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0521818230 - Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987

Norma J. Kriger

Excerpt

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1 Introduction

This study examines the construction of a new political order in Zimbabwe through the prism of veterans of the war of liberation. My previous work, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, focused exclusively on rural people's experiences of the guerrilla war.¹ I remained curious about the guerrillas because I knew them only through the accounts of rural people in which they figured as both benefactors and brutal bullies. My interest was further piqued by what seemed a puzzle. On the one hand, the image of the guerrillas in the Zimbabwe media, especially from 1988 when their voices first became prominent in the public arena, was of "forgotten and neglected heroes" of the liberation war. On the other hand, political actors, including the regime and the former guerrillas themselves, consistently invoked their war credentials to legitimate their claims. How, I wondered, could a regime which based its legitimacy on the war of liberation treat the liberators so scandalously?

The puzzle of revered but neglected ex-combatants, this study will argue, was a manifestation of internal politics. The veterans' lament that they were ignored and forgotten war heroes was both an important symbolic resource and a strategy to seek privileged access to state resources. Moreover, veterans' claims to have been forgotten concealed how those who belonged to the ruling party had already benefited, often at the expense of guerrilla veterans of a minority party. The ruling party's symbolic appeals to the war originated in its need to build power and legitimacy following the grim legacy of the peace settlement. Appeals to the liberation war as well as intimidation and violence were crucial resources for veterans and the ruling party as they collaborated and engaged in conflict with each other in pursuit of their agendas. This dynamic between war veterans and the ruling party persists in contemporary Zimbabwe. The party and veterans manipulate each other, quarrel and cooperate, and draw on a war discourse and violence to advance their agendas.

When I began this study of guerrilla veterans, there was no obviously relevant body of literature. Today, some ten years later, ending civil wars and rebuilding war-torn societies, collectively known as peace-building, are established international policy and scholarly concerns. More specifically, peace-building refers to operations that aim to prevent violence from reigniting after the initial

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termination of hostilities – demilitarization, the control of small arms, institutional reform, improved police and judicial systems, the monitoring of human rights, electoral reform, and social and economic development.² As one commentator observed: “Peacebuilding is in effect an enormous experiment in social engineering – an experiment that involves transplanting Western models of social, political, and economic organization into war-shattered states in order to control civil conflict: in other words, pacification through political and economic liberalization.”³

A product of the post-Cold War era, academic and policy interest in peace-building reflects at least two major changes. First, so-called intrastate or internal wars, comprising over 80 percent of all wars and casualties since the end of World War II, rose noticeably after the end of the Cold War.⁴ Second, no longer divided by superpower rivalries, the United Nations (UN) Security Council approved UN peacekeeping operations in these internal wars. Between 1988 and 1995, the UN established twenty-five peacekeeping operations compared with only thirteen in the preceding forty or so years of its existence.⁵ In the 1990s, the major sites of peace-building, as for civil wars, have been on the periphery of the international system – Namibia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cambodia, Angola – but also in Bosnia and parts of the former Soviet Union.⁶ International relations scholars whose main staple had been interstate wars and superpower rivalries also shifted their attention to internal wars.⁷

Indicators of the spectacular growth of interest in peace-building include donor-sponsored research, new scholarly publications and specializations, and shifting aid patterns. In 1992 then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali first identified peace-building as a UN priority and coined the term “post-conflict peace-building.” The UN Research Institute for Social Development has a War Torn Societies Project on “post-conflict,”⁸ the UN Institute for Disarmament Research had a Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project on demobilization, disarmament, and the proliferation and control of small arms after intrastate conflict,⁹ and UNESCO has a Culture of Peace program.¹⁰ The International Labor Organization is concerned with employment and training aspects related to ex-combatants’ reintegration.¹¹ The World Bank produced influential studies of demobilization and reintegration in 1993 and 1996, and in 1995, James Wolfensohn, its president, declared that a Bank priority was to anticipate and organize for “post-conflict” economic development programs.¹² In 1997 the World Bank established a Post-Conflict Unit within the Social Development Department and a Post-Conflict Fund.¹³ Think tanks and research institutes have climbed on the bandwagon too. The Peace Research Institute in Oslo directed a two-year collaborative project, Disarming Ethnic Guerrillas.¹⁴ The Bonn International Conversion Center sponsors studies of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.¹⁵ For scholars, the rising significance of peace-building may be measured by the proliferation of new

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specialized journals, such as *Civil Wars*, *International Peacekeeping*, *Global Governance*, *Journal of Peace and Development*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, and academic posts for specialists in civil wars, post-conflict studies, and peace studies. The structure and size of international aid also reflects the new concern with war termination and post-war reconstruction. In 1994 total foreign aid to victims of internal wars reached an annual high of \$7.2 billion.¹⁶ By 1996, emergency relief assistance had increased to 10 percent of global official development assistance and one-half of the UN aid budget at a time of shrinking aid budgets.¹⁷

Peace-building is widely seen as made up of two phases. Studies of war-to-peace transitions focus on the first phase of peace-building. This covers negotiated settlements and/or settlements imposed through military victory.¹⁸ The “typical” post-Cold War settlement focuses on combatants, providing for full or partial demobilization, disarmament, and military integration. Reluctant donors and non-government organizations (NGOs) were pushed to broaden the recipients of their assistance from refugees and internally displaced people to include former combatants.¹⁹ The second phase of peace-building is referred to as the post-transition or peace consolidation phase. It begins after the implementation of the settlement, whether imposed or negotiated, and entails continuing efforts started during the transition to reform political institutions and the security sector and to pursue economic and social recovery, development, and change. Peace consolidation includes the reintegration of ex-combatants and other war-affected groups.²⁰ Indeed, studies of demobilization and reintegration programs, which typically cut across the first and second peace-building phases, conceive of reintegration and demobilization as essential for peace-building.²¹ Peace-building studies, above all, seek to identify the conditions, determinants, or strategies for successful peace-building.²² Consequently, the literature is evaluative and prescriptive.

This book shares common terrain with, but also departs from, peace-building studies. Concerned with the peace settlement which formally terminated the guerrilla war for political independence and with programs for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (military and civilian) of ex-combatants, the book covers the familiar turf of studies of transition and peace consolidation. Its main point of departure from peace-building studies arises from its lack of interest in the conditions, determinants, or strategies of successful peace-building. Hence there is no attempt in this study to evaluate the success of the settlement or ex-combatants’ reintegration. Indeed, this study seeks to demonstrate how the evaluative orientation in peace-building studies is an obstacle to understanding the politics and outcomes of settlements and ex-combatant programs. Another difference is that while the peace-building literatures are preoccupied chiefly with the role of external actors, this study is concerned primarily with domestic political actors.

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The study is organized around three major questions. First, how did the legacy of the settlement which formally terminated the guerrilla war for political independence shape post-war politics? Second, what strategies, resources, and agendas characterized the relationship of the war veterans and the ruling party after formal independence? Third, what were the political outcomes of their engagement for the ruling party, the veterans, and the society more generally? Insofar as this study focuses on actors' resources, agendas, and strategies, its approach is similar to recent work on post-Cold War civil wars or "new" wars.²³

I argue that the peace settlement was a harbinger of continued armed conflict and set the stage for the politics of guerrillas' incorporation. The settlement had left intact and legitimated three rival armies – the Rhodesian forces and the two guerrilla armies, ZANLA and ZIPRA, which had fought for independence but also battled each other. It had also left undisturbed the Rhodesian-controlled bureaucracy and a white-controlled private sector whose African managers and workers were also deemed loyal to the Rhodesians. To build and legitimate power, the ruling party turned to the already powerful guerrillas and to symbolic appeals to the liberation war. At first, official programs treated both guerrilla armies equally. But the ruling party, ZANU(PF), and its ZANLA guerrillas could not conceal their preference for building power on an exclusively ZANLA guerrilla base and for using only ZANLA's guerrilla struggle for legitimacy. Between 1980 and 1987, the new regime sanctioned and instigated violence and intimidation in collaboration with ZANLA ex-combatants as they both sought power in the army, the civil service, the private sector, and cooperatives. Both also used symbolic appeals to the war of liberation to justify their actions. By 1987 ZANU(PF) had consolidated its power. For their part, ZANLA guerrillas had won privileged access to resources. Among the ex-guerrillas of both armies, though, there was a sense of victimization, discrimination, and neglect by society and the party rather than privilege. Whether colluding or clashing with the ruling party, the guerrillas appealed to their war contributions to justify their quest for power and privilege. The outcome of this dynamic between the ruling party and its guerrilla veterans was a new violent and extractive political order. At the very least, the perpetrators of violence and the beneficiaries of extraction differed from those of the colonial period.

The argument I am making shares much in common with Frederick Cooper's discussion of how African labor in the 1940s and 1950s used successfully the French and British colonial governments' legitimating discourse of them being "industrial men" to justify their own demands for European wages and standards for labor conditions. After independence, when the independent African governments ceased to participate in this discourse, the dynamic of ever-expanding benefits gradually ceased.²⁴ There is a parallel in the Zimbabwe study. Guerrilla

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veterans were labeled “soldiers.” Both the settlement and the new regime endorsed the idea of the guerrillas as “soldiers” even though the constitution acknowledged the Rhodesian armed forces as being in charge of law and order. Guerrilla veterans often made successful use of the new regime’s legitimating discourse of them being “soldiers” to justify their own demands for the salaries and benefits accorded Europeans in the former Rhodesian army. In addition, guerrilla veterans used with some success the regime’s legitimating discourse about rewards for war sacrifices to justify their own demands for state benefits. At the time of writing, the war discourse and the cycle of expanding guerrilla veterans’ benefits persist. The ruling party and veterans invoke their war sacrifices and war goals to legitimate their continued struggle for economic justice, including the right to take white-owned land without compensation. Though the chief opposition party rejects rewarding war sacrifices, it invokes the war of liberation to justify its struggle for democratization.

The findings of this study contribute to a revisionist interpretation of Zimbabwe’s “peace-building” experiences and draw attention to inherent limitations in peace-building studies more generally. Studies of Zimbabwe’s settlement celebrated the political transition in 1980 as a triumph. Studies of military integration lauded its success whereas studies of integration programs for the demobilized tended to deplore their failure. Focused on evaluations in terms of subjective peace-building measures, these studies missed how the settlement set the stage for subsequent violent conflict and how veterans’ programs were characterized by a central political dynamic in which the ruling party and its liberation war veterans collaborated to establish power and privilege in ways that built a violent and extractive political order. The Zimbabwe study highlights how the orientation in peace-building studies toward evaluation in terms of externally imposed criteria produces unreliable evaluations and misses how settlements, politics, and power agendas may shape political outcomes antithetical to peace-building.

The limits of peace-building studies

The discourse of peace-building used by international organizations and NGOs has permeated the academic literature on peace-building.²⁵ The most trenchant critiques of the peace-building discourse have come from students of the dynamics of “new” wars.²⁶ They portray these conflicts as posing particular challenges for international actors engaged in war termination and reconstruction. In “old” wars, such as the anti-colonial struggles for independence, the contending sides were reasonably cohesive and well disciplined, the rebels’ goals were to capture and transform the state, and war termination was unambiguous. In contrast, “new” wars occur in the post-Cold War period in conditions

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of rapid globalization and in weak states that lack efficacy and legitimacy. The warring actors engage in violence less to win or retain state power than to satisfy immediate and local security, psychological, and economic agendas. Leaders have limited control over their unpaid or under-paid fighting forces; military opponents often collude with each other to advance their economic interests; and regional and international economic networks help to sustain violent conflict and its beneficiaries. The structures and relationships that make it possible for some elites and non-elites to secure profit, protection, and power through violence persist after peace operations, underscoring how war and peace are not discrete events. Analysts of “new” wars point to the need for outside actors to recognize these special features of contemporary warfare if they are to terminate wars and reconstruct states and societies.

The portrait of Zimbabwe’s war and post-war politics in this volume suggests that the differences between “old” and “new” wars are overstated. This chapter will draw attention to collaboration and violent contestation between and within the African nationalist movements, thus underscoring the limits of ideological cohesion and leadership control. Elsewhere I argued that rebel violence in Zimbabwe’s war of independence served not just to win state power but also to advance local and immediate purposes, such as youths’ power against elders, women’s quest to end marital violence, non-ruling lineages’ resentments toward chiefly lineages, and youths’ and guerrillas’ extraction of resources from civilians.²⁷ Moreover, this study shows that the transition, despite its much-heralded success, did not mark an identifiable break between war and peace. After independence, the elite and the guerrilla veterans who fought under the banner of state transformation often used violence and the fact of their war participation to demand and legitimate their privileged access to state resources. These dynamics of an anti-colonial war and post-war politics have some commonalities with “new” wars.

The critique of peace-building studies in this chapter is distinctive in two ways. It derives from the examination of an “old” war and it investigates two arenas which have received almost no fundamental criticism: studies of war-to-peace transitions and studies of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.²⁸ The critical analysis of peace-building literatures in this study of an “old” war resonates with many of the general objections raised by those who study “new” wars. Both concur that peace-building discourse conceals the politics and history of wars and also the agendas of international actors and/or scholars and practitioners who participate in the peace-building discourse.²⁹ However, the specifics of the critique differ. How peace-building studies rely on subjective and arbitrary criteria for evaluations of success and how this predisposes them to miss important dimensions of politics is demonstrated for both studies of transitions and studies of programs to demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants.

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*Studies of transitions**Subjective, arbitrary, and externally imposed evaluative criteria*

Analysts use a variety of criteria to measure the success of transitions. These subjective and arbitrary criteria cannot provide consistent measures and they impose external peace-building agendas on domestic actors. A common measure of a successful transition is the end of the war. This measure is itself subject to different criteria – ending multiple sovereignty and/or reducing the number of battle deaths. When analysts specify the maximum number of battle deaths that are permitted for a transition to be considered a success, their thresholds often differ as do the time periods over which they require these declines in battle deaths to prevail. Other measures include a successful negotiated settlement, compliance with “free and fair” elections, or full compliance with all the settlement provisions. Some criteria of success are more demanding and require democratization that goes beyond merely “free and fair” elections. As shown below, the application of each measure requires analysts to make further subjective interventions. Given the subjectivity of the exercise, it is miraculous that there is ever agreement on which transitions have been successful. In this regard, the Zimbabwe case is intriguing: it has been almost universally hailed a success.

Analysts who agree to measure the success of a transition by when a war ends often differ on what criteria to use. For Roy Licklider a civil war ends, whether through negotiated settlement or military victory, when one of two criteria is met. There must be either an end to multiple sovereignty or fewer than 1,000 battle deaths in each of five consecutive years.³⁰ Following Charles Tilly, Licklider defines multiple sovereignty as the population of an area obeying more than one institution. Licklider quotes Tilly: “They pay taxes [to the opposition], provide men to its armies, feed its functionaries, honor its symbols, give time to its service, or yield other resources despite the prohibitions of a still-existing government they formerly obeyed.”³¹ Because it is possible that the battle deaths may stem from a different war, Licklider distinguishes between ongoing wars which have the same sides and issues and wars with different sides or issues.³² Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis use different criteria for identifying when a war ends. They specify a lenient measure of peace-building following civil wars, whether they end in negotiated or imposed settlements: “an end to the war and to residual lower-level violence and uncontested sovereignty” for two years.³³ Leaving aside the different battle death numbers which they require for a conflict to be labeled a civil war and hence for a war to end,³⁴ their criteria differ from Licklider’s in the two years for reduced violence (rather than five years), and the necessity that multiple sovereignty end (rather than be an alternative measure of a war’s end). Like Licklider, Doyle and Sambanis also must decide when battle deaths are part of an ongoing or new war.

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Our rule of thumb for coding separate war events was the following: If a war ended in a peace settlement and then restarted after a period of peace, we coded a separate war event . . . Other rules of thumb for coding separate war events were the following: If a different war started while a previous war was ongoing in the same country, we coded separate war events (e.g. the Tigrean and Eritrean wars in Ethiopia). If the parties and issues to a war changed dramatically during an ongoing conflict, we coded a separate war events [*sic*] (e.g. the Afghan war before and after Taliban). We collapsed two or more war events in other data sets in a single observation if the parties and the issues were the same; if less than 2 years or other substantial period of peace intervened between the first and second event; if large-scale fighting continued during the intervening period, and if the case-study literature treats those wars as a single war.³⁵

Analysts also provide different criteria for when negotiated settlements of civil wars can be said to effect a successful transition. For Walter, removing multiple competing armies to end the war is “one of the main objectives of any peace treaty.”³⁶ As she puts it: “The key difference between interstate and civil war negotiations is that adversaries in a civil war cannot retain separate, independent armed forces if they agree to settle their differences.”³⁷ Thus she differs from Licklider, for whom eliminating multiple sovereignty is not essential for a war to end. Walter offers three criteria for successful negotiated settlements.

First, a treaty had to be jointly drafted by all combatants through give-and-take bargaining . . . Second, the agreement had to keep the opposition intact as a bargaining entity. Third, it had to end the war for at least five years. If a formal peace treaty was signed but broke down within this time period, it was considered a failed attempt . . .³⁸

Walter codes a war as having experienced negotiations “if both sides had enough bargaining power to elicit important concessions from each other, if factions actually held face-to-face talks, if issues relevant to resolving the war were discussed, and if talks appeared to be undertaken in good faith.”³⁹

Fen Hampson’s measures for a successful negotiated settlement have similarities and differences: “in the short term, if societies are to make this transition [from war to peace], the key considerations are these: Did civil strife and violence end? And did the parties fulfill the commitments they agreed to under the settlement?”⁴⁰ Like Walter, Hampson seems to believe that it is important for the parties to an agreement to have face-to-face talks. He asserts: “it is absolutely essential that all the warring parties have a seat at the negotiating table and are directly involved in discussions about the new constitutional and political order that will be created after the fighting stops.”⁴¹ Establishing whether parties comply with a settlement is itself obviously subjective. For example, some analysts evaluate the Truth Commission in El Salvador as a failure,⁴² while others consider it to have been a success.⁴³ Hampson evaluates El Salvador’s negotiated settlement as a success because the violations were not serious enough to upset the peace process or to undermine the elections.⁴⁴

Compliance with settlement provisions to hold “free and fair” elections is a common measure of successful transitions. The evidence does not support

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either Samuel Huntington's claim that free and fair elections provide "a single, relatively clear . . . criterion" of democracy⁴⁵ or Gisela Geisler's belief that one can establish clear standards of free and fair elections to enable international observer election teams to avoid subjective and inconsistent evaluations.⁴⁶ Where most others have seen democratic transitions in the 1980s, an analyst argues that few third world countries actually meet the conditions for liberal democracy because of violence and official restrictions on participation and representation in elections.⁴⁷ Some judge the UN-supervised Cambodian elections of 1993 to have been a triumph and the mark of a successful transition.⁴⁸ Others point to factors that undermined "free and fair" elections.⁴⁹ It has recently been suggested that "free and fair" elections set too high a standard for democracy in the inauspicious context of implementing peace accords, that a better standard would be the promotion of reconciliation among the warring parties, and that its measure of success be the contenders' acceptance of the election result.⁵⁰

Some analysts use more demanding measures of peace-building than ending a war, a successful negotiated settlement, or compliance with some or all settlement provisions. Doyle and Sambanis propose a stricter peace-building measure which requires a minimum standard of democratization for two years. It is also the measure they prefer "because it reflects a higher order of peace but requires only a minimum standard of political openness."⁵¹ Pauline Baker criticizes conflict management which makes ending the war a priority and proposes criteria for success which parallel the distinction Doyle and Sambanis make between lenient and strict peace-building. According to Baker, since the end of the Cold War, "peace is no longer acceptable on any terms; it is intimately linked with the notion of justice. Conflict resolution is not measured simply by the absence of bloodshed; it is assessed by the moral quality of the outcome."⁵² This includes "the need to bring human rights abusers to justice, establish political legitimacy, establish the rule of law, and build new state structures that can earn the confidence and trust of the people."⁵³ Fen Hampson makes a similar distinction. Though he uses a lenient measure of a successful transition, he remarks that for a peace settlement to be durable, institutions and support structures must be put in place so that the parties are discouraged from taking up arms again. "The ultimate success of the peace-building process in situations of civil conflict is thus directly related to a society's ability to make an effective transition from a state of war to a state of peace marked by the restoration of civil order, the reemergence of civil society, and the establishment of participatory political institutions."⁵⁴

There is nothing novel in the claim that evaluative criteria are subjective and arbitrary, though war termination analysts often hide behind appeals to the "consensus of experts."⁵⁵ Some war termination scholars draw attention to the subjective standards used to evaluate transitions without critiquing the orientation of war termination studies toward evaluation in terms of externally

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imposed criteria. A student of war termination⁵⁶ alerts readers to the subjective and arbitrary nature of what counts as a civil war and when it can be said to have ended. Moreover, he warns of the pitfalls of using battle-death counts to determine when a war ends. However, his point is that subjective criteria vitiate against any single formula for war termination. Similarly, the introduction to *Keeping the Peace* provides an excellent overview of the range of criteria to evaluate transitions. Perhaps reflecting the belief among many war termination scholars that they are engaged in objective evaluation, the study of peacekeeping in El Salvador and Cambodia reports as a major finding the existence of multiple standards of evaluation:

the very concept of success and failure is ambiguous in these complex operations. It can signify the successful implementation of the mandate detailed in the initial Secretary-General's report. It could also mean the successful implementation of the peace agreement which . . . may not be identical to . . . the mandate the Secretariat drafted. Success can also be measured against the fundamental purposes – long-term peace, democratization, human rights, the rule of law, social and economic development – which may be reflected in the peace agreement. But even if those principles are not specifically reflected in the treaty, there are underlying purposes of the United Nations itself that should govern the actions of the peacekeepers . . . And lastly, success may be measured against much more pragmatic standards: did the peace operation reduce the pre-existing level of violence, promote a modicum of stable centralizing government, permit citizens to return to something resembling their pre-war lives? Sometimes, achieving success along one measure may require bending another. We will try to be clear as we discuss success and failure in each instance, but we aware [*sic*] that there is more than one standard against which these difficult operations should be measured.⁵⁷

As is evident, the study endorses the variety of standards and does not find the subjective nature of peacekeeping evaluations reason to question their merit.

Leaving aside the many interpretive issues which scholars of success and failure must confront, it is noteworthy that some violate both their own criteria and seemingly indisputable facts. A few examples will suffice. Recall that Barbara Walter makes the removal of multiple sovereignty a prerequisite of a successful negotiated settlement and coded a war as having experienced negotiations if both sides had enough bargaining power to elicit important concessions from each other, if factions actually held face-to-face talks, if issues relevant to resolving the war were discussed, and if talks appeared to be undertaken in good faith. Zimbabwe's peace settlement did not meet many of these requirements, but it does not interfere with her judgment that the transition was a success. The Lancaster House settlement did not end multiple sovereignty and factions did not hold face-to-face talks. At the end of the war, the three major competing armies remained intact. Britain was thrust into the role of mediator during the negotiations because the factions refused to talk to each other.⁵⁸ Indeed, there is little in her analysis of the conditions for Zimbabwe's "success," and thus