

Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders (eds), *Southern African Liberation Struggles: New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives*

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The title emphasising multiple struggles is an accurate reflection of this well-written and accessible collection of essays which re-explores different facets of the liberation wars to end colonial rule in southern Africa, covering the period broadly from the 1950s onwards. The book is what it claims to be: new, regional and global in reach, showcasing the work of both new and older scholars. This is a well-structured collection and the smooth transition between chapters reflects the skill of the editors.

The emphasis of the collection is not on comprehensive coverage of southern African liberation struggles, but rather to offer a spark for new insights and perspectives drawn from the selected case studies. The intersection of these perspectives allows for a more holistic interpretation of southern African liberation movements than has been possible before, with an emphasis on balance and nuanced accounts. What emerges is a picture of liberation movements struggling simultaneously with internal political, ideological and ethnic tensions. This review will discuss some of these perspectives in turn.

The Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns, the attempts by Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) command to infiltrate armed units through Rhodesia into South Africa, emerges strongly, covered by different chapters (pp 76, 125, 216) and pointing to its importance as a watershed failure that led to the Morogoro conference of 1969, the subject of Hugh Macmillan's detailed and insightful chapter. Macmillan draws attention to the fractious internal politics of the ANC in exile in Zambia, of which the period "1969 to 1973 marked one of the lowest points" (p 91). Macmillan's argument points to the importance of changes within South Africa for a shift in fortunes for the ANC in exile, beginning with the Durban strikes in 1973, the independence of Angola and Mozambique in 1974–1975 and crucially, the Soweto uprising in 1976, presenting a boon for the ANC due to "the influx of new recruits that came after it" (p 92). This interplay between local developments in southern

Africa and their impact on the exiled liberation movements is a prominent theme throughout the volume.

Thula Simpson's chapter on the ANC in Swaziland shows the shifting attitude towards the liberation movement in the country, with secret support from King Sobhuza II running into conflict with distinct camps within the government that were much more reticent in their attitude towards the organisation. His chapter paints a vivid picture of the espionage and diplomatic tensions between the Republic of South Africa and Swaziland, an account which also raises prickly questions of complicity and betrayals by high-ranking Swazi leaders. However, the Swazi officials also emerge as skilful brokers of South African favours, sharing information of their "secret" briefings with the ANC as readily as they communicated ANC movements to the South Africans.

Elements of the "new" in this volume include Arianna Lissoni's study of the neglected history of the Pan Africanist Congress, particularly in Basutoland, which flags some of the fatal errors made by its leadership. As Lissoni shows, the elision of the PAC from the history of liberation is at odds with its prominent role in the early 1960s, a prominence the organisation lost due to poor leadership and tactical blunders. Liazzat J.K. Bonate, in her chapter on the role of Muslims in Northern Mozambique, also points to their neglected history, at odds with the support they gave the Mozambique African National Union (MANU) and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO). Although Muslim participation became less visible after 1969, Bonate recognises, due to Portuguese secret police persecution, the crucial factor in their sidelining by the liberation movement was FRELIMO's adoption of a "doctrinaire and radical Marxism after 1969" (p 71). This imposed ideological orthodoxy led to the erasure of the group's contribution, as Bonate notes, Muslims were "denied a place in the history of the independence war ... along with groups that did not fit the profile of secular and militant Marxist revolutionaries" (p 71).

The volume provides instances of many splits in the international response to apartheid. As Colin Bundy shows, the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was closely wedded to the African National Congress, and followed the ANC in their suspicion of the Black Consciousness Movement and the independent Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) (p 221). In contrast, according to Christabel Gurney in her chapter, the British Council of Churches met with representatives of the Black Consciousness Movement "to the exclusion of the liberation movements" (p 237). The presence of exiled liberals in London, also suspicious of the degree of communist influence in the African National Congress and Anti-Apartheid Movement, led to further fissures in what would otherwise have been a broad front opposing apartheid. The book demonstrates not only fractious anti-apartheid politics, but also portrays political leaders scrambling to keep up with internal developments in South Africa. Steve Davis, in his fascinating account of the use of radio by the liberation movements, writes of political movements in the wake of the Soweto uprising of 1976

attempting to “superimpose their particular brand of politics over new forms of struggle evolving in South Africa” (p 129).

One of the most exciting chapters, written by Elizabeth Williams, flags the importance of the anti-apartheid struggle in Britain for its immediate resonances with British domestic politics. Williams shows that black British support was divided between moderates, such as the West Indian Standing Committee (WISC) formed in 1958, who were open to alliances with whites, and black nationalists, such as Black Action for the Liberation of South Africa (BALSA), formed in August 1986, which placed central importance on the need for black agency and was highly suspicious of cross-racial coalitions. Williams identifies a major failure of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain in its lack of engagement with racism in British domestic affairs, which alienated the organisation from many potential black supporters in the country. As Williams argues, black British responses to apartheid South Africa spoke to “the growing discontent black citizens felt towards the British state” (p 257). It was in the AAM’s nature, as “a single-cause” organisation, focusing almost exclusively on the destruction of apartheid, that points to a weakness. This is picked up by Chris Saunders, in the next chapter on the question of Namibian solidarity, in which he shows that liberals found a cause they could support, which would not force them to work with the communist sympathisers in the AAM and ANC, thus taking the lead on the question of Namibian independence (p 277) and separating it to a degree from the anti-apartheid cause.

The instructiveness of such recent history rings out most clearly in the rigorous manner in which the book engages with the memorialisation of history. Whether this is addressing events in the liberation struggles, that showed undemocratic and Stalinist tendencies in the liberation movements (such as forced confessions from “spies” in SWAPO camps) or to the issue of which soldiers to name in the Freedom Park memorial, the subject of a chapter by Gary Baines, where SANDF soldiers killed in action were not included.

The book is a much needed corrective to nationalist revisionism. Perhaps most troubling is the silencing of accounts, such as that presented by Christian Williams of the SWAPO camps. Drawing on the literature surrounding the history of witchcraft, Williams points to the slipperiness of the concept of the “spy”, and the tendency of Namibians from the south, who tended to be lighter-skinned and spoke Afrikaans, to be accused of spying for the South Africans. The harrowing account of forced confessions under torture of such “spies” is corroborated by Steve Davis’ study of Radio Freedom, in which he points to the tensions between the Western-trained, intellectual “aristocrats” who staffed the radio, and the poorly educated, Eastern European-trained security police, *Mbokodo* (p 133). This led to the majority of the Radio Freedom staff being detained and a number being killed.

The strength of the volume is its balance. The chapters do not attempt to simplify or make the particular histories more palatable. Complexity and

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difficulties in such local, regional and global perspectives are flagged by the authors as real and pressing. It is not surprising in a volume of this nature that there should be omissions, and indeed the editors make no claim to comprehensiveness. As such, there are areas that are not addressed. One that looms large, perhaps due to the recent publications of the voluminous South African Democracy Trust's series, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, is the absence of rigorous engagement with aboveground opposition in South Africa over the period covered.

The perspective of the book, although it refers to "local" history, is more that of the exiled liberation fighter, the anti-apartheid activist, looking in at southern Africa. Of course, there are intimate accounts of local histories – Thula Simpson's and Christian Williams' are fine examples – but overall the tone and focus of the volume is on the transnational and regional. Janet Cherry's article is also the exception here, because she presents a consideration of community struggles in the Eastern Cape region in the 1980s. However, her article is focused on resolving a historical debate rather than providing a social historical account. There is nevertheless a degree of self-reflexivity in the collection, which points to its incompleteness and that it instead seeks to model a type of history, which will be instructive for further local, regional and global histories to come.

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