

Unpacking Complex Masculinities in the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) Guerrilla Warfare

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Abstract

Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) guerrilla warfare from the early 1960s to 1979 was fought by armed men at the front, while trained female cadres remained in the rear bases. Recruitment, training, deployment and battlefield experiences ran alongside orientation in the African home which was inclined towards male aggression and female submissiveness. Complex masculinities in this guerrilla army remain a grey area of study and influence how the former fighters look meanly at one another today. Data for this article was drawn from autobiographies and interviews with former ZPRA combatants, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) publications and secondary sources, to interrogate the link between masculinity and militarism. This research established that ZPRA guerrilla warfare was a meeting-point of complex masculinities with each individual guerrilla discharging military duties in accordance with circumstances of the time. The article contributes to the understanding of how men behave in a war situation. The suffering and feminisation of men has not attracted much academic attention in accounts of guerrilla fighters, who since the attainment of independence in 1980, became either heroes or villains. The research on masculinity contributes to men's perceptions of their role in armed conflict.

Key words: Masculinity; femininity; Mkushi Camp; manhood; Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army; Zimbabwe African People's Union.

Opsomming

Die Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) se guerrilla-oorlogvoering van die vroeë 1960's tot 1979 is gekenmerk deur gewapende mans aan die front, terwyl

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opgeleide vroulike kaders in die agtergrond gebly het. Werwing, opleiding, ontplooiing en gevegserverings het plaasgevind binne 'n Afrika-patriargale konteks wat deur manlike aggressie en vroulike onderdanigheid gekenmerk is. Die komplekse vorme van manlikheid binne hierdie guerrillaleër bly 'n grys gebied – beide wat hulle invloed op die verloop van die oorlog betref en met betrekking tot die teenswoordige gespanne verhoudings tussen voormalige vegters. Die bronne vir hierdie artikel sluit in outobiografieë en onderhoude met voormalige ZPRA-stryders, publikasies van die Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), sowel as sekondêre literatuur, ten einde die verband tussen manlikheid en militarisme te ondersoek. Hierdie navorsing het bevind dat ZPRA-guerrilla-oorlogvoering 'n ontmoetingspunt van komplekse manlikheid was, waar elke individuele guerrilla sy militêre pligte uitgevoer het volgens sy eie realiteit, werklik of verbeel, op 'n bepaalde tydstip. Die artikel dra by tot 'n beter begrip van hoe mans hulle in 'n oorlogsomgewing gedra. Die lyding en “vervrouliking” van mans het tot dusver min akademiese aandag geniet in beskouings oor guerrillavegters, wat sedert die verkryging van onafhanklikheid in 1980 as óf helde óf skurke beskou is. Hierdie navorsing oor manlikheid lewer insig in mans se persepsies van hulle rol binne gewapende konflik.

Sleutelwoorde: Manlikheid; vroulikheid; Mkushi-kamp; Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army; Zimbabwe African People's Union.

Introduction

When Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor undertook a study of military drill (toyi toyi) by Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) cadres during the liberation struggle, it was not surprising that their findings were based exclusively on oral accounts provided by men.¹ Drilling itself was a means of instilling masculine discipline in men who were training as guerrillas. Studies on guerrilla warfare have generally focussed on men because of the thinking that militarism is masculinist. The Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) did not deploy women to the front.² A critical missing point in ZPRA guerrilla warfare studies is that military men are not a homogenous entity. By drawing on interviews with former ZPRA commanders, ZAPU publications such as *The Zimbabwe Review* and other secondary sources, this study unpacks how societal expectations of men in times of war exert pressure on them and in turn they struggle to live up to these attributes. While men perpetrate

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1. J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'The Travelling Toyi Toyi: Soldiers and the Politics of Drill', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45, 5 (2020), 923-940.
 2. F. Sadomba and G.A. Dzinesa, 'Identity and Exclusion in the Post-war Era: Zimbabwe's Women Former Freedom Fighters', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 2, 1 (2004), 53-54; N. Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-war Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 122.

violence in wartime, they may also be victims of gendered vulnerabilities.³ In ZPRA guerrilla warfare, masculinities were not fixed male identities but were multiple, complex, and intersectional social and military practices. ZPRA cadres sought to excel in what constituted a man as expected by the communities they were serving, although infractions were also rampant. This leads in turn to hegemonic and non-hegemonic militarised masculinities in armed conflict. Veterans of the armed struggle masculinise their contribution to the armed struggle by positioning themselves strategically, while feminising some of their colleagues within the same movement.

The armed struggle to liberate Zimbabwe provided space for the validation of male masculinities whether deliberately or by mere chance. As such, oral accounts by former ZPRA guerrillas explain what it was to prove one's self a man during the protracted armed struggle. What becomes apparent is that manhood from the perspective of former combatants was measured by enduring tough training, being sent abroad (especially to the Soviet Union) for further training, fighting and surviving fierce battles, and after the war, enduring torture at the hands of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government without giving in. Unhegemonic masculinity, which in part included civilian murders, rape and surrendering to the enemy, were also part of ZPRA combatants' experience. Former ZPRA guerrillas prefer to argue that they had consensual sex with women as opposed to rape during the war. This is part of denying unhegemonic masculinity. The study found that guerrillas were exposed to fear, withdrawal, miserable deaths, selling out and so on, but for the most part, they only pinpoint these when talking about others. The reality is that guerrillas encountered multiple masculinities, hence the need to challenge the nationalistic picture of a heroic and patriotic fighter who fought for the independence of Zimbabwe.

This article, based on qualitative research, is arranged into a number of sections. The first provides a background to Zimbabwe's liberation war and the emergence of ZPRA as a key player. I then proceed to discuss masculinity and masculinities as key concepts. Thirdly, the article examines masculinities as experienced in the war of liberation. Evidence was drawn from interviews with former guerrillas and a reappraisal of key sources including two autobiographies by former ZPRA guerrillas. The findings demonstrate how (male) guerrillas struggled to keep up with what was expected of them in a highly masculinised environment and how they suffered as a result. The stereotype that masculinity is directly related to biology is thus brought into question by a study of these wartime experiences.

3. 'Engaging with Men and Masculinities in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings', OECD Development Papers, 17 (March 2019), 11.

Background

According to the official version of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Zimbabwe's war of liberation began with the Battle of Chinhoyi on 28 April 1966 which today is commemorated in the country as Chimurenga (Liberation) Day.⁴ Seven of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) fighters involved were shot dead by Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF). They were Simon Chingoza Nyandoro, Godwin Manyeranyere, Christopher Chatambudza, Aurthur Maramba, Chubby Savanhu, Godfrey Dube, and David Guzuzu.⁵ Michael Raeburn locates the beginning of the war in 1964 to the activities of the Crocodile Gang that killed a white farmer in the Melsetter area of Chipinge.⁶ The war of liberation can also be traced back to the formation of ZAPU on 17 December 1961, and its subsequent splinter, ZANU, formed on 8 August 1963. ZANU established its armed wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) in 1964, while ZAPU formed an armed wing in 1965.⁷ ZPRA was founded in 1971 following a crisis in ZAPU which led to the formation of a splinter party, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI).⁸

The ultimate motive behind the armed struggle in 1964, was to gain independence in what is now Zimbabwe, by dislodging the white minority regime under the Rhodesia Front Party headed by Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith. ZPRA had rear bases in Zambia while ZANLA was based in Mozambique. Both movements were masculine in nature, partly as demonstrated by their avowed apprehension of deploying females to fight at the front and secondly, by the advanced training that was given to some of its men. By 1978, the armed struggle for the independence of Zimbabwe had reached its most decisive, final stage. The war came to an end in December 1979 with the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement. Following this, ZANU-PF won the election against its rival PF-ZAPU. The postwar experience of some ZPRA (male) former guerrillas was daunting because they were treated as dissidents with unhegemonic masculinities and suffered torture at the hands of the new government. Going to war did not therefore translate to them returning as heroes or so-called 'real men'. The life histories being explored here clearly illustrate this assertion.

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4. H. Ellert and D. Anderson, *A Brutal State of Affairs: The Rise and Fall of Rhodesia* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2020), 93.
 5. H. Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War: Counterinsurgency and Guerrilla War in Rhodesia, 1962-1980* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), 11-12.
 6. M. Raeburn, *Black Fire! Accounts of the Guerrilla War in Rhodesia* (London: Julian Friedman Publishers, 1978), 53-74.
 7. Sadomba and Dzinesa, 'Identity and Exclusion in the Postwar Era', 152.
 8. J. Brickhill, 'Daring to Storm the Heavens: The Military Strategy of ZAPU, 1976-1979', in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger eds *Soldiers in Zimbabwe' Liberation War: Vol. 1* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe, 1995), 61-65.

Conceptualising masculinity and masculinities

Globally, masculinity as opposed to femininity defines what it is to be a man. Feminism on the other hand, is a critical and massive movement whose purpose is to analyse and change the power relations between men and women so as to modify or transform the patriarchal order.⁹ Connell observes that ‘masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition’.¹⁰ Duncanson portrays men as victims of socialisation by emphasising that in many cultures across time and space, excelling on the battlefield has been deemed an important way to prove oneself as a man.¹¹ He goes on to add that boys and men are socialised into thinking that being tough, aggressive, having authority and being in control, are important markers of being a man. In growing up, male children are toughened and hardened by messages that ‘boys don’t cry’, that they must be brave, and to learn to stand up for themselves in a fight.¹² By definition, masculinity is an ‘artificial status which is typically constructed around a culture’s need for brave and disciplined soldiers’.¹³ Kopano Ratele associates masculinity with traditional ideologies which men and boys endeavour to fulfil.¹⁴ Men are haunted by the fear that they do not measure up to manhood and it is this which drives them to articulate their heroic acts in war. This also means that during training, recruits must endure insults and intimidation because that is part of ‘being a man’. War can even make a man think meanly of himself for not being an archetypical ‘soldier’.¹⁵

Masculinities encompass the various socially constructed ways of being and acting, the values and expectations associated with being and becoming a man in a given society, location and temporal space.¹⁶ Ratele reiterates that the African cultural psychology of masculinities centres on African ways of living and understanding the world.¹⁷ Thus African cultures and cosmologies have a bearing on the behaviour of a man and in this research, the narratives obtained reflect that as

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9. K. Savva, ‘Masculinities in Conflict: The Construction of the Militarized Masculinity in a Patriarchal Society’, Honours paper, Department of Social and Political Science, University of Cyprus (2011), 8.
 10. Savva, ‘Masculinities in Conflict’, 12.
 11. C. Duncanson, ‘Masculinities, War and Militarism’, in L. Gottzén, U. Mellström and T. Shefer, eds, *International Handbook of Masculinity Studies* (London: Routledge, 2019), 3.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Ibid.
 14. K. Ratele, ‘Masculinities Without Tradition’, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 40, 1 (2013), 133-135.
 15. Ibid.
 16. ‘Engaging with Men and Masculinities in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings’, OECD Development Papers, 17 (March 2019), 11.
 17. K. Ratele, ‘African Psychologies of Boys, Men and Masculinities’, *Psychology in Society*, 54 (2017), 19.

former combatants avoid speaking badly about themselves. The challenge here is that masculine responsibilities are not necessarily biologically driven. Women can also perform tasks which are expected of men and vice versa. Toxic masculinity which is associated with violence, is generally unacceptable and not always tolerated in society and hence the need to embrace hegemonic masculinity which constitutes positive behaviours and expected of a decent citizen. In practice however, guerrilla warfare straddles both toxic and hegemonic masculinity owing to the changing demands of the war at any one time. Masculinities are associated with what men say and do to become 'men'.¹⁸ This study has established that guerrilla respondents invariably try to prove themselves as men by asserting heroic experiences, despite the evidence of encounters with other experiences and moments in which they were victims rather than courageous victors.

Generally, women are assumed to be associated with pacifism and men with militarism.¹⁹ This mentality remains dominant despite changes in the gender makeup of militaries in the 20th and early 21st centuries.²⁰ Being a soldier, and particularly when fighting a popular war, remains a key symbol of masculinity. Throughout the world, militarism and masculinity reinforce each other,²¹ and men make up the vast majority of armed forces and personnel engaged in war.²² This does not mean that men are innately militaristic, and, by corollary, that women are naturally peaceful. Instead, the link between masculinity and the military is constructed and maintained for the purposes of waging war.²³ Molosiwa and Bolaane have argued that men are not inherently privileged perpetrators and beneficiaries of gendered power inequalities.²⁴ Given that war is not a leisure activity and death is a daily occurrence, men have suffered and even lost their lives in a bid to maintain manhood, which in such times was a burden thrust upon their shoulders by nationalist organisers. Evidence from Zimbabwe's armed struggle reveals that ZPRA were likened to fugitives and bandits when some of them were accused of being dissidents. Some men faced torture, dismissal from the army and threats of prison sentences in the period between 1982 and 1987.²⁵

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18. C. Ammann and S. Staudacher, 'Masculinities in Africa beyond Crisis: Complexity, Fluidity, and Intersectionality', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28, 6 (2020), 759-768.
 19. F. Nantes jnr, 'Masculine Domination', *Academic Letters* (July 2021), 1-5; T. Sajjad, 'Women Guerrillas: Marching towards True Freedom? An Analysis of Women's Experiences in the Frontlines of Guerrilla Warfare in the Post-war Period, *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 59 (2004), 4-16.
 20. Ibid., 82.
 21. Ibid., 83
 22. Ibid., 84
 23. Ibid., 81.
 24. P.P. Molosiwa and M.M.M. Bolaane, "'A Peaceful Country": Refugees, Masculinities and Anti-radical National Identity in Early Postcolonial Botswana', *Historia*, 66, 2 (November 2021), 48-73.
 25. This period, known as Gukurahundi, saw the death of about 20 000 people, mainly from the Ndebele-speaking ethnic group. See J. Chakawa, 'From Connemara to Gukurahundi,

Lovgren has observed that African men in particular are often considered the rawest and most natural expression of masculinity.²⁶ This assertion implies, in Western circles, that being a man in Africa carries with it negative connotations because the men are imagined to be unreasonable and uncompromising. Being raw and natural is not always an acceptable attribute. In the same study, Lovgren quotes Kaplan's description of young men in Africa as 'loose molecules' and claims that anxious masculinities may turn aggressive, leading to general chaos and disruption. Africans are characterised as brutal, depicting aimless expressions of nature unchecked and this view is used to explain their sexual offences in times of war as emanating from uninhibited libido.²⁷ Rebels are understood from such conceptions as being badly raised, untrustworthy, sexually promiscuous and apt to stand in opposition to all kinds of authority. Such misleading perceptions about Africans tend to originate from the West and they elude and eclipse real revolutionary motivations by giving a blanket condemnation to armed men, defining them as 'terrorists'. Negative connotations of young African men such as those suggested by Kaplan do not consider contradictions in the behaviours of fighting menfolk and do not give credence to the existence of femininity among masculinised men.

Methodology

This qualitative research is based on interviews, reviews of ZAPU publications, autobiographies, newspapers and other secondary sources. Some are published and others unpublished. Three former ZPRA commanders were key informants. They are Comrdes Khumalo, Soft Magarasadza and the now late Joseph Mbedzi. They were interviewed in the period between 2019 and 2021. The choice of these particular men was based on the fact that they were all military commanders. For most of the war, Mbedzi fought in the Guruve district; Magarasadza was active in Mashonaland West and parts of the Midlands, while Khumalo fought mainly in Matabeleland provinces. The areas cited covered the bulk of ZPRA operational fronts. Data was also drawn from the autobiographies of two former guerrillas, namely Vincent Ndlovu and Irvine Sibhona.²⁸ Both of them received advanced training and fought in the war. Sibhona fought in Mashonaland West and Matabeleland. After the attainment of independence, Vincent Ndlovu became a dissident and did not join the army, while Sibhona decided to join. Despite these different realities, both were tortured and persecuted after independence. Their experiences shed further light on the meaning of militarised masculinities.

the Genocide of the 1980s in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 37, 2 (2021), 27-39.

26. R. Lovgren, 'Masculinity and Mass Violence in Africa: Ongoing Debates, Concepts and Trends', DIIS Working Paper (August 2015), 5.

27. Ibid, 7-8.

28. V. Ndlovu, *Seeking Freedom and Justice* (Cape Town: Michael Terence Publishing, 2021), I.J.K. Sibhona, *Nation of Violence: ZPRA's Struggle against Rhodesia in Alliance with Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Cleveland: Bubuya Publishing), 2018.

The Zimbabwe Review, a ZAPU publication circulated between 1974 and 1978 was another primary source of information. The position of women in the struggle is not clearly defined but in all cases, it appears that it was complementary to that of men. As a result of the general view that women are weaker than their male counterparts, ZPRA did not deploy women to the front. Some veterans of the liberation struggle from ZPRA and ZANLA have shared their wartime experiences with journalists and their stories were serialised in the *Sunday Mail*. These were useful sources, as was information from the *Sunday News*. The newspapers were analysed to give an idea of how the combatants reminisce about the past. Contemporary academic writings on masculinities were also utilised to buttress how the term is conceptualised in everyday society and even more importantly, during wartime. However, masculinities are not directly linked to biology. The idea of women participating in combat duties has been questioned and men usually constitute the bulk of forces who are openly engaged in fighting. Literature consulted was key in defining concepts as understood during the liberation struggle and in the contemporary world. White and African masculinity was compared and contrasted.

Masculinities and ZPRA wartime experiences

Generally speaking, ZAPU entrenched the subordinate role of women and elevated that of men in the process of executing the liberation struggle. Some of the roles set aside for women during the war included caring for the injured (male) comrades; supplying vital information to freedom fighters (giving the impression that these were indeed men), production in the fields and taking up various posts in ZAPU.²⁹ Some girls sent abroad for further education by ZAPU returned and worked in the party as broadcasters and teachers. In 1978, Jester Nkomo summarised the role of women in the struggle as ‘fighting alongside men; donating money towards the liberation front; donating clothing and other items, and providing food to our (male) gallant fighters’.³⁰ All the roles except the first are feminine but even the ‘fighting alongside men’ portrays a subordinate and complementary position to that of men. Furthermore, the roles which ZAPU defined as appropriate for women were extensions of their domestic duties, a scenario which entrenched the passive role of women in war. Such duties were also undertaken by men at the front but respondents did not emphasise them because of their feminine nature. Thus, more than four decades after independence, respondents are still trying to prove ‘manhood’ as a marker of the war in question.

ZPRA provided specialised and advanced military training in the Soviet Union, largely for its men. Such cadres ordinarily regarded themselves as better than their

29. T. Ushie, ‘Girls’ Role in the Struggle’, *The Zimbabwe Review*, 6, 10 (1977), 11; Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, 122-123.

30. J. Nkomo, ‘Women’s Role in the Struggle’, *The Zimbabwe Review*, 7, 1 (1978), 10.

colleagues who were trained in Zambia. Put differently, the feeling was that the masculinity of those trained abroad was superior to those who were not selected to go to the Soviet Union. The philosophy behind sending men (rather than women) for further training was the [mis]informed thinking that men have the monopoly in the handling of technical objects and machines.³¹ That mentality, although unscientific, was a means of naturalising masculinity.

In 1977, ZPRA sent 180 men for advanced training at Simferopol Military Academy in Ukraine.³² No women were included in the group. High intelligence operations were seen as the prerogative of men, a situation which was compounded by a patriarchal African society which gives limited chances of female advancement in the military. In ZPRA's counterpart, ZANLA, female combatants did indeed serve in the commissariat, medical corps, in the departments of operations, logistics and supplies, training, personnel, construction and education.³³ The bulk of these posts were confined to the rear (in Mozambique) of the fighting force. In the majority of cases; they were excluded from the front but in cases where they were indeed deployed they were quickly withdrawn if fierce confrontations broke out as the case of ZANLA shows.³⁴ ZAPU established the Victory (Mkushi) Camp for female cadres in Zambia but women were trained separately from men.³⁵ By 1978, Mkushi Camp had been set aside as a refugee and training camp for women. When this camp was bombed by Rhodesians on 19 October 1978, ZPRA female combatants fought back ferociously and were later described by Rhodesian and nationalist propaganda in masculine terminologies.³⁶ It is against the above ideas that I seek to explore how the war was conceptualised as the epitome of masculinity.

The ZPRA commander-in-chief, Joshua Nkomo, was against the training of women as combatants. On one occasion he sent Dumiso Dabengwa to Mwembeshi in Zambia where females were training alongside male cadres, to say: 'No, ask those ladies ... [to] come back and be sent to school'.³⁷ Similarly, in 1977, on learning of the presence of girls at Nampundwe Camp in Zambia, he tried to stop them from undergoing military training, but they pleaded with their commanders that they be allowed to stay. At the end of the day, their request was accepted.³⁸ Even after

31. Nantes, 'Masculine Domination', *Academic Letters*, 4.

32. Ndlovu, *Seeking Freedom and Justice*, 98.

33. Sadomba and Dzinesa, 'Identity and Exclusion in the Postwar Era', 153.

34. J.L. Parpart, 'Masculinity/ies, Gender and Violence in the Struggle for Zimbabwe', in *Rethinking the Man Question, Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations*, eds J.L. Parpart and M. Zalewski (London and New York: Zed Books, 2008), 193.

35. T. Lyons, 'Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Struggle' (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1999), 126-128.

36. Lyons, 'Guns and Guerrilla Girls', 129.

37. 'ZAPU through Zenzu Nkobi's Lens', The South African History Archive (2017), 25.

38. M. Sibanda, 'Noko One of First Zipra Women Instructors', *Sunday News*, 31 August 2014.

military training, Joshua Nkomo preferred to send women to work as nurses or secretaries. However, the attack on Mkushi Camp effectively ended the military training of women and the camp was abandoned. The women who survived were eventually deployed for civilian training in other countries; to work in offices in Lusaka; or to attend local colleges.³⁹ Once more we see that women were confined to their domestic chores, away from perceived masculine tasks.

Despite being trained as guerrillas, the privilege to operate in masculine domains was given to a limited number of women such as Thoriso Phiri (alias Bvunzai) and Ethel Noko (alias Grace Muchachi), who were instructors and had trained in Mgagao and Morogoro.⁴⁰ Technically therefore, women were not adequately represented in the decision-making bodies of ZPRA. In ZANLA, women performed their feminine roles supporting guerrillas and in return were praised with phrases such as ‘forward with the cooking stick’.⁴¹ Rhodesian security forces used masculine discourses in attacking guerrillas by asserting that they were undermining the capacity of nationalists to protect women.⁴² It is clear that the execution of the war at the front was a masculine role because of its exclusive domination by male guerrillas. On the Northern Front, which included Hurungwe district and the adjoining areas of Mashonaland West Province, the entire command structure was made up of fighting men. Among them were combatants such as China, Mapepuka, Tolbert, Hugh, Chovhachoha Muputukezi, Jagger, Sam, Chaka, Kabaira, Majola, Chipikiri and Single.⁴³

Masculinities and life histories of former ZPRA combatants

Recruitment, training and battlefield experiences are used in this study as a peephole through which military masculinities may be studied. Once recruited, future fighters were isolated from civilian life. This process was a marker of converting boys into men. Recruits took training as some kind of fulfilling societal expectations of a man. A good example is that of a former ZPRA guerrilla, Khumalo, who in 1976 was a Form 4 pupil at Lower Gwelo mission school run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church when his father, a bricklayer at the school, fought with the European school principal. Khumalo remembered:

39. Ibid.

40. Ndlovu, *Seeking Freedom and Justice*, 96.

41. J. Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2000), 17.

42. T. Lyons, *Guns and Guerilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 26.

43. Interview with Cde Magarasadza and Joseph Sibuko Mbedzi, former ZPRA commanders, Harare, 22 June 2019.

Chakawa – Complex Masculinities in the ZPRA

My father worked at Lower Gwelo Mission. One day, he quarreled with Mr Cheesman, a Canadian missionary and beat him up. I was marked by the principal for that. I was already a rowdy character and used to fight with others at school. Realising that my days were numbered at the school, I decided to follow my father who had fled to Botswana after the fight.⁴⁴

Khumalo's father took an extremely courageous decision to fight against his principal at Lower Gweru Mission. Such behaviour was unacceptable in a highly racialised Rhodesian society where the minority regime vilified its enemies as weak, effeminate and failed men.⁴⁵ Looking down upon African men was part and parcel of white masculinity which colonised subalterns sought to challenge at any given moment. During the war, the minority regime encouraged Rhodesians to fight against Africans on the grounds that this was a test for manhood (white masculinity). Similarly, the same teaching was emphasised in African homes in Rhodesia where a man was expected to be tough, resilient, courageous, and if need be, ruthless. But at the same time he had to be able to look after his family.

That Khumalo's father fought back, held potentially dire consequences. Under colonial rule in Rhodesia, it was far too dangerous to fight a white – hence the decision to escape to Botswana. By running away, he evaded imprisonment and humiliation, but at the same time he was driven by fear which is (incorrectly) understood as a feminine trait. Khumalo acknowledged this and like his father, he escaped to Botswana. Most former guerrillas, it is argued, would have preferred to assert themselves as fearless in such a situation. The need to liberate their country from colonial bondage was often a major reason for joining the struggle and this was seen as synonymous to manhood.

While in Botswana, Khumalo was arrested for possible deportation as an illegal immigrant. In prison, he met suspected Selous Scouts operatives.⁴⁶ He fought the strongest of them into submission. By fighting off attackers while in prison, he had won the battle for endurance, physical and psychological strength which ultimately saved him from imprisonment and deportation. The Botswana court freed him but the suspected Selous Scouts were deported back to Rhodesia. Khumalo then went to Francistown where he was quickly flown to Zambia for military training.

At Nampundwe Camp in Zambia, he met fierce, domineering, cursing, guerrilla instructors. Khumalo's meeting with swearing [male] trainers is interesting to study

44. Interview with Khumalo, Lower Gweru, 16 April 2020.

45. Parpart, 'Masculinity/ies, Gender and Violence', 189.

46. This was a highly trained Rhodesian black and white elite force operating behind enemy lines and sometimes posing as guerrillas. The unit is thought to have accounted for 68 per cent of guerrilla kills during the war. For more information refer to P. Stiff, *Selous Scouts: Top Secret War* (Alberton: Galago Publishers, 1982).

given the prevailing psychology that such behaviour relates closely to military masculinity. These men were openly insulting the new recruits with obscenities. Instead of chickening out, Khumalo's interest in pressing on with guerrilla training was aroused. In his own words, Khumalo talked of swearing guys as 'talking nasty.'

Here we pick up our argument. As explained by Whitworth, humiliating new military recruits is the beginning of acclimatising soldiers to deny all that is feminine.⁴⁷ Some of the unimaginable insults thrown at recruits include whore, faggot, clint, ladies, abortion, pussy, nigger, Indian or simply: '*You are a woman!*' as the ultimate insult.⁴⁸ In the training of the Rhodesian elite regiment, sarcastic insults such as '*Only women would fail to complete such an easy course!*' were hurled at recruits.⁴⁹ Insults like these had the capacity to tear apart any civilian. When Khumalo was demeaned in this way, he concluded that he had arrived at his rightful place with all the manly attributes he wanted. He had also successfully dealt with fear. Those who could not withstand such insults were not considered man enough.

Arguably, by not fleeing from these initial insults, Khumalo had somehow passed the first test of masculinity, a development which allowed him to proceed to military training. The selection course started with a gruelling six-hour, non-stop run as a test for endurance which is a masculine trait. In the operational field, guerrillas were supposed to display these traits and show no sign of fear. Reneging on any task directed by commanders was unacceptable. In his autobiography, Vincent Ndlovu despises recruits who were either whisked away by their relatives or tried to escape during training ...proof that they were 'failed' men.⁵⁰

Raeburn writes that 2 men who were part of the Platoon B ZAPU/ZPRA Campaign contingent refused to cross the Zambezi River for fear of being killed by the enemy on the other side. They were arrested, handcuffed and placed under armed guard to be taken to Lusaka for disciplinary action.⁵¹ According to Jack Mpofu, the aim of (ZPRA) training was 'to make a *man* that can survive in a very tough situation.'⁵² By emphasising *man* in this instance, he was referring to sex and attributes that are allegedly (and falsely so) absent in a woman.

In late 1977, Khumalo and his colleagues who had excelled in this training, were flown to Russia for further training as instructors. According to him, this group of 180 was made up of 'really tough guys' who had proved themselves above all

47. S. Whitworth, 'Militarized Masculinity and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, in Parpart and Zalewski, 'Rethinking the Man Question', 112.

48. Ibid.

49. As told to Stiff, *Selous Scouts: Top Secret War*, 67.

50. Ndlovu, *Seeking Freedom and Justice*, 90-91.

51. Raeburn, *Black Fire*, 143.

52. *ZAPU through Zenzo Nkobi's lens*, The South African History Archive (2017), 20.

others. Khumalo looked upon at those who trained in Russia as better soldiers.⁵³ In ZPRA, therefore, there were different masculinities regarding what constituted soldiering. When he returned to Zambia from Ukraine in November 1977, Khumalo measured soldiering and manhood by his success to do reconnaissance for ZPRA. The journey on foot took him from the Zambezi River to Gweru and then Gwaai River to map and understand flight routes and timetables. The objective of his trip was to establish ways of protecting guerrilla camps from Rhodesian enemy attacks. He also explained some of the fiercest battles he fought as a way of asserting his unquestionable contribution to the war effort. One such incident was in Lupane where in 1979, he was part of about 200 guerrillas who were encircled by Rhodesian forces. Despite many of them being killed, none surrendered and Khumalo was one of the less than half the original number who eventually annihilated the enemy and escaped leaving behind many casualties from their own ranks.⁵⁴ The claim therefore, was that the exploits of Khumalo were part and parcel of the struggle between White and African masculinity with each trying to prove manhood in a racialised society where Africans were looked down upon.

Magarasadza was one of the main respondents in this study. I interviewed him in June 2019 and again in May 2021. He left Rhodesia for Botswana in 1972 and was subsequently taken to Lusaka. From there, he was taken to a transit camp at Mwembeshi in Zambia before going to Morogoro in Tanzania to do military training which lasted 9 months. In 1974, he was sent for further training in Russia and returned in December 1975, before being deployed as an instructor at Tembue 1. By 1978, he was a regional commander in Mashonaland West an area that covered the entire Hurungwe district. His encounters included the Mana Pools battle, and subsequent fights after the downing of the first Air Rhodesia Viscount in 1978, among others. By 1979, Magarasadza had been deployed to Sanyati, so after the ceasefire, he went to Assembly Point Romeo in Makonde district at Magurekure. As for Khumalo, he went to Assembly Point Mike near Lupane.⁵⁵ These two men agreed to take part in the research project which sought to explore masculine attributes and gain a better understanding of what it is to be a (male) guerrilla.

Overt aggression and hypermasculinity appeared consistently as being indispensable in guerrilla narratives. Magarasadza and Khumalo were already aggressive before they had even been recruited and trained as guerrillas. In the wake of the 1971 'No' vote against the Pearce Commission, Magarasadza, together with other youths were involved in the looting of shops in Harare (then Salisbury). Having lost identification documents in the mayhem and like a fugitive, Magarasadza jumped

53. Interview with Khumalo, Lower Gweru, 16 April 2020.

54. Ibid, 16 April 2020.

55. Interview with Cde Magarasadza, former ZPRA commander, Harare, 22 June 2019 and in Centenary, 26 May 2021.

the border into Botswana where he was recruited into ZAPU. For both, therefore, joining the war became what A.M. White defines as the ‘ultimate test for masculinity.’⁵⁶ Warrior tradition (which is also a ground for practising violence) has generally been reserved for men. The link between violent crime and men also comes to the fore in jails which house more men than women.⁵⁷ Masculinity is associated with the capacity to kill, and former guerrillas do not hesitate to explain such exploits.

In reminiscing about the war, former guerrillas are quick to underestimate the enemy by emphasising that despite the numerical and technical advantages of their enemy, ZPRAs were still able to ‘crush’ Rhodesians. That became very clear from Magarasadza who explained how ZPRA overran Rhodesian Security Forces at Mana Pools at the end of 1978.⁵⁸ He spoke of his side as using an assortment of weapons such as Gad P, AK-47, amaGronov, PK, LMG and heavy machine guns, but he was dodgy about detailing casualties from his side as opposed to the enemy side. A similar testimony came from another ZPRA fighter involved in the same battle, Gilbert Msebele, who was interviewed by the *Sunday Mail* reporter, Norman Muchemwa.⁵⁹ The idea of refusing to acknowledge defeat, he said, was a sign of manliness and where defeat is acknowledged, it is to depict the inhumanity of the enemy force.

Against white masculinity, ZPRA sought to prove that they were equally strong. Although they were fighting African and also European soldiers, they preferred to lump the 2 collectively as ‘Mabhunu’ (Boers ... a derogatory term for whites). In the Chirundu Battle of 1977, Soft Magarasadza depicts ZPRA guerrillas as a uniquely strong force of just 18 men which Rhodesian Security Forces (RSFs) with more advanced weaponry and enjoying numerical superiority failed to subdue in that battle. He explained that ZPRA guerrillas used an assortment of advanced weaponry to force Rhodesian soldiers to withdraw. Having trained in artillery, Magarasadza was using Gun 75 in that particular battle.⁶⁰

Elsewhere, a battle description from a small company of 70 men in the Welsh division during World War 1 sums up this idea of being ‘invincible’, which also finds space in guerrilla narratives. A certain Tom Davies of B Company of the 13th Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers explained:

56. For a race-gendered analysis of Fanon’s ‘Psychological Perspectives on War’, see *Signs*, 32, 4, (Summer 2007), 867.

57. A. A. Mazrui, ‘The Warrior Tradition and the Masculinity of War’, *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 12, 1-4 (1977), 69.

58. Interview with Magarasadza, Centenary, 26 May 2021.

59. ‘Reliving the Mana Pools Battle’, *The Sunday Mail*, 5 January 2020.

60. How ZIPRA outgunned Rhodesians at Chirundu, *The Sunday Mail*, 24 June 2018.

... despite a terrific enemy bombardment every man stood up at his post and no one flinched. No-Man's-Land was swept by our Lewis Gun fire and a German raider was captured, whilst our line was not entered by the enemy'.⁶¹

White has argued that war, by its very nature is not only patriarchal, but the militarism that goes with it is construed in men's violence, manifesting in courage, virility, chivalry and superiority.⁶² Such stereotypes of a supermacho combat soldier who is hypermasculine appear in narratives of former guerrillas. While operating in Hurungwe as regional commander, Magarasadza claimed that he could traverse the whole of Mashonaland West province visiting his detachment commanders so as to know the war was progressing and to give them orders.⁶³ Despite the years that have passed since the end of the war and the ostracisation that ZPRA suffered in the early years of independence, reminiscing of their wartime heroic acts by these ex-combatants is an expression of masculinity. Their narratives are also an indirect way of complaining that the war did not reward 'real men' because former combatants are still struggling, while those who fought minimally and were therefore 'not real men' now occupy key posts in government and the military.

Strict discipline is another feature of masculinity which receives continuous attention in guerrilla life histories. Respondents emphasised strict discipline in guerrilla warfare. The claim is that when discipline deteriorated, tough action was taken to restore sanity. Khumalo recalls that while on patrol in Lupane some day in 1978, his fellow guerrilla combatant shot dead a male villager at his home for no apparent reason except that he envied his beautiful wife. For that, the group beat up an errant guerrilla and confiscated his weapon before expelling him.⁶⁴ That punishment was enough to reinstate discipline in the whole group.

Similarly, Magarasadza emphasised the importance of discipline as a marker of guerrilla warfare. When discipline in guerrillas under him deteriorated, Magarasadza reported this to the High Command and in his thinking, the 3 September 1978 downing of Air Rhodesia Viscount was the response.⁶⁵ Then too, ZPRA guerrillas in the general area of Hurungwe had to be on the run fighting Rhodesian soldiers on a daily basis for the next two weeks and were facing difficulties in accessing food from villages besieged by RSF. With this existential threat, proper discipline and command structures were once more restored to Hurungwe district. Mbedzi commented that

61. Duty and Honour: The Importance of notions of masculinity during the First World War, www.swansea.ac.uk/media, Accessed, 5 February 2024.

62. A.M. White, 'All men are fighting for freedom, all women are mourning their men, but some of us carried guns: A race-gendered analysis of Fanon's Psychological Perspectives on War', *Signs*, 32, 4 (2007), 865.

63. Interview with Magarasadza, Harare, 22 June 2019.

64. Interview with Khumalo, Lower Gweru, 20 January 2020.

65. Interview with Magarasadza, Centenary, 26 May 2021.

unlike what was found in other areas, in Guruve, ZANLA and ZIPRA forces were so disciplined that sometimes they undertook operations jointly.⁶⁶ The point, he said, is that, despite their aggression, guerrillas must be disciplined. From the experiences of these three former fighters, military masculinity is hegemonic and, as explained by Kiefer, is driven by ideology.⁶⁷ Reneging from that position becomes a sign of weakness and betrayal. Therefore when former guerrillas are giving accounts of their experiences within the current context, they also make an effort to avoid reiterating how their individual actions moved away from the nationalist ideology which was behind the struggle for independence.

Ordinarily, fighting to the last was proof of masculinity as encouraged by ZPRA commanders. Guerrillas would sometimes dynamite themselves instead of being captured by the enemy and this was a 'sign of manhood'. Those who hid from the enemy, ran away or surrendered were frowned upon, defined as cowards and by extension not real men. In one battle fought at Masasa near Dolo Range in Rhodesia, one guerrilla survived by hiding in a tree and staying there until it was dark. He then escaped during the night via Gwatemba Purchase Area and joined another group of ZPRA guerrillas. The commander accused him of being a coward and immediately directed him to go on another mission upon which he developed a runny tummy and shit himself.⁶⁸ This guerrilla was the only survivor in the group of 10 who were involved in that battle. It was not surprising that he was in shock but before recovering, he was being sent on another mission. Such excessive demands can break a man in times of war. Realities of the war were such that some ZPRA guerrillas surrendered to the enemy. A good example is Mkwenyembula who walked of his free will to the Rhodesian army camp between Hwange and Victoria Falls and gave himself up.⁶⁹ He could not withstand the pressure of being alert everyday. This was seen by his colleagues as the worst treachery, and people like him ceased to be men in the eyes of their colleagues. It is indeed a myth to expect all men to have the same courage to face the enemy.

Training in Russia was an ultimate test of masculinity for ZPRA guerrillas. According to Sibhona, it was always important to know where a guerrilla had trained because if he had trained in Morogoro, Algeria or the Soviet Union, this was a sign of bravery which in those days was counted as synonymous to 'real men'.⁷⁰ Such cadres were revered within their ranks, most sought after by Rhodesians and targets for arrest, persecution and elimination by the ruling ZANU-PF government after independence. Senior commanders such as Sibhona, Ndlovu, Magarasadza and

66. Interview with Joseph Mbedzi, Harare, 19 June 2019,

67. M. Kiefer, 'Of Predators and New Men: How Ideology Matters in Constructing Military Masculinities', *Z Friedens und Konfliktforsch*, 11 (2022), 42-43.

68. Sibhona, *Nation of Violence*, 185.

69. Ibid., 186.

70. Ibid., 200.

Mbedzi among others also became prime targets in the 1980s. Though this was a miserable part of their history, these former guerrillas claim to have stuck to their character of resilience which is an attribute of manhood. Their colleagues such as Lookout Masuku who eventually died under unclear circumstances were described as ‘men who had withstood pressure right to the very end.’ At his funeral on 12 April 1986, Joshua Nkomo described Lt General Lookout Masuku as one who had ‘played a very big part in winning our struggle’ and yet had ‘died a pauper in our own hands’. Nkomo went on to add that ‘it is appropriate that the site chosen for Lookout’s grave lies near a memorial to those who fought against Hitler.’⁷¹

Since former ZPRA commanders are obsessed with asserting their key role in the war, they trivialise and castigate their colleagues who worked with ZANU in the 1980s and went on to torture them as unpatriotic failures. In their autobiographies, Sibhona and Ndlovu again castigate former ZPRA guerrillas who tortured them during the 1983-87 civil war in Zimbabwe as sellouts. Speaking badly about former colleagues is one way of asserting masculinity either during the war or afterwards. Without a proper investigation into circumstances regarding why those who had joined the army ended up torturing their former ZPRA colleagues, it would be unfair to castigate them. Decisions were being made according to prevailing political and military demands of the time. During interviews, Khumalo, Magarasadza and Mbedzi looked down on ZANLA forces and accused them of having being badly trained and lacking in discipline during the war. The idea of feminising ‘the other’ was rampant during the war because the forces were sworn enemies.

The preoccupation with passing themselves off as real men often prevents veterans of the liberation struggle from discussing their own suffering, particularly at the hands of their fellow comrades. There is clear evidence that former ZPRA guerrillas suffered direct attacks with some being killed as dissidents during the 1980s. My findings coincide with those of Alexander and McGregor where the narratives and heroic exploits during the war always ended with marginality and frustration.⁷² Interestingly, none of the respondents was a passive participant in the liberation struggle and it is difficult to treat someone with a weapon as entirely a victim. The gun was a sign of military masculinity.

Even under persecution during the 1980s, these former guerrillas explained their skillful way of evading death and surviving the civil war just as they had done during the liberation war. For example, Magarasadza was invited to join the artillery part of the army, but having sensed that he might be killed in the process, he simply

71. *Bulawayo 24News*, ‘Joshua Nkomo’s Speech at Lookout Masuku’s Funeral’, 20 April 2011.

72. J. Alexander and J. McGregor, ‘African Soldiers in the USSR: Oral histories of ZAPU Intelligence’, cadres’ Soviet training, 1964–1979, University of Sussex, 2017.

did not pitch up. When eventually arrested, he escaped death by insisting that he was Shona and therefore part of those who were torturing him.⁷³ In the end, he was not enlisted in the army but together with Mbedzi, their wartime contributions were once more rewarded when they were invited by the then Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko to spearhead ZANU-PF campaign in Mashonaland West Province. Despite now being older and generally excluded by the ruling party in Zimbabwe, former ZPRA guerrillas have now been moved to centre stage once again. In 1998, both respondents were compensated for their contribution in the war of liberation and were allocated land as a result of the 2000 land reform program. They had been made full members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) at the time of interviews conducted with them. Some of their colleagues occupy the highest positions in the security apparatus of Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This article discussed the role of masculinity in recruitment, training, operations and post-war memories of former ZPRA guerrillas. The liberation war was imagined as men's turf and therefore, there was a deliberate decision to minimise women's participation in combat duties. The mentality of fronting men defined liberation movements in the 1970s. As such, oral accounts of ZPRA guerrillas are expansive on the leading role taken by guerrillas to get advanced training and fight in the war of liberation. This study contributes knowledge to men studies by exploring the suffering that men go through because of culturally-sanctioned ways of behaving that are thrust upon their shoulders by virtue of their biological make-up and not necessarily because they are naturally better fighters. Masculine approaches to Zimbabwe's war of liberation undermined the role of female combatants and elevated that of men. Among ZPRA combatants, masculinity was characterised by advanced military training beyond Zambia, fighting with courage during attacks, remaining with the movement and strict discipline.

This article argued that some ZPRA guerrillas were exposed to extreme fear and other setbacks of the war resulting in escapes, surrenders, running away or other behaviours which were not considered manly at the time. Except when speaking about their opponets, most guerrillas avoid linking themselves to any feminine attributes because of the need to maintain their 'integrity'. The article also explored the collision of white and African masculinity in a war which was highly racialised and where white Rhodesian Security Forces, attempted to prove their masculinity by overwhelming their guerrilla counterparts in battle. As shown by their narratives, guerrillas used all means possible to portray themselves in a positive light and the insist that they did not 'sell out' the struggle. For ZPRA, the means did not justify the end. Despite their contribution to the liberation struggle, many found themselves

73. Interview with Magarasadza, Centenary, 26 May 2021.

ostracised with the coming of independence because their political party, ZAPU lost the 1980 elections. Instead of returning home as respected men, they became victims liable to gruesome torture and at times death on suspicion of trying to sabotage a lawfully-elected ZANU-PF government.

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