

Mobile Soldiers, Porous States: The Un-National Liberation of Southern Africa

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For several years I was all but obsessed with the situation of armies in exile in Southern Africa. Starting in the 1960s, the armies of the national liberation movements of Southern Africa tended to be based in, and fight from, nations other than the ones they were struggling to liberate. Southern Africa reveals regional system in which national liberation was conducted in a closed circuit of acronyms and camps (guerrilla and refugee) that may have strained ideas about nations and citizenship from the start. The best example is perhaps Umkhonto wa Sizwe (MK), the ANC's army in exile, which never entered South Africa as a fighting force. It did however fight in Angola, where it was based, for the ruling party, the MPLA, in its long civil war. Because of the disputed border between northern Namibia and Angola, many freedom fighters went from the MPLA to UNITA to SWAPO. There were the Katangans, a group of soldiers who had been Moise Tshombe's personal guard in Katanga and fled to Angola in 1962 where

they fought for the Portuguese and then the MPLA. Zimbabwe had two guerrilla armies fighting for its liberation from white, minority rule: ZANLA in Mozambique and ZIPRA in Zambia; Zimbabweans entered Zambia via refugee camps in Botswana. ZIPRA's army in Zambia was larger than Zambia's own, and it may have provided more support for the government than the Zambian army did, while the government of Mozambique, itself a former guerrilla movement, found it as difficult to convince ZANLA to stop fighting in 1979 as it had been to get them to start in 1974. FRELIMO supported and tried to arrange international funding for a third Zimbabwe guerrilla army in 1977.

In 2011, I began to plan a small workshop where scholars could meet and talk about this. With Miles Larmer, then of the University of Sheffield, I organized a small workshop to be held at Sheffield – equidistant between North America and Africa – and was able to pay everyone's accommodation with funds from the Center for African Studies matched by the UF Office of Research. At the end of March, 2013, ten scholars – two from the US, five from Africa, two from the UK, and one from Europe – arrived the day before the biggest snow storm to hit Sheffield in a decade. With the aid of some excellent photographers among us, we trekked to our conference venue and spent two days in extraordinary discussion. All the papers complicated the questions of what exile and proxy armies meant. There were several papers on borders – one on negotiating the crossing the border from what was then Rhodesia to Botswana, and two on how the disputed border between Namibia and Angola created relations between and within guerrilla armies. There were three papers on training camps, one on SWAPO's camp in Tanzania in the 1960s, another on MK's camp in Angola in the 1970s, and one on a ZAPU camp in Zambia where the man in charge of security had defected from

the Rhodesian police. One paper detailed the very gentle treatment of South African prisoners of war in Angola, while another depicted the apartheid era police unit whose covert actions took place across the entire region. There was also paper on the Katangans and their circuitous history and convoluted movements fighting in Angola. Six of these papers are being prepared for a cluster of articles to appear in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

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