

BOOK REVIEWS

Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War, Volume One Edited by Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger. Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995, xi, 211 pp., ISBN 0-908307-36-5, Z\$60.

Much has been written about the liberation war. Most of the histories and the realities of the war have been mythologised and epic heroes have been created. Where documentaries have been produced, they have given a partisan view of the whole issue. Fiction has also tried but with limited success.

Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War is a clear departure from this tradition. It is a bold leap across the abyss of bias, partisanship and prejudices that many texts of this nature have fallen into. I write this review as an academic and ex-combatant who feels strongly about the issues raised here. As an ex-combatant I assess the book through the eyes of thousands of my fellow comrades who never got the opportunity to read and write.

The book is a result of a conference that was held at the University of Zimbabwe in 1991. It brought together former members of ZANLA, ZIPRA, Rhodesian Security Forces, politicians, scholars and theologians. Thus the papers in the book are drawn from scholars in a wide range of academic disciplines. It is an invaluable book for any person interested in Zimbabwe's immediate past and its relation with the present. For the layman it is a vast treasure full of hitherto unknown truths about the liberation war.

The book focuses on specific aspects of the liberation war through the eyes of ZANLA, ZIPRA and the Rhodesian Army. Some of the details are disgusting and repulsive but they are presented objectively as historical facts. This is the historical reality of the war: it has to be recorded accurately and be free of bias.

One outstanding feature about this book is its objectivity. It offers a fresh and original view of a war that has been mythologised and some people have made political capital out of it. The depth of its strength lies in that it is a document based on empirical evidence. It is the result of scientific enquiry using primary and secondary sources. Consider for example the depth of detail in Davis Moore's chapter, 'The Zimbabwe People's Army: Strategic innovation or more of the same?' or Jeremy Brickhill's chapter, 'Making peace with the past: War victims and the work of the Mafela Trust'. In both there is evidence of detailed fieldwork which gives credit to the final document.

The book serves as useful mapping ground for what has been covered so far. It also accepts its own limitations and shortcomings. For example, it argues that the infamous Auxiliary Forces of the Internal Settlement era must be chronicled no matter how unpalatable this may be. Other areas that need further research are gender and generation issues in the war. The editors mention other areas that have been overlooked like the role of the urban society, the Black businessman and woman, and White society in the liberation war.

Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War is a remarkable achievement in that it brings together diametrically opposite views and achieves what many books on the subject have failed to achieve; unity in diversity. In the

'Introduction', the editors seek to draw comparisons and contrasts in the liberation armies. While there are sharp differences, there are also striking similarities. For example, the recruitment patterns of ZANU and ZAPU are very similar in their phases. Both admit mistakes in the nascent phases of the armed struggle between 1965 and 1970. Both claim credit for the opening of the north-eastern front with Frelimo. Both experienced serious internal divisions due to 'layers' or 'generations' of guerrillas over the years. Both were preparing for conventional war in 1978 and 1979. Brickhill's reports of ZIPRA's strategies for conventional war are similar to ZANLA's plans in 1978, when sections of about ten men each operating independently were merged into platoons and operated in units of 30 to 40 men. In addition to this in ZANLA, Tanzanian-trained troops of 1977, 1978 and 1979 who were prepared for mobile warfare constantly talked about 'kujenga muzinga' (mounting heavy artillery). In both armies there were key proponents of unity, for example, the late General Tongogara (ZANU) and J. Z. Moyo (ZAPU).

Missing is Professor Roberts's paper which would have completed the triad of the major armies in the liberation war. Being aware of its value as a contribution to the Rhodesian side of the war, the editors give a long summary of this valuable paper. This paper is most important in that the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) was built around the Rhodesian Security Forces. Inclusion of this paper would have given us a better understanding of the ZNA as it is today because so much was inherited from that army and its traditions.

An interesting revelation is how deeply divided the Auxiliary Forces of the Internal Settlement era were. Part of this ambiguous force was under the Selous Scouts, another was supported by Internal Affairs and still another by the Special Branch which itself was deeply divided. The Auxiliary Forces commanded very little respect in the regular army and to ZANLA and ZIPRA they were more of a bother than a threat. Nonetheless they comprised an armed force that has to be examined in some detail.

David Moore's chapter looks at ZIPA from a different dimension altogether. He portrays it as a distinct fighting force, but ZIPA's brilliant successes on the field were not equated by political successes. This is why it finally collapsed in 1976. It lacked the political clout and guile that were characteristic of the older and more experienced politicians. Whatever ZIPA was, credit must be given to it for pushing the frontiers of the war deep into Zimbabwe in the short time that it existed.

Theresa Barnes's chapter, 'The heroes' struggle: Life after the liberation war for four ex-combatants', is a record of the feelings and views of four ex-combatants about the war. This chapter is a voice of the voiceless. So much has been said about the ex-combatants, so much has been speculated. They have been marginalized, yet they themselves have written so little. The few excerpts reveal traumas of the war and how some of them suffered in the hands of the enemy. It is sad to note that for most, the ordeal has continued into the post-war era. Despite their forbidding circumstances at present they are proud to have contributed to the liberation of their country. One of the ex-combatants had this to say, 'I don't regret that I joined the liberation struggle ... If I say I regret having joined the liberation

struggle, then I would be saying that I regret having liberated my country.' This is a poignant statement from a man who gave so much but got so little in return. The feelings expressed by the ex-combatants in Barnes's chapter make me search for my conscience that has been long lost in the ecstasy of liberation.

The work of the Mafela Trust outlined in Brickhill's chapter mentioned earlier, reveals that the traumas of the war are still very much alive for both the perpetrator and the victim. The work of the Mafela Trust is 'an attempt through field research, to list the names, next-of-kin and places of burial and the ZIPRA dead'. The pain and grief over the loss of a loved one can be overcome if there is a burial. The grief is perennial when the loved one is unaccounted for. Some fighters and peasants who fell in the struggle are still to be located. Everyone knows someone close to them who has never been found and this is a painful experience. Thus the effort of the Mafela Trust is commendable and should be the basis of a nationwide documentation of the fallen heroes, be they the fighters or the civilians.

This generation has the duty to record accurately events in the liberation war for the unborn generations. Moreover, as we enjoy the fruits of liberty we can do justice to those who died for us by putting together chronicles of the war. This new book sets us off in that direction and it is a valuable addition to our history of Zimbabwe's bloody road to liberation. The second volume is to be published in the near future. I can hardly wait for it.

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A Zimbabwean Past By D. N. Beach. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1994, xviii, 368pp., ISBN 0-6922-52-6, Z\$89,18.

This book is a very pleasant surprise. We have known for some time that David Beach intended to follow up his *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900-1850* (Mambo, Gweru, 1984) with a collection of dynastic histories. The weaker brethren among us have feared that such a collection would be very difficult reading. And Beach tells us sternly in the introduction to this new book that if '*Shona and Zimbabwe* was complicated for academic and foreign readers, *A Zimbabwean Past* will be even more complex'. That intimidating rather than reassuring comparison — the Hapsburg Empire — appears on the first page of the introduction. It looks as though we are in for a necessary but gruelling time.

And yet the book's effect is quite different. The dynastic histories are there, of course, in three chapters which between them cover over 150 pages. But each history is introduced in bold print with a paragraph setting out the moral of the tale. The first of these — a note on the Marange dynasty of Bocha — gives their flavour: