions between Mbeya in Tanzania and Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe … . The mission was all about moving arms of war'.[116] Nkiwane joined up with two Egypt-trained cadres, Misheck Velaphi Ncube and Kennias Mlalazi, to move weapons in late 1962. Ncube's account offers a tale of adventure and improvisation. He described the three men setting off from Tanganyika in a one-time NDP Land Rover, only for it to break down. UNIP then loaned them a Zephyr Zodiac, which also broke down and had to be repaired en route, using up the group's meagre funds. When they ran out of fuel they tricked potential travellers into handing over their money in anticipation of a lift to Lusaka, only to strand them and make a run for it.[117] In Lusaka the men made their way to the home of Nathan Shamuyarira, an eminent journalist and Thekwane graduate known to Nkiwane, where they repackaged the guns. Shamuyarira recorded Nkiwane's arrival: 'a young man I had known at Tegwani Mission came to my house one rainy December evening and asked for shelter. His car was loaded with ammunition and weapons he was carrying down to Southern Rhodesia'. Shamuyarira

108 Mhlabi, *The Path*, pp. 26–8.
109 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile', p. 419.
110 Mpofu, 'Why We Needed the Guns'.
111 *Ibid*.
112 Dabengwa, 'Relations Between ZAPU and the USSR', p. 216. Also see P. Nyathi, 'Reminiscing Days of the Armed Liberation Struggle: Cde Abraham Dumezweni Nkiwane (Bra Nki) Celebrates 90-Year Birthday', *Sunday News*, 14 January 2018.
113 Interview, Ncube.
114 J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London, Methuen, 1984), p. 102.
115 Nyathi, 'Reminiscing Days'.
116 Nkiwane, quoted in SAHA, *ZAPU through Zenzo Nkobi's Lens* (Braamfontein, SAHA, 2017), p. 9.
117 There are several versions of this story. Interview, Ncube, and see P. Nyathi's accounts in, 'Misheck Ntunduzakovelaphi Velaphi Ncube: A Born Military Strategist', *Sunday News*, 12 May 2019, 'Reminiscing Days', and 'In Search of Freedom: Edward Ndlovu', unpublished ms, p. 29.

disapproved but wondered, '[w]hat alternatives could I have given him for fighting for his freedom and independence?'[118] The group crossed into Southern Rhodesia and proceeded to Nkiwane's father's rural home. They hid the guns and made arrangements for their distribution to Findo Mpofu in Bulawayo.[119]

These smuggling efforts relied on the work of often only barely trained youth. On their way back from training in Zambia, Clark Mpofu said his group was 'entrusted with a big trunk which contained grenades and bombs'. They got off the train at Mpopoma township, where Ethan Dube and Gordon Butshe took charge of the trunk and hid it in the Matopos hills.[120] Dumiso Dabengwa described travelling to Lusaka on two occasions to transport arms in suitcases. On one trip, he convinced Sikhwili Moyo to show him how to use the grenades – they lobbed one after another at a wall at a derelict farm but the grenades failed to blow up. It turned out that they lacked primers.[121] Dabengwa told this as a comical story, but the failure to handle explosives properly injured and killed numbers of youth and others in these years.[122]

Despite its amateur nature, the movement of arms at first evaded the Southern Rhodesian authorities. According to Henrik Ellert, the police only gained their 'first inkling of this clandestine operation' by chance in early 1963, when Bobylock Manyonga was stopped at a roadblock on his way to Salisbury: '[t]he astonished Police Constable who examined Manyonga's vehicle found a number of vintage Thompson and Lancaster sub-machine guns, .45 calibre ammunition and hand grenades. A similar carload of munitions was detected in Hwange at the same time'.[123] This latter car was driven by Misheck Velaphi Ncube and Amos Ndukwana Ncube.[124] All three men were part of ZAPU's Egypt-trained 'commandos'. Under Special Branch torture, Manyonga appears to have revealed the name of another ZAPU youth, Thomas Ngwenya. Ngwenya says he was alerted and hid but was tracked down and sent to Grey Street prison where he found Misheck Velaphi Ncube already in the cells. Manyonga would receive a 14-year sentence and both Misheck Velaphi Ncube and Amos Ndukwana Ncube seven years, but Ngwenya was released on bail thanks to the arrival of the lawyer Leo Baron, summoned via the youth network with a smuggled note on toilet paper. Ngwenya was spirited off to Zambia and was sent for training in Ghana, along with the ubiquitous Sikhwili Moyo.[125]

At the end of 1963, 13 trained youth returned from China and introduced new elements to the nationalist youth's nascent imaginaries of war.[126] The story of this group began as a familiar interaction between state repression and internationalist networks. When Makokoba youth Shadreck Nkomo was arrested in January 1963, Clark Mpofu and Gordon Butshe came under pressure from the Special Branch: '[t]hey were hot on us and we were hiding in various places', explained Mpofu.[127] They were sent to Zambia by the Bulawayo youth chairmen and were put up at the home of a ZAPU businessman where they were later joined by two other youth: Mbhejelwa Moyo and James Chatagwa.[128] The group was escorted to

118 N. Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1965), p. 73.
119 In Nyathi, 'Reminiscing Days'.
120 Mpofu, '13 of You'. Also see Thomas Ngwenya in SAHA, *ZAPU*, p. 10.
121 Dabengwa, 'Relations Between ZAPU and the USSR', p. 216.
122 *Ibid*., p. 217; Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 72–3, 109, 129–31.
123 Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War*, p. 9.
124 Interview, Ncube.
125 See interview, Ncube; Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 132, and for Ngwenya's account, interview in The Breakfast Club, CITE, Bulawayo, 14 September 2020 (see note 3), 'Lest We Forget', and SAHA, *ZAPU*, p. 10.
126 Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War*, p. 9.
127 Mpofu, 'Why We Needed the Guns'.
128 *Ibid*. See Mpofu, *My Life*, p. 106, on sending out Mbhejelwa Moyo.

Mbeya, Tanganyika, by the Egypt-trained David Mpongo Khumalo. Abraham Nkiwane, a now seasoned mover of arms and people with weapons handling training, received them.[129] In Mbeya, they briefed ZAPU leaders Joshua Nkomo and James Chikerema on the sabotage campaign. Mpofu felt Nkomo was out of touch with the youth's desire for war. He

> seemed to be interested in learning more about our characters. I would be correct to say Nkomo was afraid we were waging a war in a manner different to what they wanted. He thought we were too radical. Nkomo asked what we had been up to, and we told him that the sabotage and bombs that had been targeting the whites and their properties had been our doing. He asked what we wanted, and we told him we now wanted military training and guns to shoot the whites. Nkomo looked puzzled, he seemed as if he was questioning himself on what animals the struggle was now creating.

Nkomo wanted to stick to sabotage, but the youth 'had decided to shift a gear up because sabotage alone was not working'.[130]

By April 1963, 13 youth from across Zimbabwe had gathered in China, including Clark Mpofu and John Maluzo Ndlovu. Both had travelled via the USSR and were impressed by the skyscrapers of Moscow – when they arrived in China they were struck by its comparative poverty.[131] Asked what they wanted, Mpofu recalled, 'we told them we wanted to train to fight the whites in our country who had taken land from our forefathers'.[132] Mpofu's group arrived first and, much to their frustration, were given courses in agricultural production before the second group arrived and military training began. Both Mpofu and Ndlovu remembered meeting Mao. Mpofu recalled that the 'Thoughts of Chairman Mao Tse Tung … were a daily food'.[133] Ndlovu depicted Mao as 'a gentle person, but a militarised mind'. He and Mpofu described training in the mountains 'to be proper, effective and mobile guerrillas', the making of explosives, and the skills of disguise and deception.[134]

As was common in these sites of training, and already typical of the eclectic readings and experimentation of youth, military and revolutionary ideas of different origins were mixed. In these men's accounts, the Chinese underlined the power of guerrilla warfare not with reference to their own history but through an upbeat allusion to Fidel Castro's 1956 entrance to the Sierra Maestro. Mpofu recalled, 'The Chinese gave us motivation that Fidel Castro liberated Cuba with 12 men and us being 13, we were even better positioned to liberate Zimbabwe'.[135] This group would fall below the magic number of 12, however, owing to ZAPU's split. In Dar es Salaam, Mpofu says three men left for ZANU, a choice he put down to their allegiance to their most proximate youth networks, which had defected to ZANU.[136]

The China-trained men felt they stood apart from other youth. John Maluzo Ndlovu considered that there was a great difference between himself and the 'untrained', and he was excited to use 'what we had been taught': 'the mood was so high'.[137] Clark Mpofu remembers confidently telling Sikwhili Moyo that 'we had undergone military training and it was our mandate to set up an army'.[138] These ideas reached Bulawayo. Joshua Mpofu recalled the excitement when youth they had helped to export 'trickled in' in 'small doses', now as 'trained personnel'. They welcomed the China-trained Mbhejelwa Moyo, sent as an

129 SAHA, *ZAPU*, p. 9.
130 Mpofu, '13 of You', and see 'Reminiscing the Zhii Era'.
131 *Ibid*.
132 *Ibid*.
133 P. Nyathi, 'Ghana Independence Inspired Clark Mpofu', *Sunday News*, 5 April 2020.
134 John Maluzo Ndlovu, 'The Veteran Fighter Who Survived the Hangman's Noose', *Sunday News*, 23 June 2019. Also interview, Ndlovu. For Mpofu's description, see '13 of You'.
135 Mpofu, '13 of You'.
136 C. Mpofu, 'I Was There Before Dabengwa', *Sunday Mail*, 4 November 2018.
137 Interview, Ndlovu.
138 Mpofu, 'I Was There Before'.

'advance party' to link up with youth and establish arms caches.[139] These men seemed to promise the imminent realisation of the Algeria-inspired schoolboy vision of a clandestine underground receiving armed men and launching a guerrilla war.

In practice, the China group did not bring radical change. Its deployment reflected ZAPU's very limited capacity. When ZAPU's national executive was established in Lusaka in early 1964, James Chikerema and J.Z. Moyo were charged with developing ZAPU's armed wing – then called the Special Affairs Department. They had scant resources. Chikerema was angered by the slow pace of the OAU Liberation Committee's establishment of training facilities in Tanganyika and sought to move the action to Zambia.[140] The China-trained group played a role in expanding security institutions, including monitoring cross-border movements and 'screening' new arrivals at the ZAPU house in Materu.[141] The China-trained Gordon Butshe was also tasked with establishing ZAPU's first modest military training camp in Zambia on a farm owned by the Zimbabwean ZAPU supporter Mahlenyika Ndlovu.[142]

In 1964, Butshe trained six nationalist youth in this new camp. They were to undertake a military expedition that would be celebrated as a 'first' in ZAPU lore – ZAPU's first firing of guns in combat – though it was also disparaged as an amateurish escapade by those involved. Among this group was Moffat Hadebe. An Inyathi school graduate, Hadebe had imbibed the 'revolutionary spirit' while working in Highfield in Salisbury. He was exported in 1964 through Bechuanaland, now a well-travelled route for the region's liberation movements, and proceeded north by truck with some 40 men from the ANC, Pan-African Congress (PAC), SWAPO and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to the Kazangula crossing point. In Livingstone, he met Dabengwa, Ethan Dube and Luke Mhlanga at a ZAPU house where he was 'screened': Dabengwa knew him to be a ZAPU youth and vouched for him. Hadebe described how he was sent on to the camp at Ndlovu's farm, where he received basic training in the use of an odd collection of guns – the Russian PPSh or 'pepesha', French 'F40' and American Thompson sub-machine gun – along with hand grenades.[143]

In August and September 1964, ZAPU's Special Affairs Department sent small numbers of trained youth to undertake the sabotage of buildings and infrastructure, much as in previous years. The exception was Hadebe's group of six men who were sent on an assassination mission to avenge the recent detention of ZAPU's nationalist leaders who had remained in Rhodesia. Their target was Bulawayo's chief magistrate, Farewell Roberts. In Hadebe's words, he 'was the one sending out people to the detention centres … . So, he was a legitimate target for any military operation'.[144] Hadebe led the group because he knew the area in which Roberts' farm was located. Israel Maduma, trained in engineering in China, was tasked with cutting the farm's phone lines. Abraham Nkiwane transported them to Livingstone,[145] where Mhlanga and Dabengwa armed them with pistols and a Thompson sub-machine gun. Three entered Southern Rhodesia in the back of a truck; three others went by train, carrying their pistols in briefcases, looking 'like any other ordinary traveller'. They

139 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 105–6.
140 See his intemperate outburst in Moscow in RGANI Archive, No. 375, SKSSA, Central Committee of the CPSU. Record of conversations held with ZAPU vice president James Chikerema, 17–27 January 1964.
141 Mpofu, 'Reminiscing the Zhii Era'; interview, Ndlovu.
142 This farm would become 'Joshua Nkomo Camp' and would play a central role in years to come. See Bhebe, *ZAPU and ZANU*, p. 19.
143 Hadebe in 'Our Target was Zidube Ranch'. His group included Keyi Nkala, Elliot Ngwabi, Rhodes Malaba, Roger 'Matshimini' Ncube and Israel Maduma. Also see interview, Maduma. Woods, *Zambezi Valley*, p. 4, mentions a Bren gun from Kenya.
144 Hadebe, in 'Our Mission'. On Roberts' notoriety, see Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 222.
145 Interview, Moffat Hadebe, The Breakfast Club, CITE, 4 March 2022 (see note 3).

were picked up by ZAPU contacts in Bulawayo and accommodated separately, their locations unknown to each other. Hadebe stayed in a house owned by the Naik brothers, Indian businessmen who were senior ZAPU members.[146] Another ZAPU businessman, Taffy Zibuya Moyo, organised the transportation of the men south to Kezi, the location of Magistrate Roberts' Zidube Ranch. Some of them were hidden in vehicles used to transport pigs – as Hadebe recalled, '[e]ven at a roadblock no one wanted to come close because they were smelly'.[147]

The operation ended in failure. Two of Hadebe's group undertook reconnaissance, and that same night they cut the telephone lines and began their attack, only to be surprised by dogs and then Magistrate Roberts himself, who came out of his house firing a rifle. In Hadebe's account, they managed to kill the dogs and to retreat. Three of the men made it back to Zambia but three, including Hadebe, ended up in Grey Street Prison in Bulawayo.[148] The other China-trained men undertook sabotage, but few lasted long. Dabengwa and Mhlanga dispatched Johnson Ndebele to ZAPU contact Kotsho Dube, Dabengwa's one-time schoolmate, in Highfield. His task was to blow up Salisbury's main post office, but he was killed when the bomb went off while he was arming it, destroying Dube's house.[149] John Maluzo Ndlovu and Amen Chikwakwata also headed to Salisbury. Ndlovu says they worked with ZAPU youth in Highfield and Harare 'conscientising and mobilising the masses', recruiting men for training and carrying out sabotage attacks.[150] Clark Mpofu travelled to Bulawayo and used his engineering training to carry out attacks using explosives on Bulawayo's trade fair grounds, magistrates' court and post office.[151] Ndlovu and Mpofu would both be captured, severely tortured and remain in prison or detention until the end of the war.[152]

There was to be one more dramatic grab for freedom for some of these men – a testament to the ZAPU underground's loyalties and capacity. When Moffat Hadebe, Elliot Ngwabi and Keyi Nkala were brought to Grey Street Prison following their attack on Farewell Roberts' farm, they found Clark Mpofu already there. These men were well known to each other and to the underground. The youth determined to break them out in a 'clandestine operation' involving Thenjiwe Lesabe and other 'semi-surface' officials. They recruited a prison guard and smuggled in a metal cutter to make a hole in the prison's roof. The escape succeeded – but all but Hadebe were recaptured in the following days as 'one of the biggest manhunts in Rhodesia', involving police, army, spotter planes, the offer of rewards, and pamphlets dropped from the air, got under way.[153]

Many of this first generation of trained soldiers and the underground youth who supported them suffered torture and imprisonment; some were killed. Men such as Joshua Mpofu, who had imagined the arrival of an army when the first China-trained men returned, felt abandoned and disillusioned.[154] But the stories of these soldiers do not end in this

146 See Ranger, *Bulawayo Burning*, p. 241, on the Naik brothers Ramanbhai and Don.
147 Interview, Hadebe, CITE, 4 March 2022.
148 Hadebe, in 'Our Mission'. For a police point of view, see Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War*, p. 10, and Woods, *Zambezi Valley*, p. 4.
149 See account in Dabengwa, 'Relations Between ZAPU and the USSR', pp. 216–7.
150 See John Maluzo Ndlovu in 'Maluzo's Dramatic Arrest', *Sunday News*, 30 June 2019.
151 Clark Mpofu in 'Images of Death Still Haunt Me', *Sunday Mail*, 11 November 2018.
152 Interview, Ndlovu; Clark Mpofu in 'I Am a National Hero', *Sunday Mail*, 18 November 2018. Mpofu tells the story of his betrayal in 'I Was There Before'.
153 See contemporary accounts published in *The Chronicle*, Bulawayo, cited in Clark Mpofu in 'Mpofu in Dramatic Jailbreak', *Sunday News*, 14 February 2016. Also see first person accounts in Mpofu, *My Life*, Chapter 12, Clark Mpofu in 'Images' and 'I Am a National Hero', and Moffat Hadebe in 'Hadebe: The Commander who Escaped from Grey Prison', *Sunday News*, 18 July 2021.
154 Mpofu, *My Life*, pp. 105–10, notes that he and many other youths were arrested and tortured following the Special Branch's capture of the China-trained men.

moment: those who remained free recounted the next iterations of institutional innovation, including the establishment of a high command dominated by the nationalist youth who trained in the Soviet Union in 1964, new experiments with a diverse grab bag of military strategies, and collaboration with other liberation movements. This process led to another extraordinary outing for the jail escapee Moffat Hadebe. He trained in Algeria in 1965 and went on to command the joint ZAPU–ANC military operation known as the Sipolilo campaign in 1968, the biggest single military operation of the 1960s.[155] Hadebe would end up in prison once more, but others from this first generation of soldiers would shape the war until its end.

Conclusion

The interplay of schoolboy dreams of freedom, state repression and transnational military training has not been captured in literature on Zimbabwe's nationalist youth or on its liberation war. The memoirs and oral histories of the first generation of ZAPU's soldiers reveals an extraordinary story, and an unusual one in comparison to other southern African liberation movements, not least for the tight cohesion and shared aims of this particular cohort, but also for their conversion of worldmaking imagination into military action, however unsuccessful these first efforts may have been.

Their accounts reveal an extraordinarily cosmopolitan set of exchanges in rural mission schools in the 'singular moment' of African decolonisation. They built on the 1950s expansion of education and the raised and dashed expectations of Rhodesian 'partnership', but went well beyond a national frame. These interactions regularly involved students from across central and eastern Africa, invoked nationalist politicians inside and outside Rhodesia, and engaged teachers from even further afield. They show how news of distant upheavals and revolutions enabled new visions of the future that sparked action within schools and beyond them. These rural school students set out to learn more, created clandestine organisations, built links with nationalists in towns and in neighbouring rural areas and even launched epic journeys to see black-ruled Africa for themselves. Colonial education had always been double-edged, but in this moment the first generation of soldiers-to-be redefined its role as an essential aid to revolution, not to colonial civilisation, wealth and status.

Many of these young men moved from their rural schools into towns in search of work just as successive Rhodesian governments violently quashed hopes of a negotiated transition to independence, underlining the need for a clandestine and violent response. State repression, combined with the nascent opportunities of internationalist solidarity, created a novel, 'militarised' mobility. Youth constituted and moved through networks designed to 'export' people, smuggle arms and provide military training. They took the lead in imagining what clandestine action and war might look like and pressed their political leaders to act, drawing on their understanding of distant anti-colonial struggles and revolutions and their immediate experience of state violence. A grassroots internationalism took root in Lusaka, the key hub for ZAPU, and home to a substantial Zimbabwean community. In Lusaka, youth joined UNIP, interacted with other liberation movements, set off for and returned from military training in Ghana, Egypt, China and the USSR, established new military institutions for screening, training and surveillance, and struggled to develop the capacity to effectively translate their ideas into action. Although they did not succeed in military terms in these early years, this was the moment when

155 Interview with Moffat Hadebe by J. Alexander and R. Dube, Gwanda, 3 February 2009.

Zimbabwe's nationalist youth first began to imagine themselves as soldiers and to believe they could form an army.

All of these processes drew on a highly eclectic set of ideas and experiences while retaining a practical focus on what might work in the face of Rhodesia's powerful, violent settler state. The failures of this era, and the terrible costs of that failure, produced demoralisation but also experimentation and adaptation, mediated by the powerful personal and political links among these young men. Though many of this first group were killed and imprisoned in the 1960s, key figures among them would drive the next phases of ZAPU's war and some would stay at the top of its military command until the very end of the armed struggle, marking in their biographies the arc that connected a handful of schoolboy dreamers to, nearly two decades later, a formidable army of some 20,000 soldiers.

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