

books. In the early 1980s, for example, there was a conflict between the Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA) at Eduardo Mondlane University and the government over the publication of a CEA report, the cover image of which depicted several children picking cotton in Frelimo's state farms. The state intervened, arguing that the photograph could tarnish Mozambique's reputation as a country committed to the social revolution to improve people's conditions. According to a former CEA researcher, Bridget O'Laughlin, the center was advised to remove the image from the study. For all of its twists, turns, and limitations, the photography bureaucracy remained a force with which people had to reckon.

doi:10.1017/S0021853722000342

An Army's Complicated Legacy

Fighting and Writing: The Rhodesian Army at War and Postwar

By Luise White. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. Pp. 304. \$104.95, hardcover (ISBN: 9781478010623); \$27.95, paperback (ISBN: 9781478011729); \$27.95, e-book (ISBN: 9781478021285).

Ushehweu Kufakurinani

King's College London and University of Johannesburg

Keywords: Zimbabwe; Southern Africa; independence wars; memoirs; civil wars; war; race

In writing *Fighting and Writing* Luise White has taken on a difficult task. It is a credit to her talents as a historian that she succeeds, at least partially. In her provocative study on what might be called the 'Rhodesian War' (often known by other names, like the Zimbabwean Liberation War), she tells the story of 1960s and 1970s military conflict from the perspective of the Rhodesian army. She considers a variety of sources generated by Rhodesian combatants, especially memoirs. White seeks to narrate the perspectives and experiences of what was in effect a colonial army, a move that is at odds with dominant scholarship at large and the recent writings of history in particular, both of which have come to celebrate the experiences of the colonized subaltern. Stated plainly, in White's volume the subjects — and maybe even the heroes — are colonizers. This is not an easy study, either intellectually or politically, especially given how memories of the Rhodesian War continue to influence white supremacist imaginaries both in Southern Africa and elsewhere (sometimes to murderous effect, as in the United States). It is not a perfect book by any means. That it succeeds at all, however, is a credit to her skills as a historian. In what follows I will first summarize White's argument, and then engage with some of the author's more provocative and challenging claims.

In her first chapter, White begins to set the scene of the war as interpreted in the memoirs, describing morale, discipline, the hopes and ambitions of soldiers, their frustrations and expectations. In the following chapter, White problematizes the use of war memoirs in historical writing. There were no memoirs from Africans who had experience with the Zimbabwean liberation struggle and the existing memoirs from Rhodesian whites had their own limitations too. Notwithstanding their limitations, war memoirs can be still be used and 'sometimes even celebrated' as they give us 'experience and emotion' (42) — affective accounts that offer first-hand insights into what

was also an enormously complex geopolitical struggle. In Chapter Three, White explores how counterinsurgency was remembered. She reflects on the use of pseudo-gangs, the Selous Scouts and the many stories about their operations and the myths about the war. In this chapter we also get to know more about Africans from the perspective of the Rhodesians. Some of this is hard to read, such as how the Rhodesian army talked about and tried to 'tame' their African auxiliaries. In Chapter Four we get more about how white Rhodesian culture translated to combat and the 'bush', particularly in stories around tracking. There were debates about white men's ability to track African soldiers and the importance of tracking skills in the war.

Chapter Five takes us away from the war itself and brings us to writings about the war. In this chapter we get to know about the conflicts, controversies, and complexities around the writing of memoirs on the Rhodesian War. Chapter Six takes us back to the war, drawing on perceptions about the weapons that were used by the African soldiers. The AK-47 was believed to be a common possession among African soldiers. Most memoirs, we are told, praised guerrilla shooting (127). We get to know perceptions that Rhodesian white soldiers had about African training in firing and the war in general. In Chapter Seven, White is very critical of so-called biological warfare during the liberation struggle. She notes that chemical and biological wars 'are inefficient' (148), and is skeptical about the reports that chemical weapons were used to the extent typically accepted. I will return to this point below.

In Chapter Eight we are introduced to the role that mercenaries from outside of Rhodesia played in the conflict. She explores the fluidity and complexities around being a 'foreigner' in the Rhodesian War. Finally, Chapter Nine again gives us greater details about the war itself as expressed in the memoirs. In particular, the chapter explores the experiences of the Security Forces Auxiliaries, African soldiers fighting together with the Rhodesian army. The chapter also explores some of the shortfalls of counterinsurgency. We learn more about suspicion and conflicts that existed amongst the Africans themselves — some as Abel Muzorewa's followers, others as Ndabaningi Sithole's followers, and still others as sympathizers of the liberation fighters. This chapter offers a rare opportunity to engage with African experiences during the war which were not mediated through the Rhodesians' perspectives. The chapter is also fascinating in that it reflects on experiences in the postwar period when the country got independence.

White covers a lot of ground. Perhaps her greatest intervention is methodological. She relies on the wealth of memoirs that the war produced, and understands how these partisan and incomplete sources are both essential and limited. *Fighting and Writing* is thus an excellent book for the teaching of historical methods, particularly histories built from personal experience. White's analysis of memoirs and demonstration of how these can be used in the writing and interpretation of history can easily be transferred to analysis of the uses of biographies, oral histories, and other memoirs and autobiographies. Her sources lead her to revisit some of the discipline's oldest question. What is history? For whom is history for? Is there any such thing as objectivity? If not, why do we even pursue historical research? Using memoirs and exploring their strengths and pitfalls, White presents us with a great research piece for those teaching and researching on historical methods. Her informants — living, dead, published, private — are profoundly flawed, which forces historians and their readers to think hard about the 'truths' that narratives like White's purport to offer.

From these flawed and conflicted sources, *Fighting and Writing* narrates the history of counterinsurgency during the war, as well as how combatants and others made sense of their actions in retrospect. Although there are some African soldiers (both guerrillas and 'collaborators') in White's sources, the book is primarily about how the Rhodesian army's white conscripts and allies experienced the war. As such, if your concern is about the 'facts' of the war, perhaps this book should not be the starting point. It does not even pretend to be presenting 'facts' about the Rhodesian War. Referring to the writers of the memoirs that informed the book, 'Authorship',

White tells us, 'is usually messy; even the least memoir can contain many voices and may have been shaped by many hands' (36). White also describes the memoirs she uses as having 'untidy provenances and muddled reliabilities' (30) as well as being 'filled with exaggerations and embellishments and many, many untruths' (31). Historical sources, and the histories we construct from them, are always subjective, and this account is almost more of an intellectual or cultural history than a military history. It is about an idea of combat, an idea of warfare, and ideas about what was at stake from the Rhodesian perspective.

Given this, it is no surprise that one of the revelations in the book is how some of the experiences of the war have been either invented or exaggerated. White questions the degree and extent of Rhodesian chemical warfare, for example, seeming to take the memoirs quite seriously on this particular point, despite earlier questioning the reliability of the memoirs (30–1) and claiming that 'No one really worries if war memoirs are true or false' (41). That is the book's weakest aspect. White toggles between believing and disbelieving memoirs, seemingly without explanation. Her faith in the memoirs leads her to make a number of bold or controversial claims. She claims that 'almost no one believed Rhodesia was trying to win the war' (17). This claim should be interrogated, given that White does not seem to define what winning constituted. Moreover, we are told that most Rhodesians who joined the security forces did so because 'they were legally required to do so' (18). Taken together, such claims gleaned from the evidence presented undermine conventional narratives of ardent Rhodesian nationalism, a citizenry driven to defend its vaunted and contested independence against the forces that threatened it. Instead, we see a Rhodesian populace forced into a conflict that they did not expect to win. Once the fighting got going, it was carried on by its own momentum, not what we might otherwise have expected.

Sometimes White goes too far. Some of her contentions seem deliberately intended to be provocative. She opens her work by challenging the often-made reference to the Rhodesian years as 'Colonial Zimbabwe' 'even though neither Southern Rhodesia nor Rhodesia was a colony' (1). This is a very bold but problematic position. While technically the country stopped being a colony in 1923 — when it received responsible government status, before later joining the Federation of Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and, eventually, declaring its Unilateral Declaration of Independence — Africans were treated throughout as colonized subjects and thus experienced colonialism, regardless of the territory's legal status. While I do understand where White is coming from, this overstretch could easily be interpreted as denying Zimbabwean Africans of having had a colonial experience. From their end, whether the country was under responsible government, federation, or self-declared independence, Africans were deprived of their land and freedom. The descriptor 'colonial Zimbabwe', thus, reflects on the more than one sort of hierarchical and exploitative political relationship that existed during this period.

Notwithstanding these critiques, *Fighting and Writing* is a powerfully and uniquely written piece of work that successfully and practically helps to answer old questions about the writing and study of history. Both broadly and in very concrete ways it helps us rethink the production and purpose of history. The book explores seemingly disparate but neatly woven themes about the so-called bush war, production of historical knowledge, authorship in history, and perceptions about war.

doi:10.1017/S0021853722000354