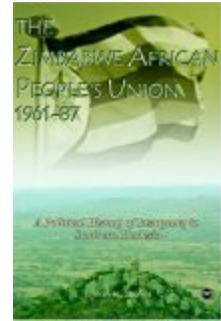


Eliakim M. Sibanda. *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005. xi + 321 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-59221-276-7.

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The Case for ZAPU

Although the author denies that his previous affiliation with ZAPU influenced his account of the party's history, there is an air of special pleading throughout this book, which is dedicated "to my people." Presumably, this refers to the Ndebele minority (about 20 percent of the population) from the Matabeleland provinces of western Zimbabwe which has been associated with ZAPU since the party was formed in 1961. The author is also concerned with redressing the balance of history regarding Zimbabwe's liberation war, which he claims has been distorted by the undue emphasis upon the role of ZAPU's rival—the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe—in the prosecution of that war. As evidence for this claim, he cites the "official" (or semi-official) history—*The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War*—by the journalists David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, which was largely based upon ZANU sources.[1] But since that book was published nearly 25 years ago, there have been numerous accounts of ZAPU's struggle against white minority rule, particularly the two volumes edited by Terence Ranger and Ngwabi Bhebe on soldiers and society in Zimbabwe's liberation war, as well as the historical studies by Ranger et al., including *Voices from the Rocks* and *Violence and Memory*, some of which are acknowledged in the notes.[2]

Eliakim Sibanda's book, in contrast with the "official" history, is largely based upon ZAPU sources, including ephemeral documents apparently rescued from oblivion or possibly censorship, and oral evidence collected from the founding and continuing membership. Among the

latter are interviews with figures ranging from the former leader, Joshua Nkomo (known among his supporters as the "father of Zimbabwe") to party loyalists of the rank and file. Since the approach is intended to be "thematic rather than chronological," there is a great deal of repetition, which the author acknowledges but dismisses as "unavoidable but necessary" (p. 5). However, most of the chapters are dated in chronological order, beginning in 1961 (chapter 3) and concluding in 1987 (chapter 7). These are preceded by a brief introduction on the purpose of the book and a historical survey of "the land and its people" from the early beginnings up to 1960. Nevertheless, the dates attached to the chapters do not always coincide with the contents. An obvious example is the chapter allegedly covering the years 1972-79, which includes the UDI negotiations between Britain and the Smith regime, which had been abandoned by then, along with ZAPU's military operations during those years.

The other chapters deal with, first, the evolution of ZAPU as a successor to the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress and the National Democratic Party, all three of which were banned by successive Rhodesian governments; second, ZAPU's ideology, organization, leadership, strategy, and internal divisions; and third, ZAPU's decline and demise in post-independence Zimbabwe, including the brutal invasion of Matabeleland by the ZNA's 5th Brigade (costing up to 20,000 lives), the marginalization of the Ndebele people under Mugabe's rule and the co-option of ZAPU by ZANU to create the ruling ZANU-PF. While these historical events have been

related in many other sources, what is new and original in this book is the amount of detail regarding ZAPU's organization and strategy and the causes of the various splits within the movement. This includes the proceedings of ZAPU's "consultative conference" in 1976 and its "Lusaka conference" in 1978, along with the documents presented by the leadership (then vice-president Jason Moyo and commander Dumiso Dabangwa) and the programs endorsed by the membership.

In presenting his case, the author's purpose is to dispel the frequent criticisms of ZAPU's role in the struggle for Zimbabwe. In particular, these are the charges that its army (ZIPRA) fought less and joined the battle later than ZANU's ZANLA, and that its leadership was weak, vacillating, and ineffectual because Nkomo spent too much time abroad and wasted too much effort on abortive negotiations with the white minority regime. The reply to the first charge is contained in the author's account of ZIPRA's incursions into Rhodesia from bases in Zambia, beginning with the joint operation with South Africa's ANC guerrillas (MK) in 1967, several years before ZANU opened up the eastern front at the end of 1972. As for the other charge, Nkomo is instead praised for having "internationalized" the Zimbabwe struggle by bringing it to the attention of the international community, which in turn led to the imposition of UN sanctions against Rhodesia. In addition, in pursuing a two-track strategy of negotiating with and fighting against the illegal regime, ZAPU's leader hoped to give peace "one last chance" as a means of achieving African majority rule without further loss of life on both sides.

While these contentious issues are yet to be resolved among Zimbabwe's historians, it is difficult not to be sympathetic with the author's special pleading because

Nkomo was in fact the father of Zimbabwean nationalism and his ZAPU supporters have been marginalized in terms of human rights and economic development since ZANU came to power in 1980 and pledged to install one-party rule. On this basis alone, the case for ZAPU deserves to be heard. However, reading this book is no easy task because it appears to have gone from the author's computer directly on to the printed page, without the intervention of an editor to correct the spelling, word usage, and grammatical errors. For example, a typical sentence reads as follows: "Chapter six looks into ZAPU's prosecution of the war and its pursuit for a peaceful settlement through negotiations" (p. x). And (on sanctions), "It was from these harbors that huge tankers carried the oil, among other things, which Rhodesia used, among other things, for its industries and the fueling of its military automobiles and planes" (p. 207). For this, along with the profusion of misspellings, the publishers have much to answer for.

Notes

[1]. David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing Company, 1981).

[2]. Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger, eds., *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War and Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications; Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995); Terence Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History of the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Baobab; Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Jocelyn Alexander, Jo Ann McGregor, and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests" of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann; Harare: Weaver Press, 2000).

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