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Liberation Armies' Imagined Futures in Southern Africa

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From the 1960s to the 1980s, anti-colonial liberation struggles and civil conflict coincided with the height of the Cold War, producing an extraordinary range of interactions and exchanges, not least in southern Africa. In recent decades, research has led to fresh understandings of the place of 'global South' actors in the Cold War and of the key role that life in exile played in the making of liberation movements' politics and identities, as well as in ensuring their very survival.[1] This work has not, however, delved into the lives of liberation movement armies with the same attention and rigour that it has applied to civilian actors, institutions and ideas. In this Special Issue, we argue that the military institutions

1 An important strand to this debate regarding southern Africa has run through Special Issues of this journal. 'Liberation Struggles, Exile and International Solidarity', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 2 (2009), edited by H. Sapire, focused predominantly on South Africa and international solidarity and showed the deep entanglement of internal and external forces; 'Mobile Soldiers and the Un-National Liberation of Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 6 (2014), edited by L. White and M. Larmer, questioned the nation as a framing device and the existence of any clear trajectory towards its liberation; 'The Transnational Connections of Southern African Liberation Movements', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), edited by J. Alexander, J. McGregor, and B.-M. Tendi, explored the extraordinarily varied motivations, ideas and relationships of southern African soldiers, politicians and diplomats in transnational spaces; and 'Liberation Beyond the Nation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46, 5 (2020), edited by J. Alexander, P. Israel, M. Larmer and R. Soares de Oliveira, eschewed grand narratives of nation and war and focused on cultural expression, imagination and ideas, including those of the sidelined and excluded. There are many other important contributions to these debates too, of course. Many are discussed in these Special Issues as well as in this issue. The seminal text that 'globalised' the Cold War and its motivating ideas is Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025). For a recent exploration of the precarious transnational life of movements in urban 'hubs', focused on the nitty-gritty of mobility, money and media, see E. Burton, *Hubs of Decolonization: African Liberation Movements and the Everyday Production of Anticolonial Infrastructure in Cairo, Accra and Dar es Salaam, 1957–1966* (Habilitationsschrift [thesis], University of Innsbruck, 2025), and for a recent view on 'global' decolonisation that emphasises local particularities and exchange, see M. Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade: A Global History of Decolonization* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2024).

formed during liberation struggles and remade in newly independent states were important places of political, social and cultural production in which imaginaries of the future were produced, transformed, and not infrequently eclipsed.

Distinctive imaginaries are identifiable across the life trajectories of the men and women who became soldiers. These individuals found inspiration in childhood lore, nationalism, pan-Africanism, internationalism, revolutionary icons and models of guerrilla warfare, new notions of modernity and gender, and ideas about statehood. Such visions were not fixed – in fact they were often upended – and they varied across geographical and generational divides. Imaginaries of the future emerged from within schools, cities, training camps and the battlefield itself. They motivated, disciplined and divided liberation army soldiers and shaped the wars they fought, serving as both worldmaking inspiration and practical guides to military practice, as well as markers of loss and failure. Many of the articles gathered here offer an ordinary soldier's point of view on these processes, taking us beyond the more common focus on elites and civilians – political and military leaders, students and diplomats – and into the distinctive institutional milieux of liberation armies. Their accounts record not just individual but collective journeys, bumpy shared rides through which memory and political meaning were made and debated. The articles also travel across the lusophone–anglophone historical and historiographical divides. They focus on movements in and from Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa, allowing us to make comparisons and shed fresh light on concepts such as youth, military masculinity and internationalism as they played out within and among liberation movements, their hosts and other interlocutors. Unusually, two articles consider the interactions among the soldiers of liberation-armies-turned-states in Angola and Mozambique and the still-at-war liberation armies they hosted and fought alongside.

The articles in this collection are able to explore these new terrains and pose new questions about armies in large part owing to their methods and sources. Like earlier reassessments of transnational spaces and liberation struggles published in this journal, oral history and memoir, alongside unusual or little used 'struggle archives', play a central role. Many authors use these sources to contend with the hazards of liberation movement myth-making – the much discussed 'patriotic history' and 'liberation script', which have played such a powerful role in creating heroic, teleological narratives that legitimate the power holders of the present.[2] These sources are difficult to work with; they may be contradictory, incomplete, partisan and unverifiable, qualities that the authors in this volume take great care to navigate. Each movement and national context has produced different challenges in this and other regards. All the authors have, however, benefited to some extent from the hard fact of the old age of veterans of liberation struggles of the 1960s to 1980s. Veterans' consciousness of their dwindling numbers and their own mortality has created a compelling incentive to tell stories and write memoirs, the latter now a booming field, and a concomitant diminished concern for telling what were once considered secret, dangerous or even shameful stories.[3] In some cases, political shifts have further enabled this new production of stories, due to the death of key gatekeepers or the ousting of political leaders; women soldiers have at times found their voices later in life, when they are freer of social

2 For two debate-provoking southern African works, see 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; and J.P. Borges Coelho, 'Politics and Contemporary History in Mozambique: A Set of Epistemological Notes', *Kronos*, 39, 1 (2013), pp. 10–19.

3 For discussions of veteran (and other) memoir, see 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, 2 (2021), pp. 605–25; Borges Coelho, 'Politics and Contemporary History'; and contributions to 'Military Memoir and Culture', by J. Alexander, J. McGregor, J. Pearce and D. Zelenova, available at https://global-soldiers.web.ox.ac.uk/military-memoirs, retrieved 30 March 2026.

pressure and institutional censure. Strictures on what veterans are willing to say remain, but there has perhaps never been a more open moment. It is one that will, by definition, not last.

This willingness on the part of rank-and-file soldiers to write memoirs and speak publicly is the source material for constructing new histories that develop a view on worldmaking and future imaginaries hitherto largely ignored or obscured. This is history 'working forward', an essential remedy to a backward-looking teleology that makes the endpoint of the hero and the nation seem inevitable.[4] Many of these visions were not realised, victim to state or military repression, bad timing or the perennial divisions that marred movements and acted to erase or discredit alternative views. They are nonetheless valuable for what they tell us about these historical actors' thoughts and ambitions at crucial junctures, for locating the paths not taken, and for underlining the tremendous obstacles to forging and sustaining military institutions. Many authors open out unexplored histories. Others alter the vantage point from which this history is viewed. In both cases, we see histories emerge that refuse the simplifications and elisions that are a defining feature of heroic and nationalist histories, especially, but not only, those written by victors. Our purpose here is not to rescue the histories of 'losers', important though that is, or even to undermine heroism, but to do justice to a history of possibilities. The authors in this volume do so not at the level of the grand visions of leaders, but in the nitty-gritty of the daily interactions essential to soldiers' worldbuilding.

This volume also seeks to add new dimensions to histories of militaries more generally. Liberation armies with their distinctive Cold War ideological grounding and diverse training in multiple foreign countries are rarely considered in traditional military history or in critical military studies, both of which take conventional state armies as the norm.[5] Among studies of liberation armies, the content of political ideas is too often assumed, and goes uninterrogated as a result, reduced instead to catch-all labels.[6] Liberation movement politics is often depicted in terms of grand ideas, whether Marxism, Maoism or a shared and mutually intelligible internationalism, and often presumes an identification between the politics of rank-and-file soldiers and those of their commanders, political leaders and foreign benefactors and hosts. The articles in this issue ask what politics and political beliefs looked like among soldiers as they read and studied, underwent military and political training, travelled abroad to often significantly dissimilar, even if politically aligned, countries, tried to maintain discipline in camps and entered the battlefield. The ideas that mattered are surprisingly heterogeneous, context-specific and rooted in the hard schools of direct experience and costly trial and error. Politics leads us into other areas of social identity and relations too, which have produced rich studies, particularly in critical military history. For example, as several articles explore, gender relations and identities were reimagined and

4 See F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), p. 19; F. Cooper, 'Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective', *Journal of African History*, 49, 2 (2008), pp. 167–96.

5 This was a major premise of the Global Soldiers in the Cold War project (see https://global-soldiers.web.ox.ac.uk, retrieved 6 April 2026, for an introduction) and is discussed in 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. 619–50.

6 See, for example, discussion in J. Pearce, 'Global Ideologies, Local Politics: The Cold War as Seen from Central Angola, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 13–27; J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'African Soldiers in the USSR: Oral Histories of ZAPU Intelligence Cadres' Soviet Training, 1964–1979', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 49–66; and N. Telepneva, 'The Military Training Camp: Co-Constructed Spaces – Experiences of PAIGC Guerrillas in Soviet Training Camps, 1961–1974', in K. Roth-Ey (ed.), *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), pp. 159–76. A larger literature critically explores these labels more widely, based on research with solidarity activists and others. See, for example, Q. Slobodian, 'Introduction', in Q. Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, Berghan, 2015), pp. 1–22.

quite literally fought over in liberation armies. The stereotypical gendered roles assigned to the soldier came unstuck in unpredictable ways, notably in the related contexts of training regimes and the battlefield itself. These were not linear stories: radical reimaginations by and of women soldiers might lead to conservative reaction and to uncomfortable compromises.

We focus here on three thematic areas. The first is youth and what might be grandly called worldmaking in the foundational years of liberation struggles, when there was little understanding or agreement regarding what a 'soldier' or an 'army' was. Soldiers and armies had to be imagined, often by young people in what were almost always extremely hostile environs. A second section turns to education and training, arguing for its centrality in the making and remaking of political and gendered soldiers as liberation armies expanded, grew more sophisticated and absorbed new cohorts of young people who were themselves products of sometimes dramatically changing politics at home. Finally, we turn to the making of military cultures, and the interaction among distinctive military cultures, that took place on the battlefield. This section considers the contentious relations between liberation movements that had only just assumed state power and built state armies, and the liberation armies they hosted in their territories, at great cost to themselves, in the name of an overarching internationalist solidarity.

Youth and Worldmaking in the Early Imagination of Armies

Three articles, by Johanna Wetzel, Jocelyn Alexander and Gerald Chikozho Mazarire, focus on foundational passages in the making of the armed wings of Zimbabwe's two nationalist parties, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and Mozambique's Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo). All three draw on combinations of oral history and memoir and trace stories that are in varied ways a challenge to the mythologies of the respective ruling parties – ZANU (Patriotic Front) and Frelimo – of today. All three articles are interested in the relationships between the category of 'youth' and the making of soldiers; all note the extraordinary journeys enabled by the 1960s boom in the web of pan-African and internationalist support for liberation struggles; all locate a terrible set of losses incurred by these first generations, leaving many of their dreams for the future unrealised, at least in this early moment.

Wetzel's central question follows up on an important aspect of the global Cold War literature: the movement of ideas, and specifically revolutionary ideas. She asks what gives an idea appeal when it is encountered abroad – in this case in the Soviet Union – and what gives it 'traction' when it returns to the location of armed struggle. Her focus is on the concept of 'youth' and specifically the fate of the idea of the Frelimo Youth League. Her protagonists are two young men from northern Mozambique – Francisco Valentino Cabo and John William Kachamila – who were excited by early nationalist organisation and sought to join Frelimo. They ended up at the Komsomol school in Moscow where they were taken with the Soviet vision of a world historical role for revolutionary youth. When they returned to Tanzania and sought to create youth league statutes for Frelimo, they adapted the Soviet model but were told by their leaders that it was irrelevant to the struggle. Undaunted, they visited Frelimo's liberated zones in northern Mozambique where they encountered youth organisations utterly at odds with the Komsomol version but also at odds with the vision of Frelimo's military command. This actual on-the-ground youth played support roles in the expanding war and they wanted guns, clothes, medicines and recognition. Communicating this message to Frelimo's leaders placed Cabo and Kachamila in the middle of a deep divide in the party that threatened their lives and resulted in the crushing of the idea of a Frelimo Youth League. Their revolutionary idea of Youth was not, however, lost

forever: it was revived in the immediate aftermath of independence and would play a central role in Frelimo's radical imagination of a new society.

Wetzel's case, in which an idea of 'Youth' was 'dreamt up in Moscow, refashioned in Dar es Salaam, buried on the battlegrounds of northern Mozambique and revived in Maputo after independence' (p. 761) stands in stark contrast to **Alexander**'s account of nationalist youth in neighbouring Zimbabwe. As in all the anglophone southern African countries that were home to 'Congress' movements, youth wings in Zimbabwe formed an institutionalised part of the rise of nationalist parties before the turn to armed struggle. Alexander argues that the contribution of nationalist youth to political and military imaginaries, and their central role in founding a liberation army, has largely been hidden in literatures on both nationalism and the armed struggle. She traces the origins of the first few dozen men who were militarily trained in Ghana, Egypt, China and the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1964 and finds that almost every one of them began their political lives as part of National Democratic Party and then ZAPU youth wings. They shared earlier experiences too: almost all recalled rural childhoods in which they had been regaled with stories of conquest and colonial iniquities; almost all learned about a wider world of politics in rural mission schools in the 1950s and early 1960s. Their schools were remarkably cosmopolitan, bringing together students and teachers from across the region and even further afield, many of whom shared a keen interest in the transformations of this historical moment, from the Suez Crisis to the Cuban Revolution. These future soldiers recounted how, as teenagers, they had avidly read and debated, formed secretive organisations and arrived at the conclusion that it was their task, as the educated, politically conscious young, to transform their ideas into action and thereby remake the world. From school, they entered the workforce and ZAPU's youth wing and played a central role in the expansion of sabotage campaigns.

In these roles, the ZAPU youth were met with extreme state violence, and here they innovated, demanding guns from their leaders and developing a practice of 'export', that is, moving youth under threat of arrest to Zambia and into the nascent networks that would provide military training. Lusaka and its surrounding farms and towns formed the key 'hubs' where they first imagined themselves as soldiers and began to build institutions and infrastructure for the movement of people and guns, for security, and for military training itself. Youth trained in Ghana and Egypt largely expanded traditions of sabotage, but the first cohort of China-trained youth began to think about a guerrilla army. They set up a makeshift training camp on a Zimbabwean-owned farm in Zambia's countryside. Ideas travelled and took root in Zambia but, unlike in the case of the Komsomol-trained Cabo and Kachamila, these ideas were, from the start, a highly eclectic mix, driven by pragmatic responses to state repression as much as the widening political horizons of this moment. These ZAPU youth imagined freedom and laid the foundations of an army, but they did not in these early days achieve military success. They suffered devastatingly high rates of death and capture throughout the 1960s: what an army was had to be imagined again in subsequent years.

Mazarire takes up the story of ZANU's founding generation of soldiers in his account of a cohort of 53 young men trained in Ghana, shortly after the party's formation by disaffected ZAPU leaders in mid 1963. The conditions were not propitious: ZANU had to compete – both diplomatically and violently – with the bigger and better-established ZAPU in and outside Zimbabwe. The fact that this first ZANU cohort was trained in Ghana reflected their leaders' creative navigation of the many divisions in pan-Africanist and internationalist support for liberation movements, a fascinating tale in itself.[7] Mazarire sets himself the

7 Mazarire tells this story in 'ZANU's External Networks 1963–1979: An Appraisal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), pp. 83–106.

challenge of tracing the fate of this entire cohort, a monumental task of historical reconstruction. It is one in which the soldiers appear to have less agency than in Alexander's account. Their political views remain opaque, they are at times 'lured' into training, and they are then subjected to a 'reckless experiment' in warfare that ends with most of them dead or in prison in the 1960s (as was ultimately the case for ZAPU's soldiers too). Reconstructing this story is for Mazarire an effort to uncover the full complexity involved in the transformation of a 'rudimentary vigilante movement' into a 'modern international guerrilla army' (p. 822). It is a vigorous riposte to the current generation of ZANU(PF) leaders' elision of this history in favour of a celebration of the gun that only has room to commemorate – quite arbitrarily – the two members of this Ghana-trained cohort who died in the 1966 'Battle of Chinhoyi', the mythic starting point for ZANU's 'full-blown gun-wielding liberation movement' (p. 817).

Mazarire's reconstruction follows the Ghana-trained survivors of the 1960s incursions into prison and then into their post-independence careers, often in government or politics, allowing us to see the full sweep of this cohort's lives. We see in remarkable detail the many extraordinary twists and turns of this early generation's often shared journeys, as well as the 'lifetime impressions' of their youthful military experiences on their identities, memories and narratives.[8]

Education, Training and Imagined Futures

The second section of the Special Issue focuses on liberation armies' education and training in exile, illustrating the profound ways in which political and military instruction reshaped soldiers' imagined futures. All three articles address the transformational effects on soldiers' social as well as political visions and demonstrate that ordinary cadres were far from simply passive recipients of ideas. The articles trace histories of contestation, identify a diverse range of influences, and focus on what ordinary recruits learned rather than what political commissars taught. All insist on a gendered lens – they explore women's experiences within masculinist militaries, trace how masculinist military cultures were changed and challenged by women soldiers' presence, and ask whether and how gender equality and feminism were part of political education and military training.

The articles focus on South African and Zimbabwean movements. They reveal similarities in some aspects of the revolutionary political imaginaries that inspired soldiers, notably those derived from Soviet military exchanges and Africanist ideas. They underline the importance in all these cases of militarised camp environments as sites of education and learning. The articles also identify notable differences in the contexts and content of education and training. Instruction in the case of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) was powerfully shaped by the protracted nature of the struggle and the resulting long periods of waiting in foreign camps, in contrast to the Zimbabwean movements, whose soldiers returned home to fight with far greater rapidity. The three articles also reflect the contrasting sources available to scholars. The rich South African liberation movement archives make it possible to reconstruct education and learning within exiled camps in a fine-grained manner using materials that are simply not available to historians of Zimbabwe.

Arianna **Lissoni**'s article provides a fascinating account of how books and reading shaped soldiers' imaginaries in exile. She stresses the importance of books in South African cadres' narratives of their wartime experiences and the transformations wrought in their ideas of self and sense of social and political possibilities. She breaks new ground by

8 Compare to Alexander and McGregor, '*Adelante!*', pp. 623–6, on ZAPU.

bringing literatures on book history and reading cultures into dialogue with scholarship on liberation armies' military culture. Using memoir, oral histories and movement archives, she traces the formative role of reading for soldiers, from decisions to join the struggle through their experiences of foreign camps, focusing on the ANC's post-1976 generation and Novo Catengue camp in Angola. Lissoni insists on the importance of understanding reading as oral, performative and collective rather than as an individual experience. Soldiers cast reading in this way as a revolutionary activity through which they developed ideas about how they would change the world, in an echo of Alexander's account of ZAPU youth. Lissoni also shows how soldiers used reading as a mode of coping with the difficulties of spending long periods in camps awaiting deployment. This was not just a matter of reading the daily news. It also entailed creative writing that served as the basis for performances within and beyond camps, thereby making life more bearable and developing connections with external allies and backers. The literature available in Novo Catengue camp included Soviet Marxist materials, books on women's struggles, and what are now considered seminal histories of South Africa. Socialist realist books reshaped soldier's imaginaries of war, discipline, sacrifice and revolutionary morality, Lissoni argues, contributing to the awe that ordinary Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadres had for the Soviet Union and establishing it as a key inspiration. For women, reading was an important way to learn about feminist ideas that enabled them to challenge conventional gender roles. Lissoni concludes that books and reading were central both to MK's military culture and to soldiers' imagined futures.

The transformative effects of books and education are also a theme of Nomzamo Portia **Ntombela**'s article, which focuses on the intellectual work of women's sections in the South African struggle. Ntombela compares the ANC and PAC, showing how in both movements women's sections played important roles in shaping social and political imaginaries in exile, particularly in terms of gender equality and feminism. They notably challenged the view of 'women's emancipation … as either secondary to or contingent on national liberation' (p. 865). Ntombela traces histories of women's writing and publishing, and the circuits of seminars and conferences in exile that they hosted, addressed and attended, alongside fund-raising endeavours. In both movements, she argues, women were intellectuals. The intellectual roles and positions they took, and their demands for autonomous women's wings as well as for representation on executive bodies, were resolved in different ways in each movement. Ntombela notes that there was greater resistance within the PAC initially to the idea of a separate women's unit. The relative institutional invisibility of women's views that this created contributed to the difficulties of historical reconstruction. There were ideological contrasts too, partly reflecting differing nationalist imaginaries. The ANC women's section's position was officially Marxist-feminist, in contrast to a less clear-cut ideological position in the PAC, developed in the context of the movement's overarching pan-Africanism. Yet Ntombela stresses how, in both cases, women's sections pushed for women's inclusion in military training and contested male commanders' decisions that limited their deployments.

In the third article in this section, JoAnn **McGregor**, Jocelyn **Alexander** and Methembe Hillary **Hadebe** turn to the different context of the Zimbabwean armed struggle to explore women's experiences of training within ZAPU's armed wing, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA). They argue that military training has not received the attention it deserves in scholarship on southern African liberation armies, and still less in literature on gender and armies. The article shows how a focus on military training sheds light on this central aspect of women soldiers' wartime experiences and on wider contestations over masculinist military cultures. Using oral histories, McGregor and her co-authors trace profound changes in the training of different cohorts of women and link these changes to shifting visions of how femininity and martial ideals might be reconciled. For the first groups of ZPRA women military recruits in 1975, training meant integration in

overwhelmingly male units and undergoing the same, demanding instruction as men. These 'pioneer' women soldiers were celebrated for embodying masculinist ideals of strength and endurance, and for changing male commanders' presumptions of women's inability to fight like men, paving the way for the expanded recruitment of women. In contrast, later cohorts were trained in segregated women's camps, leading to the formation of the semi-conventional ZPRA Women's Brigade. The military and political leadership envisaged a key role for this brigade in (never-realised) liberated zones inside Zimbabwe and in the future Zimbabwean state. In practice, women's military service was restricted to the 'rear front' in Zambia, where they played a host of different military, intelligence and professional roles, amid the acute dangers of intense Rhodesian aerial bombardment and ground assaults in the final years of the war.

As in other liberation movements, ZAPU's male leaders' vision of women's roles in the army and future society remained strongly patriarchal and paternalist. Training did not ultimately deliver on its early vision of gender equality. ZAPU's military cultures were instead shaped by ZAPU president Joshua Nkomo's influential vision of women as the 'seed of the nation', a protective imaginary focused on reproduction that some women veterans viewed positively in retrospect. But perhaps above all, women veterans remembered their rigorous military training as an effective means of mitigating the difficulties of entering post-war society by enabling them to build professional careers.

While the articles in this section underline how the education and training offered in each liberation army created distinctive future imaginaries, instruction was also shaped profoundly by the transnational exchanges of internationalist military solidarity, the focus of the final section.

Imagining Military Solidarities

The final two articles, by Clinarete Munguambe and Justin Pearce, show us how the idea of internationalism in the imaginaries of soldiers and military officers was tested in the heat of battle. Both examine interactions between soldiers fighting for the liberation of one country and the state army of an only recently independent host nation.

Munguambe deals with the period after the independence of Mozambique in 1975 and before the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. Contact and co-operation between Frelimo's liberation army and ZANU's armed wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), had started in the early 1970s but escalated rapidly after Mozambican independence. ZANLA guerrillas occupied bases in Mozambique on a vast scale, while soldiers of the just-established Mozambican state army, the Mozambican People's Liberation Forces (FPLM), crossed the border into Zimbabwe to fight alongside ZANLA. This support was couched by Samora Machel in the language of internationalist solidarity. Munguambe's interviews with former soldiers from both armies show how they spoke of a shared, idealised approach to guerrilla struggle influenced by Mao, which emphasised rural communities' support for the liberation army.

Despite this shared ground, Munguambe argues that when the two armies fought together against the Rhodesian security forces, significant differences in their 'military traditions and skills' (p. 907) required them to negotiate a shared vision of war. The FPLM soldiers who fought with ZANLA were largely veterans of Frelimo's liberation struggle. They carried with them a vision of a specific kind of guerrilla war forged in northern Mozambique and the heritage of military training in varied countries. After its formation in 1962, Frelimo made a priority of standardising military practices under Chinese instruction. Shooting, for example, was supposed to be done from a crawling position. A later phase of Soviet training

decreed that soldiers march in single file and in silence. Tensions arose when the FPLM tried to impose these practices on the Zimbabwean soldiers they fought with. ZANLA soldiers saw no need for standardised tactics and were used to adapting their shooting techniques as the circumstances demanded. They favoured a marching style that, to the FPLM soldiers, seemed dangerously noisy and undisciplined, but which echoed the movement of people living in the Zimbabwean countryside.

Over years of fighting inside Zimbabwe with limited rear support and no fixed, defensible bases inside the country, ZANLA had developed a distinctive dependence on African rural communities, living among them, mobilising them politically and relying on them for food and intelligence. Notwithstanding a shared Maoist idea of the guerrilla as a fish in the 'water' of the rural population, the Mozambicans saw ZANLA's relationship with civilians as unprofessional, especially in terms of sharing intelligence, drinking together and sexual relationships. These criticisms were powerfully shaped by their experience of Frelimo's own liberation struggle. Frelimo had been able to create large, liberated zones beyond the reach of the Portuguese colonial state where food could be grown and other amenities provided, creating a different relationship with civilians. Liberated zones were, however, an impossibility in Zimbabwe in the face of Rhodesia's more powerful and mobile military and better-developed infrastructure. FPLM soldiers had to adapt to this reality in interactions with ZANLA soldiers. Munguambe concludes that the exchanges of ideas and the adaptation of knowledge to new circumstances that ensued proved productive in 'the development of rank-and-file battlefield solidarities' (p. 917) and in effectively confronting a common enemy.

Just as independent Mozambique provided assistance to the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, so did independent Angola's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) offer a base for the South African MK, the armed wing of the ANC. In contrast to the shared Maoist ethos, joint operations and everyday interactions among soldiers that characterised the FPLM–ZANLA relationship, **Pearce**'s article describes a more distant relationship between MK and the Angolan state army, the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). FAPLA was at the time engaged in its own civil war against the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), a former liberation movement that from 1974 onwards received support from the apartheid regime in South Africa. MK was asked to support FAPLA in this war. The understanding between the South African and Angolan commanders was framed in terms of internationalist and socialist solidarity: MK should support FAPLA in its war against UNITA, in recognition of the MPLA's assistance to the ANC. This did not, however, involve joint operations. The two forces fulfilled complementary roles rather than fighting side by side, a lack of close co-operation that led to mistrust. Moreover, the FAPLA rank and file were conscripts with no history of fighting in a liberation war and some were hesitant to go into battle against their Angolan 'brothers' in UNITA – an attitude that disquieted MK soldiers who had been schooled to see UNITA as a simple proxy of the apartheid forces. The South African fighters came to resent what they saw as their deployment in a war that was not their own. This resentment, Pearce argues, prompted MK soldiers to revolt against their political leadership in early 1984, and was only deepened when the ANC's notorious Security Division was seen to enjoy the support of the Angolan government in suppressing the rebellion.

Ultimately, Pearce argues, both FAPLA and MK soldiers saw their respective struggles as nationalist in nature, and invoked internationalism only strategically, if at all. The upper echelons of the FAPLA recognised that their own independence struggle had received

support from Cuba and the Soviet Union, and that this obliged them to assist liberation struggles in states that remained under colonial or apartheid rule. The political leadership of the ANC similarly accepted that help from the MPLA incurred reciprocal obligations. The MK rank and file accepted this up to a point, but rejected it when Angolan soldiers themselves appeared less than fully invested in the war against UNITA. For their part, the FAPLA rank and file felt little commitment to the Angolan war and still less to the South African struggle.

Using interviews and soldiers' memoirs, this pair of articles illustrates the formation and contestation of different military and political imaginaries on battlefields shared by liberation armies and their former liberation movement hosts in Zimbabwe and Angola. Much depended on the nature of the interaction between the armies. In the case of the FPLM, active fighting inside Zimbabwe alongside ZANLA required innovation and permitted the exchange of ideas born of profoundly different experience, but within a shared language of Maoist guerrilla warfare. These soldiers forged 'battlefield solidarities'. By contrast, MK soldiers were asked to join the MPLA government's war with UNITA inside Angola, not in their home country. At the senior officer level, close interaction and a shared internationalism underwrote collaboration. With little direct interaction among the rank and file, however, mutual misunderstanding and significant differences bred alienation, and ultimately affirmed a nationalist set of views on both sides.

The international circulation of political visions and of ideas about soldiering is a theme that runs through all of the articles in this Special Issue. The very idea of internationalism was one that inspired collaboration, at least in the minds of political and military leaders. Through their focus on the field of battle, these last two articles show that such ideas did not readily translate from political and military leaders to rank-and-file soldiers. The terms of military collaboration were contested and negotiated, reflecting the pressures of fighting itself and longer histories of training and war.

Conclusion

This Special Issue adds a focus on liberation armies to the growing literatures on the transnational histories of liberation movements in the Cold War era. It draws heavily on oral histories, memoir and 'struggle archives', using them to reconstruct the complex political, social and cultural histories of these unusual military institutions. In so doing it adds new dimensions to military historiographies that have overwhelmingly taken conventional state armies as the standard. These histories draw us into the ideologically diverse, highly mobile and often precarious Cold War world in which liberation armies were imagined and built.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the accounts offered in this Special Issue sit uncomfortably alongside the heroic and the national. They also challenge any simple understanding of the politics of these always political armies. They do so by offering a window on the history of possibilities that soldiers themselves envisioned. The concern with soldiers' imaginaries of the future reveals individual and collective acts of worldbuilding, whether in secondary schools, cities or military camps in exile. Liberation army soldiers constructed their own understandings of world events and of revolutionary texts and expressed them in practices of cultural production, training and fighting. The ideas that animated soldiers, as many authors demonstrate, were extraordinarily diverse and much debated, and were almost always forged in contexts of tight control and repression that required constant adaptation and innovation. The explorations of 'youth' and worldmaking in the formative years of armed struggle, of the gendered politics of education and training in camps in exile and of military cultures and

political ideas on the battlefield take us through different historical moments, generations and geographies. They show us how soldiers' efforts to remake the world often ended in deep divisions and brutal foreclosures that shaped the trajectories of liberation movements as a whole. At the same time, they demonstrate soldiers' perennial ability to collectively reimagine liberation futures amid war.

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